



BA TORTUGA
STEAM & SUNSHINE

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

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Prologue

He blew the center out of a cinderblock when he was in the eighth grade for the science fair, dropping the chunk of concrete exactly where he wanted it, causing a fake river to redirect and feed the little fern forest he'd planted. A man in a pair of sandals and swim trunks came up to him after school and asked to meet his parents.

Manning took the guy to meet Mom and the Colonel, watched the Colonel's eyes when the guy offered to take him north for the summer to a camp for gifted students.

He'd never had so much fun and when August came, he didn't go home. There were eight of them then. Seven boys and Paula and they lived and breathed engineering. They built things, they destroyed things.

It was fascinating.

By the time he was eighteen, there were only three of them left from the original group. Greg and Paula and him. Others came and went, burn-out and accidents took their toll. They worked and played and studied and MJ found his niche in the lab. Explosives.

Big ones, little ones, sharp and deadly and specific and ...
Yeah

They called him Boomer and he could set a charge anywhere. In a pen cap, in a coffee cup, anywhere. Tiny and perfect and deadly.

He excelled at his work—had his masters by nineteen, his doctorate by twenty-two, and he was in the zone.

One night, he was up on the roof of the shed, harvesting a little of their crop of green to dry, when he saw Greg outside, talking to a stranger.

"...a risk to the project. She's beginning to ask questions."

"What kind of questions?"

"She wants to know what the devices she's creating could be used for. I think there's a mole in the group, someone creating waves."

"Fine. We'll eliminate her at the first opportunity."

MJ blinked and stopped. A mole. There could only be a mole if this was a covert group. This was college. This was *engineering*.

This was explosions.

There was only one 'her' and he knew. He *knew* she'd been asking the mentors questions, knew she'd been talking about traveling after going home to see her family in the desert. Knew that something was up.

It was one of those weird, life-altering decisions, going down the stairs to see her—or a short-haired, older version of Paula, because she'd changed since that morning in the lab. He caught her loading a gun and a load of equipment into bags. "Paula? I. I came to tell you..."

"I know. I heard. Surveillance equipment. Thanks, Boomer." Her eyes were blue. How could her eyes be blue? Her eyes had never been blue before.

"Your eyes."

"Yeah. I ... I have a new job, man."

"Doing what?"

She grinned. "Fixing all the shit I broke. Don't trust Greg, MJ. Don't trust anybody. This set up ... you look into it. You'll figure it out. When you do, come find me."

Then she was gone.

He did figure it out and it didn't take him long. He was quick and smart and partied and laughed enough that no one thought he could be sneaking around. It was harder to arrange his escape, but he had access to the right chemicals, access to the right explosives, and it happened. He poofed and headed toward the desert where she'd said her family was. Where the encrypted emails sent from a Las Vegas motel led him and he did find her in the middle of the low desert in a little cabin, her eyes still blue.

He and Paula worked together for six and a half years—he found out she was ten years older than he thought, that he was considerably dumber than advertised, that the people she worked for were very well-funded and very well-protected, that the desert was damned hot, and that he missed the beach. MJ also discovered that, much as he loved Paula, he didn't want her, and as much as Paula wanted to, she couldn't manage to quit hating anyone long enough to trust them. He kept being the junior partner, the sidekick.

One night, about three years after he'd come back to the desert after a big job involving an oil rig, involving meeting people, getting to know them, and then doing his job anyway, MJ caught sight of himself in a mirror and stared. He wasn't a skinny little blond kid anymore. He was tanned and built and strong and damn, blood did wash off.

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He drove to Phoenix that night, got his first ink, got laid. When he walked in the door, Paula looked up and laughed.

"It's about fucking time, Boomer."

"My name's MJ, bitch."

Things went better after that.

At least for a few years. Then Cairo happened.

Cairo, where they went to gather information and assure that a certain man was delivered alive to his rescuers. Cairo, where someone lied and Paula ended up taking a bullet to the brain. Cairo, where Greg was suddenly standing there, familiar as anything, telling him they'd been wondering where he'd gone off to. Cairo, where he woke up in a five-by-five box with a rotting partner and a broken shoulder and a pistol with a single bullet. The things that happened in that box were unthinkable and he didn't think after what he thought was the fourth day.

By the end of the fifth day, he'd managed to blow the container's lock using gun powder and shavings from the butt of the gun and wadding made out of Paula's hair, and by the morning after that, he'd killed twenty men, filled a lifeboat with weapons, food, electronics, and ammunition, and then had set the main boat to blow, Paula's body surrendered to the sea.

Then he'd become the senior and solo partner.

MJ went back to the desert house once, but Greg had already been there, the place ashes and smoke. He got in his 'stang and headed west, top down. He stopped twice—once to transfer Paula's cash and add it to his, once to get some ink in her honor. Then he headed to the water to surf.

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He was never going to be trapped again and he was never going to settle down and he was never *ever* going to work with a partner again.

He'd been wrong on all counts.

Chapter One

Sonny figured he had this problem.

He had showered. He'd shaved his head. He'd wandered around poking at things. He'd even gone out on deck and tried to stroke off a little. None of it had even come close to easing his hard-on. So his problem was that he had an itch to scratch, and the one he wanted, hell, needed to fix it was below deck, plinking away at that fucking laptop.

It was time to get serious about this.

Sonny considered himself a man of action, dammit. Semi-retirement wasn't gonna change that. So he went on down the little ladder, sort of mourning the late evening breeze, and went to retrieve his favorite toy. He wandered right on over to the little desk and sat on it, straddling MJ's legs and pushing the laptop out of the way with his ass. Look at that. Presenting his assets perfectly.

"Hey, Precious."

Those bright blue eyes slid right on up him, from crotch to eyes, admiring all the way up. "Hey, Sunshine. You look ... interested."

"I have been for oh ... an hour and a half. I'm starting to feel like the warning on a Viagra bottle, and you? Have been ignoring me."

"Oh, tell me you haven't been in the medicine cabinet." MJ grinned, hands sliding right up along his thighs, thumbs pushing in hard. Look at the little shit, ignoring his remark about—Well. Ignoring him.

"Only for the shave cream." Leaning back on one hand Sonny used the other one to rub his scalp. "You like?"

"Mm-hmm." MJ nodded, too-fucking-long blond hair bouncing like a girl's as those hands moved up higher. "I like. You know, I was trying to invest our money..."

Like MJ gave a shit about that right now.

Sonny shifted a half an inch to the right, his cock slapping MJ's hand. "Uh-huh. You do that daily."

"Hmm?" MJ's fingers wrapped around his prick, hot and just right. "Daily?"

"Uh-huh. Just like we do this. Okay, so we do this more than, uhn. There. More than once." The way MJ's thumb ran up the underside to stroke the vein had him stuttering.

"Uh-huh. Fuck, you smell good." MJ leaned forward, lips open, tongue just barely flicking the tip of Sonny's cock.

"You ... you feel good, Precious." Like just what he'd been needing. All. Damned. Day. Sonny put one hand on the back of MJ's head, pushing just a little.

That got him a little nip, MJ resisting. "Pushy asshole."

"Self-absorbed terrorist." If the mountain wouldn't come to Mohammed. Sonny arched his hips up, sliding inside MJ's lips, thumb rubbing the thick scar that ran from cheekbone to temple. His scar. Oh, fuck. Hot. MJ's hands slid under his ass, tugged him in deeper. "Good. Good." Loved that mouth. He surely did. Sonny thrust, letting MJ feel his pleasure. His heat.

MJ's thumbs pressed his hole, teasing, making him push even more. His hand slipped and he barely missed the laptop as he sprawled back. He managed it, though, because MJ would tear him up if he damaged that thing.

"Excellent save." Those bright-bright fucking blue eyes danced, the tip of that tongue sliding over parted lips.

"Why, thank you." Batting his eyelashes, Sonny pushed MJ back and slid down on his thighs. "Hi."

"Oh. Hey. You're welcome." MJ leaned back, hips rolling up, nice and easy.

Perfect. Now they could rub together, really going to town. He had to dig a little for MJ's cock, those thin linen pants just enough of a barrier.

"Watch the nails, Sunshine. You scratch it and it might fall off." MJ grabbed his hips, helping their motions smooth out.

"No, not gonna hurt you. Not unless you want me to." He grinned a little wildly, got them lined up and rubbing.

"Promises, promises." MJ's head fell back, throat working. "Right there, man. Right. Fucking. There."

"Uh-huh. You know it." He knew another there, and Sonny hit it, biting at the base of MJ's throat, letting his teeth pull up a mark.

"Fuck!" Those fingers squeezed down hard, leaving bruises of their own. Oh, yeah. That was it.

"Come on, Precious," he said. "Show me what you got." He could always goad MJ into higher, faster. More.

MJ's head rolled, and fuck, wasn't that a great moan. "Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine. Soon."

"Uh-huh. Wanna see you give it up." He loved that. Loved it when MJ came, when the smell of spunk was right there on the air.

"Shit, yeah." MJ grinned, tugged him down into a kiss, their teeth clicking together as spunk sprayed between them.

Sonny lost it, coming so hard he saw stars, his body undulating on top of MJ. "Fuck, Precious. Uhn..."

"Uh-huh. That's it. Just ... That." MJ nodded, groaning.

They sat there, blinking, sort of sliding into a doze until his chin clunked MJ's shoulder. Then Sonny sat up. "There's a really pretty breeze up on deck. If you want to scratch my itch again up there."

"Oh, that sounds much better than working down here." MJ leaned in, lapped his nipple, nibbled a little bit.

"I thought it might." Much as he hated to give up that sensation, Sonny moved until he got wiggle room and stood. "Come on, Precious. Let's go moon bathe."

"Mm-hmm. Right behind you. Right there."

Finally. The man was paying him some attention.

Good thing he had at least another two go-rounds in him. Even without hitting the medicine cabinet.

* * * *

"Are we there yet?"

It had to be the eightieth time Sonny had asked, and this time he poked MJ in the ribs. Somewhere around two a.m. the man had gotten a wild hair and started up out of their bunk to go pull anchor and sail ... God knew where. It was now six a.m., and Sonny was hungry and horny.

"Did you hear me? I said are we there yet?"

"Are we where yet?" MJ was bouncing, ass going up and down and up and down.

"I don't fucking know, Precious. You're driving." Steering. Captaining. Whatever.

"Well, yeah. I'm just going." MJ pointed. "That way. For a while."

Oh, for fuck's sake.

Sonny peered out over the wheel. "Well, head that way instead."

They'd been traveling fairly parallel to the shore, and "that way" for Sonny would take them to a nice cove. Christ, for a pair of semi-retired boys, they sure traveled a lot.

"What's that way?" MJ turned, heading the direction he pointed, still bouncing, still moving like a toy on a string.

"A place we can anchor. I want breakfast." What the hell? "You been taking speed, man?"

"Hmm? Would I do that? I mean, you're the meth dealer..." Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. Jesus Christ, almost two years since MJ fucked up his sweet little still and the damned asshole was *still* teasing him about cooking something more potent.

"You just do odd things, so running hootch doesn't trip your trigger. You're fucking scary. Blow shit up. Try to cut people's thumbs off." He reached out and turned the wheel a little, toward his cove.

"I wasn't trying to cut it off. You were choking me. That's not odd. Odd is not letting a man walk by in a fog."

"You blew up my road." Some people just had a blind spot for the fucking truth. Jeez.

"Your name wasn't on it." Like that would have mattered.

"It was, actually. But you just can't read Carolina ridge runner." Another wee turn had them heading inland. "Throttle down, Precious."

"Is that like Cajun?" MJ chuckled, easing back, heading them in a little too fast, but sure as shit, they didn't die or run ashore or anything.

"No, more like asshole environmentalist, but smarter." Shithead.

"I do not have my own language, Sunshine. Although that would be vaguely cool, something with explosives and special words for the good money and shit. Not that I'm still in the business, because I'm retired, but still. Cool."

"Uh-huh." There. They turned in a wide, soggy circle before settling, and Sonny wasted no time dropping anchor. "We're there."

"Go us." MJ killed the motor and started wandering, looking, whistling.

"Uh-huh." Sonny did some looking, too, at MJ's ass. And at other bouncy bits when MJ turned toward him to pace back.

Okay, somebody had some happy drugs and wasn't sharing, which was against the rules. Well, unless he was doling them out and that was less a not-sharing thing and more a friendly thing.

"You're holding out on me, Precious." Sonny started stalking that fine ass, watching it sway.

"Holding out on you?" Mmm. That man had some fine, strong thighs.

"Uh-huh. You've been snorting at something ... Tell me what?" Sonny reached out and stroked the flat belly, feeling muscles twitch.

"I just was trying to remember what was in that little envelope. You know, that one we picked up from that guy? I

should have marked it, but I didn't, or if I did, I forgot or it faded. Something."

"You bastard. You didn't share." Not that Sonny reacted well to some of the shit MJ did anyway, physically. But he had to keep up...

"There wasn't enough. I sorta sneezed."

"You sorta. Oh, Jesus fuck, MJ." The man was a menace.

"Yeah. Sorta." MJ started backpedaling, fingers drumming on the rail of the boat.

"You're the worst druggie I've ever met. That's downright incompetent." Turning on his heel, Sonny went to rummage through MJ's little bag. Surely there was something...

"Incompetent? Me? Hey! What are you doing? If you want speed, you can just make some." MJ tugged him away from the bag with a sharp tug.

"I don't make drugs!" He whirled and popped MJ one, right on the jaw, feeling grumpy and left out and still fucking hungry and horny. MJ's head slammed back and then MJ toppled, smacking to the deck with a crack. He had a moment of savage satisfaction before he plopped down to check MJ's skull for a fracture or whatever.

MJ's eyes popped open as he got down, one hand grabbing his throat. "You sorry motherfucker."

"Urk." Sonny's breath rattled for the full five seconds it took him to pop the heel of his hand against MJ's sternum, giving the little fuck his own breathing problems. MJ grunted, then one hard fist connected with his belly, hard enough to lift him off the deck of the boat. Sonny rolled back, clutching his

gut. Fuck. Fucking goddamned fucker. He'd bet he knew what MJ sneezed away. It always made him grumpy as hell.

MJ stumbled across the deck, heaving, head held low. Shit. So much for hungry and horny. Groaning, Sonny got to his hands and knees, heading over to help MJ out, hold his head as he ralphed over the rail.

"Shit." MJ swayed, breathing hard. "We were doing fine 'til we stopped."

"Sorry. Sorry, babe." He was, too. Dammit. Sonny sighed. He didn't think he'd be getting any until they had a nap.

"Uh-huh." MJ nodded, heading toward the stairs. "Gonna wash out my mouth."

"Okay. Wanna lie down then? Want a beer or some morphine?"

"I'm thinking we could use a shot." MJ waited on him to catch up, then twined their fingers together, squeezed. God, he loved the way MJ got with the forgiving.

"Yeah. I think that's a fine idea." It would help MJ down, and it would ease the fucking adrenaline in his own system. "What kind, Precious?"

"Tequila. Salt. Lime." MJ washed his mouth out, spitting into the sink.

"Hoo, yeah." He set them up, cutting a lime into wedges, setting out the bottle and the salt. One thing about his Precious, the man didn't hold a grudge, didn't fucking pout. Hell, MJ even brought over chips and a thing of dip from the little fridge. He grinned and got some beers to chase with, and they had the breakfast of champions. "Looks good, MJ."

"Yeah." MJ settled, jaw starting to bruise so pretty above that scar.

He figured he had bruises of his own, on his belly and his throat. It kinda made him grin. Just like old times. "Bottoms up."

"You know it." MJ knocked one back, throat working a little as he shuddered. "Woo."

"Hoo, yeah." That hit the fucking spot. Sonny poured them one more, the heat in his belly too good not to indulge.

MJ nodded and leaned, leg against his, just rubbing a little, the bounces reduced to a periodic jiggle. Sonny petted that leg, stroking lightly with his fingers, the golden hairs catching, showing off all that amazing black ink. MJ took the shot, blinking a couple of times before those pretty thighs just spread. That was the ticket. Sonny let his fingers wander over and around, tickling the inside of MJ's leg. MJ chuckled, the sound husky and deep, hips shifting on the cushions. Hell, yeah. Just like that.

"You like that, huh?" He knew MJ did, but the talking was half the fun. Sonny squeezed a little, his fingers leaving marks.

"Mm-hmm." MJ rolled toward him, lips hot on his throat, making the bruises burn. "More, Sunshine."

"Where more, Precious? Here?" He slid down to touch the back of MJ's knee. "Or here?" He worked back up to the crease of thigh and torso.

"Uh-huh." MJ started moving, tongue slip-sliding on his skin. Oh, now. This was way nicer than grumpy. They shifted a bit, Sonny oozing over between MJ's legs, both hands

working that fine skin now, his lips sliding down MJ's shoulder. "Mmm. Smell good." MJ groaned and wrapped around him. "This make up sex?"

"Nah. This is my lost wake up horny sex. We'll do the make up sex later." MJ smelled damned good, too. Hot and male, with a tang of tequila and lime.

"Oh. That works." MJ's hand slid down his back, nails scratching a little, making his skin sing.

"Yeah." He kissed along MJ's collarbone, his hands sliding down, cupping MJ's cock. "Yeah, I think it'll work. And before it, there might be a post-sex nap, followed by pre-lunch sex."

"Mm-hmm. Then food and beer and maybe a soak in the sun with oil." MJ spread wider, moaning some. "Then the make up sex."

"You got it." Sweet. Suck? Fuck? Hmm. Sonny pushed MJ back a little to get that distracting mouth off him. He looked MJ over, up and down, hands still working that sweet cock. Suck. Definitely. He could fuck during the make up sex.

Sonny dropped lower, the decking cold under his knees, and licked at MJ's belly, which was quite possibly his favorite part. Maybe. Kinda. MJ made this amazing fucking rumbly-assed noise—sort of part new lawnmower, part bad porn, part Nascar from a distance—and arched right up into him. There was nothing like growly. Nope, not a damned thing. Well, except the taste of MJ's cock as his lips slid down over it, tongue working the head.

"Sunshine!" MJ's hands landed on his head, not holding yet, just tangling in his hair and making sweet fucking promises.

"Mm-hmm." He loved that fucking surprised sound. It came every time he did this, like MJ just didn't expect it. Sonny sucked harder, loving on MJ so good. MJ humped up, cock pushing right on in, fucking his lips and letting him taste each bitter, salty drop that slid over his tongue. Sonny closed his eyes and pulled harder with his lips, letting the taste and feel of hot flesh overtake him. So good. MJ always tasted so fucking good.

"Would fucking sell my soul for your mouth, man."

He chuckled. MJ didn't know it, but he already had. That ass was his, lock, stock, and barrel. His tongue ran along the underside of MJ's cock, rubbing along the big vein.

MJ's fingers tightened, pushing into his scalp a little, those pretty fucking thighs hard as stone under his hand. Grasping them, Sonny got more leverage, really turning on the damned Hoover. He wanted MJ to come like a freight train. Just to make up for popping him. And hey, you never knew if you could get high doing this...

Heat poured into his mouth, MJ just losing it, going all incoherent and wild and shit underneath him.

Sonny took it all in, sucked the guy down like there was no tomorrow. Then he took a kiss, surging up to share MJ's flavor with him. Sonny figured his cock might explode. Lucky for him, MJ's fingers wrapped right around and started tugging, helping him out straight off, not making him ask for it even a little.

Thank God. Sonny humped that hand, his muscles tight as anything, his back arching impossibly. MJ sucked his tongue, teeth and lips working him above while those fingers worked

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him below. It took maybe a minute. Maybe a minute and a half. Then Sonny came, his hips going crazy as spunk spilled out of him.

"Mmm. Pretty, pretty." MJ sounded too fucking satisfied for his own good.

"Uh-huh. You do good, Precious." Sonny couldn't even get pissed at the man for being an ass. He felt too good. Well, all but where MJ had hit him. Then even that only mattered a little as MJ kissed him good and hard, sorta scattered him all around.

Looked like they were working their way toward the make up sex *before* lunch.

Which suited him right down to the ground.

Chapter Two

Fuck, he was itching for a fight. They'd gone to some damned titty bar, Sonny hooting and carrying on like a fucking asshole, getting chicks to rub their boobs and play ride-the-horsey. Asshole. He knew Sonny didn't want the broads. Hell, MJ knew Sonny just liked pissing him off.

That was why he was pissed.

Mostly.

Really.

Dammit.

MJ'd stormed out about half an hour ago, heading straight for the boat. Well, maybe not straight, because, hello! Tequila. Liquor store.

The fact that Sonny hadn't come right after him ... oh, yeah, pissing him off even more. So when Sonny hopped over the rail and came up, planting his feet, hands on his hips, MJ just wanted to nail him in the nuts.

Especially when Sonny said, "What crawled up your ass and died, Precious?"

"Don't make me beat you to death, Sunshine. I have a mostly full bottle here. It would leave a mark." Maybe even a dent.

Sonny reached down and snagged the bottle, *his* bottle, and took a long swig. "Ugh. That stuff is poison."

"Excuse me?" He blinked over. "You make lighter fluid that makes people hallucinate. This is 1800 Cuervo."

"Well at least you remember it's not meth, huh?" Oh, poke, poke, poke. Bastard.

"I remember you *claim* you weren't cooking up meth. I never really saw. Fog, you know?"

"Uh-huh. More like the ringing in your ears from where I beat you down." That grin was enough to make his fingers twitch.

"You still have that scar on your thumb, Sunshine? From where the cuffed guy cut you?"

"You know I do, Precious. You feel it on your skin every night. You still have that scar from where you took a bullet for me?"

MJ reached up, stroked his face even as he arched an eyebrow. "You still have the one you took for me?"

"You fuckin' know it, Precious. I'm your motherfucking hero." Sonny took another belt of his tequila, swaying with the motion of the boat.

"Thought it was poison." That was his tequila. His motherfucking hero. Goddamn.

"It gets better with each sip. Kinda like you." His cock throbbed and he stood, got right up into Sonny's space, grabbing his bottle back. "Hey! I was drinking that. Might as well get something out of the night, as you didn't give me any love at the strip club." One big hand closed over his, yanking at the bottle.

"You were getting plenty of love from Titarama and SuperPussy." Fuck, Sonny was strong.

"Oh, fuck you, Precious. I was just playing. Shit, I was showing you off, showing them what they couldn't have." He wasn't sure whether to believe it, but Sonny got right in his face, teeth bared.

"Possessive bastard." MJ pushed right back, his chest slamming against Sonny's. Beautiful motherfucker.

Sonny pulled, sending the bottle flying over the starboard rail. MJ heard it splash in just before Sonny took him down, one leg hooking behind his, his whole world reeling.

"Fuck!" He dug in, fingers squeezing Sonny tight as they landed with a thud.

"Uhnph." They rolled, Sonny ending up on the bottom, struggling against him.

He got hold of Sonny's arms, got them pressed onto the deck. "Got you."

"Do you?" Those hips bucked under him, Sonny's long legs scrabbling, hard cock poking at his hip through thin linen pants.

"Yes..." Goddamnit. He arched, fighting for leverage. This was like some weird-assed seesaw thing, but with tequila and sex.

"Well come on, then, Precious. Do your worst." Oh, that look. Those eyes lit right up, Sonny rearing up to bite him.

"Fuck!" He slammed down with his hips, grinding them together, fingers fighting to keep hold of Sonny's wrists.

"Uh-huh. Yeah, you got me. Sure." Goading him and pushing him, that was what Sonny was doing. Constantly.

"Fucker. Drive me batshit crazy." The man was under his skin, sunk into him.

Oh.

Sunk into him.

Fuck.

"I only do it because I care." Laughing, Sonny ground against him, starting to pant. "Want you."

"Yeah. Fuck, yeah." He nodded, leaned to bite Sonny's throat. "Yes."

Sonny tilted back, offering that long throat, just grunting under him. Those hands twisted under his, pushing. Pushy. Redneck. Formerly meth-producing. Insane. Fucker.

MJ fucking adored him.

He bit hard, loving the feel of Sonny between his teeth, under him.

"Harder, MJ. God, harder." Hips rocking, Sonny hummed, all that muscle standing out in Sonny's arms, tendons hard in his neck.

"Yes. Mine. Do you hear me? You're mine." He bit again, making another mark, making Sonny groan.

"I got it. I do." Finally breaking his hold, Sonny reached down to grab his ass, pulling him down hard. "Come on. Come on."

That was all he needed, that little extra squeeze. MJ started humping furiously, driving them together. One of Sonny's long-assed legs wrapped around his, hauling them together even harder, holding on for dear life.

Everything in him went tight as he shot, teeth on Sonny's shoulder.

"Shit!" Sonny bucked under him, the scent and heat of Sonny's come heady as Sonny shot, too, hands bruising his skin.

"Yeah." They slumped together on the deck, the boat still rocking a little.

"See? This is what you get for ignoring me, Precious. Don't think I don't know you've been thinking on planning a gig," Sonny said, popping his ass. "You don't type so fucking much on that damned computer if you're not IMing your handler."

Goddamn. He didn't deny it; the money was too good, the job close enough to be easy, hard enough to be a challenge.

"No fouling our nest, MJ." Like the man could read his fucking mind.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sonny. I just ... it's a huge take." He could almost taste it. "Too big to turn away from and they know it."

"So what's the catch?" The pinching and smacking had turned to stroking, Sonny pushing at MJ's pants.

"They want it to happen inside a military base." He nudged Sonny's jaw, tasting and licking, the little hairs tickling his tongue.

"Oh, fuck that. Not gonna happen. We'll sail away." Okay, this he could tell Sonny meant, the way every muscle went tight under him.

"Yeah?" The part of him that wasn't all pro might have—might have—rejoiced a little.

"Yeah. You know those military types are crazier than anything, right?" Soft lips moved across his cheek, bruised and swollen.

"Crazier than meth-cooking rednecks?" He hummed, relaxed down to his bones.

"Uh-huh. Crazier than bomb happy eco-terrorists."

"That's pretty fucking crazy, Sunshine."

"You know it, Precious. So let's not and say we did. 'Kay? There will be other jobs."

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"Okay." When did that get to be easy? Shit. He was getting old. Or settled. Or something.

Sonny nipped at his collarbone, making his nipples draw up, his spent cock giving a happy twitch. Maybe these days he just had something else to occupy his time. Something almost as good as setting off bombs.

Or maybe even better.

Chapter Three

"Sunshine, how far are we from the Keys?"

"Uh..." The hammock Sonny lay in stopped swinging and one wet finger popped up to test the air—and what the *hell* did that mean, anyway? "Half a day, maybe? Maybe a full day's sail. Why?"

"I got an email." And, hell, the money didn't suck entirely. Not for the chance to steal a hard drive and blow the living shit out of a huge fucking research facility. The challenge rocked—blow up the place without causing mass chaos or leaking anything heavy-duty into the water table, while making it look like a gigantic accident. Too fun.

"Yeah?" The hammock started swinging again. Sonny usually talked him out of the not so good money. Lazy bastard.

"Uh-huh. California. Facility that makes weapons for the military. Three-quarter of a mil plus expenses."

"Huh." One foot hit the deck, so he could tell Sonny was interested, even if that silly, scruffy head never came up above the ropes.

"Yeah. We get to the Keys tomorrow. Dock. Be in Santa Barbara in four days. Work out a blueprint, grab a hard drive. Blow the joint. Be back out here before two weeks is up."

"We'd get there sooner, you'd let us fly." Oh. Asshole. He could hear Sonny laughing at him.

He shuddered, shook his head. "No planes. No trains." Besides, Harry knew he didn't fly.

"But it's so much faster, Precious. I mean, I don't get why you think a car is so much better." That did get him a look, Sonny's dark eyes peering over at him.

"I can get out of a car." He just couldn't do it. No closed spaces. None. He stuck his tongue out at Sonny, rolled his eyes. "So, you wanna come with me?"

"Are you kidding? I ain't letting you go by yourself. You'd just get arrested or kidnapped or something." That was a serious thought, he could tell. Sonny actually got up and stretched.

"It's a lot easier for you to rescue my ass if you're close." Mmm. Pretty. He typed out a quick confirmation and waited for the details to download. He would need det cord, detonators, timers. Hmm. He'd be in the car long enough to make his own. MJ grabbed a piece of paper and started scribbling.

"Mm-hmm. A lot easier to fuck it, too." Damn, but Sonny looked good naked in the sun. The man might be lazy, but he worked out like a fiend, kept those muscles cut and heavy.

"We got some time before we hit land, you know." He could start licking at the bottom and just work his way up. He put his pencil down.

"We do." Oh, that prick woke up for him, just like that. Like on command and shit.

Impressive.

The file downloaded and he logged off, clicking the laptop shut and going to find him something much more fun. "You have something in mind?"

Mmm. Sonny smelled good.

"Oh, let me see." Sonny grabbed him when he got close enough, pulling him right up against all that bare skin. "I bet I can think of something, Precious. I'm good that way."

"Mm-hmm." He bent his head and started licking and lapping, tongue dragging along one fine shoulder.

"Oh, now see? I didn't have to even suggest anything." Sonny kissed his throat, his chin, his cheekbone, hot, damp little touches.

"I was improvising until you came up with something."

"It's nice," Sonny said, squeezing his ass. "Keep on. You're good at that spur of the moment thing."

"Yeah. Part of the job description. Thinking on your feet." Mmm. Nipplage. Salty. Sweet. Yum.

"Uh-huh. You know me. I like a plan..." Sonny must have lost the plan, though, because the man was just grunting and kinda humping him.

"Mm-hmm..." He slid down to his knees, working toward that heavy prick. He'd get it all wet and slick and throbby and then offer Sonny his ass. It seemed more than fair. Sonny knew where he was headed. When it all came down to it, they could think along the same lines really well. One hand cupped the back of his head and pushed him down, Sonny's growl rumbling deep in that belly, against his cheek.

He fucking loved that sound. MJ bit Sonny's belly a little, just enough to sting, then he wrapped his lips around the tip of Sonny's cock and sucked hard.

"Uhn. Precious. Yeah." Oh, yeah. Sonny was doing that bendy thing, where his knees crooked and his hips pushed up. It didn't get better than that.

Uh-huh. Just like that. He rubbed Sonny's thighs, head bobbing some as he went down on that fine fucking cock. Sonny cussed him, praised him, and finally started to beg him, voice rough and broken, hands petting his head and shoulders, fingers tangling in his hair. Sonny did love his damned hair since it had gotten all surfer dude. He pulled back, breathing hard, his fucking body one big ball of need. "Want you to fuck me."

Sonny's eyes blazed down at him, all dilated pupils. "Okay. Yeah. I can do that, Precious. We don't have anything here, though. My turn." Sonny dropped down, spinning him around to pull his ass right up and bite one cheek. Hard.

"Fucker!" God, that burned. So fucking much. MJ's hips swayed, thighs parting and ass pushing out like a bitch in heat.

"Mm-hmm. That's the idea. Me fucker. You fuckee." Bastard. Beautiful bastard, laughing at him again. Sonny made up for it, though. Right then. That hot tongue scraped over his stinging ass, then down, between, pushing right at his hole. Oh, yeah. Right there. It was easy as breathing, hips rocking back, hands just thrumming on the deck.

Sonny opened him, spread him, getting him so wet their skin made slick noises as it slipped and slid. Finally Sonny moved up behind him, pushing against him, thick cock inside him before he could even blink. The burn and stretch were just what he needed, just enough to make him hum and push back, slap his ass right into the basket of Sonny's hips. Those big hands grabbed him, fingers digging into his hips, and they

rocked together, Sonny really giving it to him, slamming in over and over.

Hell, yes. Like that. Just fucking like that. "More. Sonny."

"Uh-huh. Gonna. MJ. Damn." Oh, that growly voice gone all incoherent was a good, good thing. So was Sonny's cock swelling in him, hitting all his hot spots, rubbing and driving him crazy.

"Yeah. Yeah. My cock, Sunshine. Please." He wouldn't need much. Just a touch. Come on.

Sonny just grunted and let go of his hip with one hand to reach down beneath him and grab his cock, pulling hard in time with each thrust that shook him, made him slide on the deck. Oh, fuck, yes. Every nerve in his body fired at once, eyes rolling back in his head as he shot his load. He got one short cry as Sonny filled him right up, coming inside him in hard bursts, leaving them both limp and breathless when they collapsed.

"Mmm. Yeah. That was. Uh-huh." Loved that fucking man.

"You think that was a good plan, Precious?" Those lips moving against his nape had him shivering.

"Excellent fucking plan."

Grade A.

"Oh, good. Wait until you see what I can do with planning our flights."

"Planning our what?"

"Flights. To California..." Evil fucking asshole.

"No flying. We'll get a fast car."

"Sure, Precious. Sure we will." Sonny slid away and patted his ass. "It'll be fine."

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"Mm-hmm." He stretched out, the sunshine just baking him, balls to bones. Evil redneck.

They'd argue a lot more between there and California, but Sonny had agreed to do the job. The rest was just child's play.

Chapter Four

Sometimes, it seemed odd to be on dry land.

Sonny figured he and MJ spent enough time out on the water to be dolphins or something. Whales. Oh! Manatees. He chuckled at the idea of a manatee with MJ's floppy, sun-streaked hair. Then he chuckled again at the look on MJ's face if Sonny mentioned his thought.

They were holed up in a seedy motel in the Keys while MJ got the rest of his instructions for the job. The money was damned good, and while sometimes Sonny thought MJ liked his work just a teensy bit too much, he wasn't gonna bitch.

The hotel had magic fingers in the beds.

"Hey, Precious," he said, reaching out with his toes to pull the hair on MJ's bare leg. "You about ready to stop surfing and come ride instead?"

"Ow! Damn, that stings." MJ looked over and grinned, the edge of nerves and excitement just starting to show.

They surely didn't need MJ to peak too early. Shit, just the drive to the Mississippi would be a pain in the ass. Time to work off some steam. "You get all the details?"

"Yeah, for the most part. We need to stop in Lubbock for the good stuff. I have to find a car. Do you have a preference?"

"Something fast..." They tended to get shot at. "Know what I was daydreaming about while I was over here aaaalll by myself?"

"Mmm ... Fried okra and moonshine?"

"Asshole. I was thinking about you, naked, swimming in the ocean." Manatees were naked, right?

Oh, now, that got him some attention, got one of those hands sliding right up his leg. "Yeah? I'm a fan."

Sonny spread, figuring he had MJ looking now. "Uh-huh. Me, too. I love your ass when it's just above the waterline. Hell, I love it any way I can get it."

Oh, look at that. The laptop closed and MJ turned all the way around toward him.

Hoo, yeah. Go him. Score one for the redneck with the sweaty balls. "I was thinking maybe you could bring that ass over here. What do you think?"

"I think that's a plan I could get ... behind." MJ snorted at his own joke, eyes dancing as said behind came closer.

"Lord, Precious, that was bad." Digging his heels in, Sonny lifted his hips, really showing off as he spanked the air with his growing cock.

"Mm-hmm..." He didn't think MJ was listening, not the way those eyes were staring at his cock.

Casually, Sonny reached down and cupped himself, stroking, humping up into the touch. Damn. "You want some of this, MJ?"

"Uh-uh." He'd've pouted if MJ hadn't groaned, deep and low, those scarred up hands sliding on the chintzy coverlet. "Want it all."

"Come and get it then." Hell, at this point he'd stroke himself off and let MJ have his ass. He was easy that way these days. It still kinda boggled his mind.

MJ's teeth found the inner curve of his knee, then that hot tongue slid up his thigh.

"Uhn." His legs were gonna fall off if he pushed them apart any more. His muscles quivered, and he just watched that man love on him. Fuck, yeah.

MJ was kinda muttering, lips moving against his inner thigh, fingers sliding to work his balls.

"Come on, Precious. Gimme." Give him something. Suck, rim, fuck. Sonny didn't care. His elbow thumped the mattress as he stroked himself, really finding a rhythm.

MJ moved, quick as a snake, and wrapped those lips around the tip of Sonny's cock, mouth moving in time with his hand, fingers pushing down to tap at Sonny's hole.

"Fuck! MJ..." Sonny trailed off with a groan, his whole lower body one giant tingle. Jesus. More like a burn. He bore down, opening right up for that finger. MJ fucking knew him, knew right where to touch him, where to stroke and suck and ... Yeah. Yeah, just like that. He thrashed, hard words starting to fall from his lips, needing so bad he felt like he was strung out like a wire. Ready to snap. "MJ. Fuck. Please, Precious. More."

One finger became two, MJ's head snapping up, those eyes just burning. "Want you, man. Need in."

"Now, MJ. Now." All he could think of was that pretty cock inside him, stretching him. That and MJ on top of him, just moving and groaning and yeah ... not a manatee in sight. MJ nodded, licking one palm and slicking that fine cock before pushing his thighs wide and lining up. Sonny let go of his cock long enough to grab MJ's shoulders and pull, hauling them

together, pulling MJ right in. His eyes rolled back. That was the fucking ticket. Right on.

"Yeah." MJ didn't waste any time, just drove into him, eyes boring into him like nothing going.

They moved together like they were meant to, and Sonny had stopped questioning *that* a long while back. His belly felt tight as a board, his thighs shook, and his cock leaked all over hell and half of Georgia. MJ hauled him closer, his ass meeting MJ's thighs as one hand found his cock. Shit, between the mattress squeaking, the cock pegging him deep, and those fingers jacking him good and hard? He was happier than a pig in shit.

Sonny reached above him and grabbed the headboard, arching into it even more, needing it like nothing else in the world. They got all sweaty, got humming and groaning and all of a sudden it was too damned much. His cock throbbed, his ass tightened, and he came all over, spattering MJ's chest.

"Oh, sweet fuck. So fucking fine..." MJ slid his fingers over that tanned skin, licking them clean and moaning loud. The motions of those lean hips got faster, cock punching deep.

"Yeah, Precious. Now. Goddamn." He could watch now, even if his eyelids tried to get all heavy. MJ looked fine, cheeks dark, chest heaving, nipples so hard.

"Uh ... uh-huh. Now." MJ's head went back, throat working as heat filled him. Shit. No fat, hairless manatee could manage that. Especially not on slick motel sheets.

His. MJ was his very own psychotic, sexy bastard. Sonny held MJ as he plopped down on top, stroking that sweaty back. "That was way better than my imagining."

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"Yeah?" MJ hummed a little, fingers on his chest, heart just pounding away.

"Uh-huh. Way. Got your attention, huh? Wanna try the magic fingers?" He grinned, expecting a pinch.

MJ chuckled, fingers finding his nipple and tweaking. "You and the magic fingers. I got extra quarters at the desk. Rev her up."

Chapter Five

"Rick, dude. Boss lady says you got company coming."

Padraic looked up from his notes, pushed his glasses up.

"Huh? Company? Me?"

Who the hell was this guy? Man, they went through interns at a terrifying rate. Hmm. Wonder if there was a mathematic corollary? The ratio of interns was directly proportional to the amount of times Bethy threw something caustic or flammable toward said intern's head.

"Yeah, dude. Some guy. Bethy said to be nice and not scare him away or freeze any bit of him off."

"Oh, fuck off. I haven't hurt anybody in way longer than she has. Speaking of, can you turn that burner off over there before that flask explodes?"

"I'd say it's too late for that." The deep, cultured, and way accented voice came like two seconds before the flask shattered, sending the intern scrambling and yelping. "What a pleasure to meet you."

Oh. Oops. He chuckled and grabbed a hot pad on his way over. "Hey. Thanks. Well, I mean, we haven't met yet, but I'm Padraic Bair. Rick. So, assuming you're looking for me, hi. Or, yeah. If you're wearing polyester blends, you might want to move away from there."

"Wool. And I'm quite far enough. No one likes to smell like a singed lamb." Waiting calmly for Rick to put out the fire, the guy stood there, hands in the pockets of his fancy pants until Rick put got everything doused, then the guy stuck one hand out.

"Neil Caseman."

Rick shook the man's hand and smiled, still more than ninety-eight percent confused as to why he had company. One point six percent of him was convinced Bethy was being a bitch and foisting off some newbie suit from the main office because she'd forgotten to wear a bra again. Point two percent of him was thinking oh, he'd won the stud lottery and this was a gift from the gods, because, hey. Guy. Sex. Hello. "How can I help you?"

"I like your name. Padraic." Mr. Neil Caseman had green eyes, blond hair graying around the edges, a trim body that was not too horribly tall, and he held Rick's hand about two seconds too long for politeness, thumb sliding against the web between Rick's thumb and forefinger.

"Thanks. My dad was Irish. We've all got the amazing names. Neil's a good name, too. Means champion. Pretty cool, really. I mean, do they make names meaning second-runner up or son of 'gee, you almost don't suck'? No. So are you a new hire? Sorry, Bethy didn't send me an email." Or if she did, he'd deleted it this morning in his pre-juice and forbidden Pop-Tart frenzy.

"I'll be evaluating the lab for a bit. Nothing that should concern you, but as the premier researcher here, your employer thought we ought to meet straight away."

Oh, man. Evaluating. "That sounds ominous. Evaluating who for what? They did show you where Bethy's office is, yeah? She's the boss. Has a secretary and a schedule and shit. I'm just the chief lab monkey." He reached up, tugged one red curl that was probably breaking some lab rule about

hair, but man, hair cuts happened while he was working and those places smelled bad. "Or orangutan, I guess."

"I've met Beth, yes. I'm to evaluate the lab, as I said. That means you." Smooth, smiley, not a bit fake, but somehow the guy just wasn't ... right.

"Well, cool. You want a cup of coffee?" Surely, he wasn't supposed to entertain the man. Surely not. Because he had stuff to do. Like send an email to Bethy asking what the fuck he was supposed to do with a dressed-up guy and how long he was supposed to do it.

"Only if you have the most exquisite cream." The smile was nice. It went all the way to Neil's eyes, making them twinkle. "But if you might provide hot water..."

"Hot water? Well, thermodynamics lab. My specialty. Sure." Okay, something to do. Hrm. Okay. Erlenmeyer flask from the box. Good. Good. Next. Water. Okay, no brainer. Cup. Cup. Oh, there was a Star Tre ... Oh, God. Scary. Scary. Trash. Don't look. Christ. Oh. Look. One of Bethy's Fraggles. Rock ones. Cool.

"Excellent. I have tea bags." A little laptop case appeared, Neil pulling a teabag out of one of the pockets.

"You carry tea bags? For real?" He filled the flask with water and lit a burner. Okay, interesting. Odd, but interesting.

"Naturally. Doesn't everyone?" One perfectly groomed eyebrow went up. Just one. That was annoying.

And sort of Spock-y. His head tilted as he thought. "Nope."

"Oh. Well. Shall we have tea?" More rummaging in the bag produced a squashed muffin, chocolate chip in variety, a pack

of Cheese and Wheat crackers, and two-thirds of a large-size Dairy Milk bar.

"Okay." He grinned and shook his head. "Although, I warn you, you start going Mary Poppins with that bag and we're having a class about the laws of physics. Some things are supposed to be what they are."

He got a little spot cleaned off and found a mostly unburned stool.

"I rather like the idea of a TARDIS, myself. And laws are meant to be broken." Oh. Now *that* was a smile. Wicked.

"Well, sort of. I mean, I like the laws that we find out aren't laws. Like the projectiles here, you have to ... Oh. Oh, man, if I had a TARDIS then the dissolution factor would be solved without resorting to zero G's and vacuum freezing. Damn. Still, they're not going to fund that." He looked at the flask, the bubbles forming. "How hot? I can go anywhere from tepid to tongue-melting."

"I just bet you can." Voice going all low and growly, Neil plopped down on the stool, propping his chin on his hands. "I like it boiling. Tea won't steep properly without."

Oh. Growly. And accent-y. Wow. He'd take two, please.

"I can do that. Boil water, I mean. Anybody can. The secret is superheating steam, you know? Can you imagine? Instant tea. Of course it would be more like tea-rain, which has its place. I mean, you could collect it in barrels and drink it, if the condensation area was clean..." Paddy trailed off, realizing Neil was looking at him with his head tilted, a waiting look on his face. Jesus H. Christ, Paddy, can't you shut up? He could hear Kynan's voice in his head, see his

oldest brother's eyes glaring. His whole face burned and his glasses slipped a little. "Oh. Right. Sorry. I don't. Science nerd. Yeah. It's boiling. Watch your hands."

"Oh, don't apologize. I quite like listening." The teabag and cup slid over, propelled by one of those great hands. "Please don't think I was mocking. I wasn't."

"I just tend to think aloud. Trust me, I don't waste lab money with silly stuff. I just..." Just what? Imagine? Superheated steam causing a room to rain *tea*? Bethy was going to kill him.

"Stop." The flask teetered as he got all bouncy and Neil reached out and grabbed his wrist, steadying it. Warm, only a little callused, and very sensitive, Neil's fingers felt good. Really good. "It's fine. I'm not going to dock you for having a good imagination."

"It's a creative thing, science. People forget that." His eyes were focused on those fingers, not on the flask or the cup, which was a little oops, especially when the cup got filled to the top.

The tiniest motion tilted his hand back up, stopping the flow. "Precisely. You have a talent for it, and I imagine that's because you aren't hidebound. Now, have a treat with me."

"A treat?" He turned the burner off, put the flask down. "Hidebound is the neatest word. It sounds like something that should be exotic, but isn't."

"Chocolate. Muffin or candy bar?" Smiling, Neil pulled little packets of sugar out of his bag, the kind you got at the Olive Garden. Little tubes.

"Bethy didn't show you the sign?" Neil was, like, scary together. Either that or he lived out of that little bag...

"Sign? No, I'm afraid not." Tapping the sugar into the tea, Neil pulled out a little stirring stick. Wow.

"That's pretty cool, you know? It says, 'Anyone caught feeding Padraic chocolate or sugar will be written up. Providing him with Jolt cola is grounds for immediate dismissal.'"

The last Jolt incident had cost the company a lot in just cleaning.

"Oh, now I *must* give you chocolate. I'm an independent contractor after all. What on earth is Jolt cola?" The Dairy Milk ... Neil had to offer him the Dairy Milk. And notice he was staring. "It's from England."

"Oh, it smells good..." His fingers twitched as he took the piece, humming low at the meltyuhnchocoliciousness. "Jolt's like super caffeinated soda. I more than bounced."

"Oh. I see. It's like one of those atrocious triple espresso drinks. So, what precisely do you do?"

"Here? I research how to make hot things really, really hot and then try to make them really, really cold without bending time."

"Bending time? Now isn't that a law?" Maybe Bethy had sent this guy to see if he'd been eating Cocoa Puffs again.

"I prefer to think of it as a strong suggestion." Man, that chocolate tasted good. Better than Pop-Tarts. His leg started bouncing, just a little. "Breaking time? That's a law."

"I see." The muffin disappeared in small, neat bites, Neil licking his fingers when it was gone, closing his eyes and humming a little. "Oh, now. That did the trick."

"Yeah? Cool." He grinned and stood, taking one last bite of chocolate and grabbing a pen. Okay, so. Working. Yeah. He did that. Sometimes. Man, he needed a soda pop. Oh. Caffeine. Yeah.

"Tell me if I'm hanging over your shoulder too much." Neil packed everything away, setting the laptop case aside and following him about.

"Are you a physicist?" He wandered, turned on the radio, grabbed some instruments, and fiddled. Weird. Weird. This was weird.

"No." Well, okay, yeah. He knew that, but Neil gave him nothing to go on. Just that one bald word.

Bald. Huh. Maybe that was it. Not smooth enough. Or too smooth. Something. The air caught on the edge of the bullet and the friction...

Oh, fucking cool.

He forgot about his company, the chocolate, the tea, sinking into the noise and chatter of the work, talking furiously to himself as he went to it.

He had no idea how long he worked and Neil watched, but when he lost the groove, Neil was still sitting there. Watching him.

"Hey. I. Sorry. Boring. I got busy. Did you want lunch. Uh. Dinner?" Please say it wasn't already breakfast tomorrow.

"I think I could stand dinner, yes." Like that was that, Neil stood, snapped off the valve on his gas line, and took his

arm. "Shall we? How do you feel about Indian food? Or perhaps Mexican? Oh, I imagine you like turbocharged burritos, hmm?"

"Sure. Okay. I love Mexican. And Italian. Indian. Doughnuts. BBQ. I'm easy. Or there's a cafeteria here in the complex. We all mostly eat there."

"Oh, I believe we should definitely explore." Paddy loved the way Neil made those few simple words sound sexy as hell.

He looked down; his Area 51 T-shirt was in fair shape. "You sure you want to? You're dressed up and I'm a schmo."

Propelling him out of the lab, Neil nodded. "Quite certain. You'll be a most intriguing dinner companion. Mexican it is. I'm told there's a place not far from here that has the best salsa in three counties."

"El Mercado? Yeah. Yeah. They have a fabulous air conditioning vent system, too. Mariachi bands. Cold beer. Pretty waiters. It's all good."

"Then that sounds like the place for us." Flashing his little plastic badge, which Rick hadn't even noticed, Neil steered him out, the parking lot baking in the sun. "I hope you don't mind if I drive."

"That's cool." More than cool. His little Honda's front seat was, uh, scary. Terrifying.

Possibly not even running; it had been a while.

"I rather thought it might be." The rental was like the guy. Sleek, gray, just big enough to have muscles. Nice.

"Huh? Bethy told tales, huh? I had a house off campus, but then the other guy wanted out. So, too much shit stored here

and there and then Bethy just moved me in..." Man, he hadn't thought about Steve in weeks, which was probably why Steve had thrown him out of the house, huh? Still, he had a little apartment thing and a little storage thing and a little car thing and the locker at the lab and ... Wow. Pretty car.

"Was he your roommate or your boyfriend?"

"I guess that depends on when you asked him, huh? I mean, nothing is constant. Well, there's the luminosity of the sun and the speed of light in a vacuum, I guess."

"As well as the fact that your mother will hate your hair." He got a sideways grin, Neil heading unerringly toward El Mercado. "So you're single."

"Yeah. All lab rats are single by nature. We aren't easy to live with. I mean, hell, you blow up one bathroom and people get all pissy."

"Yes. I tend to have difficulty myself. Gracious, that smells good."

It did. Grease and tortillas and heat. Yum. And the parking lot was about half empty. Yay.

"You've blown a bathroom, too? Wicked. I tell you, dry ice in a toilet? Boom." He held the door open for Neil, chuckling softly.

"No, I meant difficulty maintaining a relationship. The worst I've done is clog the bathroom sink."

"Dry ice won't help that and why not? You're fine and slick and stuff."

They settled at the table, menus open, those blue green eyes shining at him over the top, a grin sliding across Neil's face. "Well, because I'm a mind reader. That's why."

A mind reader. Huh. Interesting. "On purpose or is it like an accidental thing?"

Or maybe a psychology thing.

"When I was younger it was purely by chance. These days I've honed the skill. You're really quite impossible. I've not had that happen in years."

"Impossible? Yeah. I'm sort of a pain." He nodded, even grinned. He'd stopped waiting for someone to not think so. Impossible was a requirement in his line of work. Mind reading. Huh. Well, minds had electricity. Electricity could be mapped. Maps were read. Worked for him. Or really for Neil. "Do you like it? Being a mind reader?"

"It affords me a certain lifestyle. One I enjoy. Gracias." The waiter was cute for sure, all black curls and big brown eyes, and if he wasn't completely messed up in the head, Neil was *flirting* with him.

Rick just nodded and searched over the menu. Hmm. Okay. Stuffed sopapillas were good, but greasy, and chimichangas were all about the greasy and enchiladas could be drippy and. Flirty. Okay. Really?

"Have you ever had the burrito supreme? It sounds delightfully messy. We could split one, and that way I could have a tamale without guilt."

"That works. I want guacamole. The green is something else. I mean, a fruit that's all fat and slip-sliding and green? Wicked cool."

"Is it good here? I like it spicy." Neil had really long eyelashes.

"Not hot enough to burn, but hot enough you notice. You know, tingly tongue and your skin gets tight, but not enough your balls sweat. That's so embarrassing."

"Really?" Blinking, Neil tilted his head. "I'm not sure I've ever had anything that hot." The man sipped his water, before adding nonchalantly, "You'll have to show me sometime."

"Yeah? Okay. I'm not an expert of Scoville units, but I know my jalapenos from my habaneros. Did you know the heat is in the membranes and if you cut the membrane out the heat is lessened? It's fascinating. The capsaicin is used to treat arthritis sometimes."

"It's also supposed to be an aphrodisiac. Chile that is. Courtesans in India used to feed it to patrons before love making to get them revved up."

Was that a foot against his leg?

"So long as they washed their hands. The oils could burn..." He shifted a little, spread a little to give himself some more room. "Burn delicate skin."

"I'm sure they were most careful. Burning skin does not make for a good tip." The waiter came back and Neil ordered for them. Burrito, tamale, a picadillo taco for him with a side of guacamole, and sopapillas for dessert. With honey, not sugar and cinnamon. Oh, gooey.

He put some chips on his plate, salting them. "Are you all done with watching me? I mean, the lab? Did you see everything?"

"Oh, no. I have a great deal more observation to do. Your work is apparently very important to someone." Somehow that big-eyed innocent look just didn't fly.

"Oh." Okay. Weird. Important was weird. Watching him was weird. He so needed to lock Bethy in a room and find out what the fuck was going ... Oh, man. Look at that woman's earrings. When she was fifty they'd hang around her bellybutton and her grandkids could play jump rope.

"She's had them pierced twice. The first hole stretched too much."

"Yeah. It's bizarre, but vaguely cool in that oh-my-god creepy way. I thought about getting my ears pierced once, but ow, you know? And also I blow shit up, I'd worry."

"I went with tattoos." Well, at least Neil wasn't shy about scooping up salsa and gobbling. Maybe if he dribbled on his shirt the guy wouldn't notice.

"Really? That's another want to but didn't thing. What kind of tattoos? Do they hurt?" He drank the Coke he'd ordered, the bubbles burning all the way down. God, the man was like a ... A chameleon? No. But kind of.

"I have one on my upper arm, which of course this sweater precludes you seeing. And one at the small of my back. Oh, you should try this cabbage, er, whatever it is."

"Slaw." He reached back, touched the small of his own back, the nerves sensitive. Man, that would burn. He shook his head, hiccupping a little at the soda. "It's great in the taco."

"Is it? I like the vinegar tang." That was *definitely* a foot against his leg, the toe of one elegant shoe sliding under his pants.

Okay. Okay. He could say something. Or nothing. Or just enjoy it. Or not. Well, not *not* because he was enjoying it. A lot. Oh, man, he *so* should not have had caffeine.

"Why not? I rather wonder what you would be like in bed if I fed you a triple mocha latte."

Uh. Eek.

"I'd ride you into the mattress and then aggravate the living fuck out of you by bouncing." He stopped, looked over, curious now. That whole hearing thoughts thing was incredibly cool and also more than a little wow, but he bet it got tiring. "Can you tell me what it's like? Is it an energy thing? Readable? Could someone wear a helmet and screw with it? Or a hat with electricity running through?"

"I'm not sure what might disrupt it. Some thoughts are much louder. I tend to think of those as thoughts everyone could hear if they believed in an extra sense. Like the earrings. Some thoughts are much, much harder. Some I would never catch. I can close some of it out, almost like wearing earplugs, but I would say there's definitely an energy component." Neil held him with a steady stare. "Most scientists say I'm quite mad."

"Most scientists say I am, too." He looked right back. "After all, that's why you're here, isn't it?"

"To judge your sanity? Partly." The foot went away, Neil sighing and resting his elbows on the table. "Partly for security reasons. Partly for things I can't discuss with you."

Suffice to say Bethy would like me to be your new best friend for a bit."

Oh. Ow. Man, no more thinking flirty thoughts about someone getting paid to be watching him. That was. Ugh. And vaguely ick and. Well, hell. He wasn't that desperate. Frank at the lab? Possibly that desperate, because damn, that man smelled like a wet dog. Him? Well, sulfur sometimes, but never truly gross. "Here's the food."

"Now I've upset you. I am sorry, but I find it better to be up front."

The burrito came with an extra plate and Neil halved it for him, pushing it toward him.

"No. That's cool. Honest is cool. Lying gets all convoluted and shit. No stress." He added some slaw to the taco, enjoying the different colors, thoughts wandering, flittering about from work to this to that.

"But you no longer want to sleep with me. And that's sad." He got a wink before Neil attacked the tamale, moaning as he ate. "Oh. Lovely."

"The place deserves its reputation." He nodded, snacking on the taco and humming over the burrito.

"Obviously." He could almost feel how much Neil liked the food on the air ... hmm. Maybe he could. Maybe the guy radiated stuff as well as soaking it up. That would definitely be an energy thing. That could be fairly interesting. He could set up something in the lab. A measuring device. Something for when it was just him and something for when it was him and Neil and something for when it was just Bethy or the weird ass interns.

"Certainly, if you wish. I might as well contribute something if I shall be about bothering you."

"You're going to bother me?" He really hadn't minded Neil, well, except for the whole being paid to learn about him part, and a job was a job.

"I hope not to, but it must be disconcerting to have someone watching you day in and out." Neil forked up a bit of tamale. "You must try this."

"I'm pretty good at getting lost in my work." He reached out for the fork, taking the bite. Oh, it was good. Very good. "Still, you have to be curious how it works. That's the whole fun in life. Figuring out how it works."

"Is it? I've never cared so much how it works. More what makes people tick. Why do they do the things they do?"

"Because of how they're made, of course. How the pieces fit together. It's a puzzle." Mmm ... salsa.

"You're quite intricate, you know. The pattern is hard to read." The sopapillas arrived just as they finished and Neil ordered coffee, too. For both of them. More caffeine.

"Intricate? I'm like. Like ... a hypercube. On and on and on." He loved debates. And honey. And coffee.

"You're wonderful." That sudden smile, as open as could be, left him blinking.

Well, no one'd ever said that to him. At least no one that wasn't trying to get him to decipher some problem. "Thanks."

"More honey?"

He wasn't ever going to get a handle on this, was he? "You're going to set me flying and then abandon me to scribbling theory on my walls again."

"I am?" Licking honey off his lip, Neil stared at Paddy again, the smile leaving in favor of the head tilt. Back and forth. It was fascinating. Not in that puppy head tilt way, but in that look at those eyes and the light in them and the way Neil's hair didn't move and the difference between the light in Neil's eyes and on Neil's lips. "So. What happens at," Neil looked at his watch. "Six p.m.? Do you have to go back to work?"

"I sort of wander. Work sometimes. Sleep sometimes. Log in and tease graduate students sometimes. Go to the park sometimes." Ooh. Park. Trees. Birds. Seesaws. Swings. Physics in action.

"Would you like to go to the park? I mean," pausing, Neil smiled at him. "Not that you have to spend your time off with me, of course."

"Well, it depends. If you're going to the park because you want to and it sounds fun, then okay. Let's go play. If you're doing it because it's your job, then, no. Let's go back to the lab until you're off the clock."

"No. I'm only on the clock when you're at the lab." He got a look that made all sorts of energy surge. "Let's go play."

He finished his last bite of guacamole, then nodded, pulling out his wallet for some cash. "Okay. Okay, if we're lucky the swings will be empty. Let's go."

Chapter Six

Neil watched Padraic swing, a rainbow of pleasure-speed-physics of swings-possible Montezuma's revenge thoughts assaulting his brain. The pattern of those thoughts fascinated him more than anything had in the years since he'd learned to separate out the jumble of white noise into actual mind reading.

He was never so bloody forward. Never. Oh, certainly he flirted, with everyone from his eighty-year-old grandmother to his six-year-old nephew. Life was far too short to be coy. But really, it was unlike him to throw himself so blatantly at someone and be ... well, ever so gently rebuffed.

Pushing off again, Neil watched Rick, Padraic, what a lovely name, smile and laugh and glower at the unfortunate boy who had the temerity to complain about big people hogging the swings. Rick's curls caught the colors of the sun, but there were shiny stickers on the tips of the man's purple (bright purple with ... something drawn on them in marker) runners that caught Padraic's attention, for a second at least. He was childlike, but not childish. Distractible, but not really classic attention deficit disorder. Utterly unique. And somehow, despite the fact that he'd been admonished to remain distant enough to detect any faltering in the man's scientific method, Neil wanted Padraic. Badly.

"Oh, man. I love early autumn. It's like promising Halloween, but still warm enough for T-shirts." A series of Halloween costumes—both Rick's (Paddy's?) and strangers'—just poured out before sliding into candycandycandy.

"Oh. Yes, you have much different customs here for that, hmm? We don't do it up so much at home." Candy seemed to be quite a refrain with Rick.

"Well, kids do. And people with partners do the party/bar thing. I'm probably going to buy a bunch of chocolate and rent scary movies and lock my apartment door. Where's home?"

"I was born in Brighton. England. Now I have a flat in London that I might see twice a year." He had the sudden urge to buy Rick a bag of his favorite candy; M&Ms perhaps? A very big bag. And then watch the bouncing.

"Yeah? Why do they call it a flat? If it's two-story, is it still a flat?"

"Well, by some accounts it is actually linked to flet, which is Scottish, meaning the interior floor of a house. Any apartment might be safely called a flat, I suppose." He grinned. The way that man's brain worked...

"Yeah? Too cool. Do you like it? London, not the flat, although that, too."

"I like it, yes. It's vital. Gloriously historical." Exhausting.

Rick nodded. "I bet it is. I had a paper presented there once. Bethy did it. I. Uh. Didn't make it out of the airport."

"Really?" Planting his heels, he stopped, regarding Rick curiously. "Why not?"

Those cheeks went a deep, dark red, almost purple, flashes of dark eyes, furious, passionate sex in a broom closet and a lounge and a bathroom stall hitting him. "I got distracted."

"Oh." Oh. My. Neil turned that pathway off, shutting it out. It made him rather. Pokey. "Yes, I see. Well."

"Oh. Right. Sorry. It was ... different." Rick chuckled, shrugged. "Science nerds get it where they can, huh?"

"Don't we all?" That sounded crass. Especially as hard as he'd been coming on. Neil choked on the "hard" part. "I think I'll give up my swing to that determined young fellow."

"Sure. Sure." A sharp, almost painful wave of embarrassment flooded over him, then disappeared, replaced with a swirl of thoughts.

"Stop that. Last one to that enormous slide buys the chocolate." Grinning, he took off, hoping his scientist wasn't terribly fast on his feet.

He heard the bright laughter when he was halfway there, Rick still laughing when they bumped together on the slide, the lean body shoving him against the ladder. "You won, but you cheated."

"I? Cheat? I think not." He tickled Rick's ribs, fingers digging in hard, knowing exactly which spot would cause exactly that helpless spasm.

Goodness, that laughter was amazing. "Oh! Oh, cheating! That's *cheating*!"

"Yes." His own laughter coming so hard it hurt his ribs. "Yes, this is definitely cheating."

Rick's fingers found his nipples, eyes just dancing behind the glasses. "I'll ... I'll pinch. I swear. I have brothers!"

His cock jumped, his cheeks flushing. Good heavens. If he wasn't communicating his thoughts right back, he'd be

amazed. "I imagine your brothers would not react as I would."

"God I hope not. Kynan and Sean are straight as arrows and gigantic fireman-types and they'd both knock me into next week."

Neil rubbed his chest into that touch. Just a little. "Slide?"

Padraic nodded, nothing but pleasure and desire and warmth pushing against him. "You want to go first? Or should I?"

"Oh, you go. I won the wager. You'll buy later." He wanted to watch Paddy's, ass.

"I will. There's a Rocky Mountain Chocolate company here. Yum." Chocolate covered bananas. Little tease. Padraic climbed up the slide, a little hole in the crotch of the worn jeans. He was really turning into a pervy old fart. Neil climbed up, watching as Paddy sat at the top, the wind ruffling his hair. Adorable. Paddy laughed, grinned back at him. "There's a storm coming, way off."

"There is." Lightning and thunder and hail the size of the end of his thumb. "We should slide and head for a corner store."

"Yeah. Do you like them? Storms?"

"I do. But this one we don't want to get caught out in." He smiled, bending to give Paddy a small shove.

"Whoo!" Paddy slid all the way down, somersaulting at the end with a goofy 'ta-da!'.

Neil stood at the top, grinning like a fool for a long moment. Then he sat and slid, shooting off the end faster than expected, landing roughly atop Paddy. "Oof."

"Oh. You. You okay?" He wasn't the only one wanting, the only one intrigued.

"Yes. I. Yes. Are you?" He knew very well Paddy was just fine. "I think you like peanut butter M&Ms."

"Oh, I do. I bounce. I warned you earlier. I bounce a lot." Paddy's eyes were on his lips, focused, curious. Curious about how he'd taste after eating chocolate.

Certainly he'd be happy to let Paddy find out. "I think I must encourage that. Come on, Paddy. That storm is hurrying."

"Paddy." Those eyes met his, blinking. "No one's called me that in years."

"Will it bother you if I do?" Oh, he hoped not. It suited Padraic far better than Rick.

"No. No, it's..." Comforting. Right. Good. Real. Bright. Warm. Oh, the wind. "Cool."

"Good." He took Paddy's hand in his. "Let's go get you chocolate. I'd like to see you bounce."

Paddy nodded, fingers twined with his. "Don't tell Bethy; she'll grumble."

"This is off work time, right? She'll never have to know." They headed back to the car, making it just before the first pea-sized hail hit.

"Oh, your car!" Paddy unrolled the window, hand stuck out to try to catch some, almost bouncing already.

"It's a rental. I have insurance." It would be worth risking damage to see that look on Paddy's face. He glowed. And the utter *glee* radiating from his thoughts was like a drug.

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

"Oh, cool. If there are marks we can measure. God, it's cold and they're sharp."

"Don't hurt your hand. I rather like it as is." Since Paddy wanted to see how it was when they were moving, he started up and backed out.

"I won't. Stop at the store. I'm buying chocolate." Paddy leaned out of the vehicle window, laughing as they moved.

Such joy. Life would never bore this man, because he really did want to know how things worked. Neil was simply enchanted, which was no doubt stupid and dangerous, but there it was. He didn't care.

Right now he'd simply take the ice and the chocolate and the lovely laughter, and be happy with it.

Chapter Seven

MJ dragged the box up the stairs and into the hotel room, big assed duffle on his shoulder.

One final check of equipment, a list of equipment they needed, and some cleaning, and they'd be good to go. He had the Leopold, the Glocks, a couple of sweet little .38s. That gave them some options.

He hated being limited on options.

He had some spare charges, too. A couple of random detonators, just in case. He was a big fan of just in case. "We'll probably need to get oil and rags after I'm done today, Sunshine. I haven't done a big clean in a while."

"Okay." Sonny was actually being productive. The man had shaved his head again and it shone with sweat as Sonny worked disassembling and reassembling a Glock. "What kind of car did you get us, Precious?"

He schooled his face not to grin. "I got us one of those SUVs."

That newly shaved head turned slowly, Sonny giving him an incredulous look. "And lose my street cred?"

"Yeah. I was thinking size and comfort, no one would ever know it was us. Hell, I even got a 'Baby on Board' sign." Fuck, this was fun. He pulled the HK416 from the bag and set it on the table.

"You're a sick man, Precious. Now tell me what you really got." That Glock snapped back together and oh-so-casually pointed his way. The only reason he didn't take it away and stuff it up Sonny's ass was he knew it wasn't loaded.

"You look pretty good with that thing. I approve." What the hell was in the Ziploc bag and towel? Oh. Cool. His throwing knives. He'd thought he'd lost them.

"You're still not telling me," Sonny said, tossing the gun aside and coming to pluck his knives out of his hands. "What you got us to drive."

Sonny had this thing about cars. It was kinda cute.

"Olds Cutlass. '66. Rebuilt V8 with reinforced shocks, hard top. Purrs like a kitten. That work?"

"Oh. Yeah." For that he got a kiss, Sonny bending and planting a hard one right on his mouth.

"Mmm." Yeah, that's why he got the muscle car, because they turned his Sunshine on like nothing going. One big hand slid behind his neck, tilting his head just so. Sonny took the kiss deeper. He tasted like Tabasco sauce and lemonade. Sonny may have been a moonshiner, but he only drank on the job if someone shot at him.

MJ hummed. The whole working-with-a-partner thing had loads of bennies, primary of which was the fact that there was someone to scratch itches and keep things lively.

Sonny crowded in, pushing him back on the bed and sort of swarming on him, straddling him. "Hey, Precious."

"Hey, there. You about ready to go make mayhem?"

"Uh-huh. I think we do that well." Those dark eyes really twinkled for him. And Sonny called him a psycho?

"It's a talent." He grinned, leaned up and took a long, hard kiss. They hadn't been on a tear with a fast car in too fucking long.

"Mmm. Fuck, Precious. Love that mouth of yours. I so do." Sonny touched him, running hands up under his shirt, a little greasy from the gun oil.

"Good." They were both nervy, with the being on land, being at work, being almost ready to go. A little nervy and a little edgy and a little horny. He could feel the hard ridge of Sonny's cock rubbing his belly. Okay, a lot horny. "Were you thinking perverted thoughts while you were cleaning that firearm?"

"I was. I was thinking about you, Precious, all Dirty Harry tough guy, playing shoot 'em up. It's sexy as hell."

Oh, God, they were two of a kind.

"Mm-hmm. You're the only guy ever came to rescue me from a closet." Got shot for him, too. Sexy fucker.

"Uh-huh." They rubbed, Sonny just revving right up like the cars the man drove like a bat out of hell. That cock pressed against him through too much cloth, hot and hard as it could be.

"Why the fuck aren't you naked?" He was a massive fucking fan of naked.

And chocolate.

And corny dogs.

Dude, he was hungry. They needed a post-screw snack.

"I was cleaning your guns..." Pulling back, Sonny reached to rub him, unzip him, and haul his cock right out.

"You're good to me." Handy, too. MJ approved, even if his prick was going to smell like the inside of a muzzle.

No way was he gonna get sucked, either. Which would probably frustrate Sonny more than him. The bastard was

oral. Still, the tugging and stroking and petting was gonna work just fine.

Still, turn about was fair play and shit, so he got Sonny's jeans unbuttoned, fingers needing to know that Sonny's fine fucking self was coming along for the ride.

"We need to get tattoos, after. You and me."

"Uhn. Fuck, yes." Oh, definitely along for the ride. Sonny's prick twitched in his hand and Sonny thrust right into his grip, moaning. That deep voice went gravelly, the South so deep in it when Sonny called him, 'Precious.'

He ducked his head and got his lips on Sonny's throat, licking and biting, the soft skin newly shaved and so fucking smooth.

"Mmm." Sonny's hand tightened on him, too, and they rolled so Sonny could pull their cocks together. His hands moved to hold that slick, shaved head, fingers trailing on the scalp, drawing circles. They panted, heating up the air even more, their sweat starting to slick the way for them. He didn't figure they'd even make it to the fucking. Not as hot as Sonny was for him. MJ found a hot spot on Sonny's jaw and started sucking, teeth scraping across the skin.

"Gonna ... gonna bruise me, Precious," Sonny told him around the grunt. Then Sonny returned the favor, biting at his shoulder.

"You look ... oh, fuck. You look good bruised."

Hot.

Sexy as all fuck.

A soft chuckle ghosted on his skin. "We need to fight more often, then."

Sonny really went to town on him then. Sexy, crazy fucker. He'd just bet it was the thought of hitting him that did it, too. Motherfucker called *him* a psycho.

Sonny's mouth hit a spot that make him jerk, that thumb catching the slit in his cock, and he just bucked, balls drawing up hard as stone.

"MJ..." Sonny jerked against him, too, cock throbbing, hot come spilling over his hip and thigh as Sonny came. That bite just went hard and deep, making him feel it deep in his muscles.

Oh.

Oh, fuck, yes.

His eyes rolled back in his head, cock pulsing hard in Sonny's hand.

"Oh, Precious. I do like you when you're all jonesing for the job."

"Yeah. You do rough and ready to go just fine, too. Our magic med bag all stocked up?"

"You know it. Never go into a fight without morphine, I always say." Sonny grinned at him. "Are you hungry?"

"Fucking starving. I want greasy diner food. You?" Fuck, he loved that crazy son of a bitch. Good thing he hadn't killed him at the beginning.

"Yeah. I say onion rings. And some of that weird blue cheese stuff." They both got up, wiping off and putting themselves together. "Think we ought to hide the guns in case the maid comes?"

"Probably. People get all weird and shit."

"Yeah, okay." The Glock went back in a box and under the little side table. Sonny stretched, the bruise on his throat looking lurid in the dying light. "I want some of those little jalapeno things, too."

"Okay. I want one of those brownie ice cream hot and melty cake dessert things." He shoved the duffle under the bed, pocketing the knives. "You wanna meet our new car?"

"I do. Lead me to her, Precious." The man bounced. Actually bounced.

"It's black as your soul." He tossed Sonny the keys, heading for the door. This part was actually fun as fuck.

"Oh, she's a doll baby," Sonny said, running his hand over the back fender and slipping into the driver's seat once they got downstairs. The engine hummed right to life, and Sonny yanked him over for a hard, hard kiss as soon as his butt hit the passenger seat. "She's perfect, Precious."

Oh, fucking go him.

"Excellent. Feed me, Sunshine. We have to get back to work."

They needed to go do this job, have some fun, and fuck like bunnies so they could get back to what they did best. Retirement.

Chapter Eight

Oh. Oh. Oh, damn.

The first few bites of chocolate were delicious. The beginning of the second bag was amazing.

Now? Oh, the storm was—damn. And he was—uhn. And the balcony railing—wow.

And then Neil? Sweet fucking Christ.

He leaned over backward, laughing as the rain poured down over him, soaking him to the skin.

The glass door behind him opened and shut, Neil coming out to join him. The fancy pants and sweater had been replaced by a long-sleeved T-shirt and some workout pants, and that was definitely woo and probably hoo, too. Especially since the shirt was white.

And now see-through.

"Oh, that's almost cold. Delicious."

"Uh-huh. Mmm ... nipples. Do yours taste salty?" He'd bet they did. Salty and good and ripe in his lips. Uhn.

"I suppose that depends on what I've been doing." It was nice that Neil didn't whack him or look shocked or anything, like some other guys had. "Do yours taste like chocolate?"

He looked down, then stripped off his shirt to look closer. Man, they were hard, too. Pokey. Pointy and, oh. The water and wind felt cold. Good. Wow. "They could."

"They could indeed. But not out here. The chocolate would wash right off."

He laughed, fingers sliding up his belly to brush them off. "Then they'd just taste like rain and me."

"Yes. I wonder what that tastes like." Man, those eyes were like water. Not the rain, but like the sea. In Greece, maybe. And Neil had this look...

"Like a merman..." Oh, wow. He'd always wondered about them. Right now, he could almost believe in them.

"Hmm?" Neil took one step, then another, close enough to brush against him, fingers reaching out to trace his sternum.

"You look..." Mmm, that was warm, the contrast making his cock throb, his nipples just draw up tighter. Oh, Neil's nails were smooth.

"I look?" That smile. Pure wickedness.

"Exotic? Wet. Wicked. Hungry." Mmm ... hungry man. Well, not Hungry Man, because TV dinners, ew. But eat him up hungry.

"I am hungry. But not really for chocolate. I fear I've overindulged." Closer still, and Neil was hot, even in the cold rain.

"You're not sick to your stomach, are you? I'd hate to make you sick."

"Not a bit. But I know my limits."

Yeah. Yeah, they'd binged a little. A lot. Something.

"Yeah? I never do. Haven't found 'em. Curious, though. Like to see how they work. Oh, look at the lightning!" He shivered, pressed toward Neil's heat because he was cold now.

"I think I should like to see how they work, too. Let's go in. I put towels in the little dryer. They should be nice and warm."

"There's a dryer?" Ooh ... warm towels. Warm Neil. He wondered if Neil'd let him help dry.

"Next to the hot tub. There's a little gas fireplace, too. And the kitchenette. I do like this hotel." Neil took his hand, just like in the park, and led him in, over to the bathroom so they could drip on the floor.

"It's nice. Sleek." Fancy. Sort of chilly, at least until you got up into the pretty bathroom with the deep tub and tiles. More sea stuff. Palms, too, but not tiki head coconut bra cheesy palms. Coconut bras. "Did you know you're 10,000 times more likely to die from being hit in the head by a falling coconut than by being eaten by a shark?"

"Really? Why is that? More coconuts than sharks?" His shirt was already gone. Maybe they could put it in the dryer later. Wherever it was. And Neil was sorta ... working on his pants, fighting the button. Neil had pretty hands.

"More access to coconuts and sharks think we taste bad." He had the sudden urge to kiss Neil's jaw. Neil's shoulder. The small of Neil's ... "Oh, can I see your tattoos?"

"You certainly may." Smiling, Neil peeled the wet T-shirt over his head, tossing it over a towel rack. "Here's the one."

It covered the whole of Neil's upper right arm, the spiral pattern done in stark black. It was the Chartres labyrinth. He could get lost tracing that one.

"Oh..." He blinked and stepped closer, following the pattern over and over. "Are you looking for God?"

Paris. Stones. It wasn't as pure as the golden triangle, but curvy.

"Not really. But I suppose, like you, I like puzzles more than I would like to admit." Grinning, Neil let him touch it, trace it, for the longest time.

If it was his, he'd trace it with metallic markers, using them like the stones Hansel and Gretel dropped to find their way home from the wood. "It's fascinating."

"You'll like the other one, then." Turning, Neil showed Rick the small of his back, the very elegant spine narrowing right into it. It was a disk, done really well so it looked almost metallic, though he knew most tattoo inks really weren't metallics, because it could cause complications, but some artists were good at faking it. Like this one.

The disk looked bronze, and it had all sorts of little pictographs in a spiral, all the way to the middle, and it looked vaguely familiar.

"Oh. What is it?" He knelt down, fingers sliding the pants down so he could set better, touch, get closer. Oh, so pretty. (And didn't Neil smell good? Oh, God. Like ... sex and heat and man and rain all rubbed raw together.)

"It's the Phaistos Disk. They found it on Crete. It's a clay tablet. They really can't decide what it was for. Another puzzle."

The pants dropped to Neil's feet.

"Phaistos." Oh, more sea stuff. Greek stuff. Island merman stuff. He traced it with his fingers, with his tongue, the salt of Neil's skin delicious.

"Mmm." Oh, Neil liked that, didn't he? The rumbling noise and the not so subtle rocking of Neil's body just gave that right away. Oh, good. Because he was down here now and a

little dizzy from the taste and smell and feel of Neil.

"Paddy..." Neil turned, hand sliding against his cheek. "Feels just right."

"Yeah?" Oh. Warm. Smooth. Good. Well, except the floors. Damn, they were cold.

"The towels are warm." Bending, Neil got the dryer open, got them both a towel. Oh, wow. He needed one of those for his bathroom.

He stood up, shucked his jeans, and moaned as he wrapped the hot towel around him. Oh. Cotton-based, full-body skin-gasm.

"Exactly. We've been wet, so I say we skip the tub for now and go right to the bed, hmm? We can call down for room service in a bit. Coffee. Copious amounts of breakfast food at two a.m. Do you think they might make me mushrooms?"

"You get all demanding and wanting with them, and sure? Mushroom whatever. Except pancakes. The concept of mushroom pancakes is wrong."

"No, just fried ones. I imagine they wouldn't understand beans." Neil was really good at steering him around, pulling him into the main room again and leading him to the bed, sitting on it with him and leaning right up against him, hair still wet.

"Beans?" He reached up, playing with Neil's short hair, petting it. "Oh. Soft."

"For breakfast." The lips pressing against his jaw were even softer. Wow.

"Like in tacos?" Oh, don't stop. He moaned a little, shifted so they were closer.

"No. Just regular, oh you would call them baked beans, I suppose." One arm came up around him, the tiny hairs brushing against his skin, making him shiver.

"Huh. I like cold lasagna for breakfast sometimes." He could handle beans, especially if he got to straddle Neil's thighs just like that. Uhn.

"Yes, but how do you feel about bubble and squeak?" Long eyelashes rubbed his cheeks as Neil found his mouth, kissing him lightly.

"Squeaking can be good. Never bubbled, that I know of." He pushed a little closer, kissed a little deeper.

"Oh, I can see I shall have to take you back to England to get out of the airport." Airport? What did the airport have to do with—oh, tongue. Pushing into his mouth. Wow. Chocolate and rain. And tea. He'd so go to an airport with this man. Padraic moaned, pulling on the soft tongue, fingers holding Neil's head.

That was when Neil got serious, no more bubbles or beans, kissing him hard and pushing him down, sort of crawling on top of him. Yum.

It was funny, how his legs wrapped right around and fit. Funny but good and oh. Oh. Yeah. Touch right. There. They touched everywhere, in fact, the whole wow we're naked thing sort of a surprise. Neil felt good. Like the chocolate had tasted, smooth and silky. With a candy coating.

Mmm ... candy-coated Neil, although this? Worked. He took another kiss and another, just sort of floating. Yeah. Yeah, he wasn't sure this wasn't better than candy.

"Yes. This works." Pushing down against him, Neil smiled, getting them lined up just so. Those amazing hands explored him, touching him everywhere.

"Yes. Yes, more." He licked those smiling lips, taking Neil's bottom lip in his teeth and tugging.

"Mmm. I like the sting." Yeah, Neil would like the hard along with the soft. He could tell that by the way Neil pinched his nipple before petting it, soothing it.

"What else do you like?" He couldn't help wiggling, hips arching so their cocks slid together.

"I like this." Slipping down, Neil moved up from below, cock sliding against Paddy's balls.

"Oh. Oh." Oh, do it again. He'd like that cock in him, pushing deep while he moved. Oh, moving. Moving. Moving would be good. Neil did it again. And again, moving down all the way so that the head of his cock pressed against Paddy's hole before slipping back up over balls, and finally cock. Oh. There was. Neil wasn't cut. Oh. Slip-slidy skin. Heat. He'd never. Oh, he wanted to see. But seeing meant no more of that hot little press and that made his toes curl and—Damn. There was touching, too.

"There's time, Paddy. We have time for all of it." They moved together faster, all of those lean muscles flexing against him.

"Oh. Time." His hand flattened out on Neil's lower back, over the ink. "We do. I mean, until the insanity factor hits. Oh, that's. It's just right."

"Yes. It is. I think ... right here." Neil grinned at him, fierce, eyes glittering, before giving him a kiss so hard he felt his lip split.

Oh. Blood and sex and candy. Part of him wondered if that wasn't an album name. The other ninety-five percent of him was shooting his brains out of his cock.

"Oh ... Paddy. Oh, God." Neil watched him, watched his face, licking the blood off his mouth before closing those amazing eyes and moving faster. A lot faster. His own come slicked the way as Neil thrust and grunted and finally came hard against him, bathing his balls.

He whimpered, blinking up, the room a little spinny as he came down, crashing, melting. Oh. Wow. Don't make him leave. Not yet.

A soft rumble came from Neil and the world spun even more until they laid side by side, Neil's leg over his thighs, the covers pulled up. "No leaving. We need room service in perhaps an hour ... Eggs. Bread things."

"Uh-huh. Beans." He chuckled softly, relieved. Exhausted. Cuddling in with a happy little snuffle.

"Potatoes. Mushrooms." Rhapsodizing. You had to like a guy who could really get into food. And snuggling. Like an octopus.

"Mmm ... coffee." Later. Later. Oh, warm and yeah. Yeah.

* * * *

Three a.m. Neil started to roll on his back to get away from those accusing little red numbers on the clock, but found himself pinned securely to the mattress.

Ah. Paddy.

What a lovely diversion. Frighteningly open. Utterly drunk on the chocolate and endorphins. Perfectly curious. Neil stroked the fine, pale skin of Paddy's back. Yes, indeed. Breakfast. Perhaps with champagne. Mimosas. Oh, yes.

Slipping to one side as gently as possible, Neil reached for the phone, calling and ordering a huge breakfast from the sleepy sounding clerk.

Paddy stretched under his hand, dreams filled with light and color and motion, laughter.

Fascinating. Bending, he placed his ear to Paddy's heart, listening to it beat, wondering if it went as fast as those thoughts. Steady and quick, the rhythm was addictive, soothing. Paddy hummed, shifting a little, murmuring his name. His name. It was enough to make his own heart race. Neil smiled at his own folly, moving to lick at the hollow of Paddy's throat.

The laughter bubbled out, followed in short order by a low moan. Paddy's fingers slipped into his hair, holding on.

"Mmm. Breakfast is on its way." From the throat to just under the ear, Neil licked, tasting rain and sweat. "Oddly enough, they had no beans."

"No?" The pleasure just rolled off Paddy. "Shame on them. No donuts. No beans. No bean donuts."

"Now that sounds revolting, sweet. You, I like." He could make a meal of Paddy alone, the skin of his chest and shoulder addictive.

"Your mouth is. Oh. I mean." Those bright eyes blinked open, dancing, smiling at him. "Yeah. We are most definitely not revolting."

"Definitely not. Sorry if you were sleeping deep. I got munchy." He was always hungry, but even at his decidedly non-teenager age he never put on a pound. Neil often wondered if his gift took so much energy that he burned off his calories that way.

"I never sleep. I nap. A lot." A puppy. Someone'd called Paddy a puppy once—bouncing and eating and humping and napping.

This was no puppy, though. No puppy could be this brilliant at science. Or this complex. He kissed the spot right over Paddy's heart. "Naps are good. I sleep in three, four-hour stretches myself. Why did you think I would kick you out?"

The wave of pure, honest confusion was possibly the simplest reading he'd gotten from Padraic. "What?" Why wouldn't I? Everyone does. Everyone. I make people tired. They always do. It's okay. It is.

"Before we went to sleep you were worried." Distracting a little, he took a kiss, hoping for some mmm sounds.

The swirl of thoughts shifted, just like that, warming and growing focused on him. Much better. Paddy didn't make Neil tired at all. Just hungry. He traced Paddy's ribs, tickling just a little, breaking away two seconds before the knock at the door.

"Food!" Paddy chuckled and made for the door, dangly bits dangling. "Tell me there's coffee and I'm yours."

"There's coffee. There's also a robe on the wee hook by the door. Please think of the waiter's sensibilities, Paddy." Neil got up and wrapped a sheet around his waist, searching through his pants for a tip.

"Oh, right. Oops." The robe was grabbed, wrapped around Paddy's waist. "Sorry. I'll pay for breakfast, since you have the room and all, yeah?"

"If you like. I had them charge it to the room. You can settle up later." As if he wasn't going to let the lab pay for that, as well as all of his other expenses.

"Okay. Just tell me how much. Is it still raining? It smells like ozone."

"I think it might be." They moved about, tipping the bellhop, rolling the cart in where they could eat. "Oh. Bless them. They did sauté some mushrooms."

"They smell like ground to me, like meat, but not, you know?" Paddy took a blackberry, moaning low as he bit down.

"I do. Portobellos especially taste almost beefy. These are just plain white, but they'll do." He loaded a plate. Eggs. Sausages. Potatoes. A proper fry-up.

Paddy ate the berries, the toast, the melon, almost flitting around the table and tasting this and that.

"More coffee?" He would most likely get in trouble with the lab boss, Beth, but Neil loved the bounce. Loved it.

"Yes, please. Berry?" Paddy painted his lips with a strawberry, leaned in to lick them clean.

"Mmm." Sweet and tart. Lovely. And the Paddy chaser was the perfect accompaniment.

"Blueberry next." Paddy's eyes danced, wet fingers tracing his lips.

"Then a raspberry? You liked the raspberry."

"Yes." He got a lapful of physicist, the blueberry shared between them, Paddy's tongue playful against him.

The room had both an oven and a microwave. If his food got cold he could heat it. With that in mind, Neil grabbed Paddy's bottom and squeezed, licking those bruised lips.

"Mmm ... Raspberry. Then your mushrooms." The raspberry was tart, sweet, smeared over his lips and Paddy's, making them bright red.

He laughed out loud, licking and sharing. "You'll like them. A nice subtle flavor. Nothing too salty."

"Oh, good. Mushrooms. Eggs. Little bits of everything."

"Yes. You're a nibbler, aren't you?" He fed Paddy a mushroom, watching closely. Listening.

"Mm-hmm..." Paddy bit and nuzzled his fingertips, humming over the butter, the hint of spice. There was a curiosity now about the way the savory food would taste in his mouth, a satisfied little murmur that said he was happy where he was.

A bit of toast cleared the way for a spicy cafe potato, the skin crispy and the pulp soft and creamy. He moaned a little, sharing it. Delicious. Paddy's kiss stole it off his tongue, a happy little moan pushing into his lips.

Food tasted so much better shared. Now a piece of creamy scrambled egg, just a hint of onion and cheese making it fluffy and sharp. Then the sausage, spicy enough to make Paddy wiggle, make the bright eyes widen.

He'd never had a more sensual breakfast. "You delight me, sweet."

Paddy stretched, took a sip of coffee, and brought their lips together, sharing the hot, milky sweetness with him. That burned a little, but the milk soothed, and so did Paddy's kiss. Neil listened in his head, the running commentary as fascinating as the physical sensations, if not as immediate.

Everything from the chemical makeup of caffeine to the softness of his thighs to the mathematical equation to figure out the rate the coffee cooled to pure enjoyment of the kiss—it simply poured through Padraic in constant waves.

His own pleasure started to take on a harder edge, his cock throbbing in time with his heart. He stroked the back of Paddy's neck, searching for a grape with his other hand. Yes, that would be the perfect cool foil to the spice and heat.

Paddy had a sweet spot there, right below the hairline, the flow of thoughts hiccupping and shattering into a hundred pieces for a split second.

Oh. Neil went after it again, rubbing his thumb over it as he took Paddy's mouth, tongue pushing in. They fit well together.

Paddy gasped, grabbed his shoulders, mind off-balance and swinging wildly. It made Neil feel high, like the one time his college mates had gotten him to smoke weed. Giddy. A little out of control. Neil bent Paddy back, kissing down his throat.

"Neil. Oh. Oh, I." Those hands held on, squeezing, trying to stay centered.

"I've got you. I promise." He would not let Paddy fall. Not ever. The angle of their cocks changed, their balls slipping and sliding.

"Oh. Okay. Okay." God, that trust. Just pure and immediate and heady. Holding on tight, Neil bent enough to touch Paddy's nipples with his tongue, licking and biting down gently.

"Yes." Another shattering of thought, another cry of pleasure, another shudder.

Somehow making Paddy lose all ability to think was the sexiest thing he'd ever encountered. He left a mark above the left nipple, sucking the skin hard, abrading it with his tongue.

Yes. Yes. Yesyesyesyes. Pure need, pure desire, all focused on him.

His cock jerked, his whole body shaking. He—they—needed to lie down. Now.

"Need." Padraic whimpered. "*Need.*"

"I know. God, sweet, I know." He pulled Paddy back up to lean on him. To hell with horizontal. Once Paddy was secure again, Neil grabbed their cocks, stroking them together. Paddy's hand joined his, rubbing and pulling, eyes wide and fastened to his.

"Yes. God, yes." They rocked, hips moving up and down, their joined hands pushing and pulling. Wonderful.

"Uh-huh. Neil. Neil. Now. Now." Those shoulders rolled, Paddy's orgasm crashing over him.

Neil shook, his cock on fire, his whole body arching and twisting as he came. Good heavens above, this man got to him. Like no one else that he could recall.

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

Paddy collapsed against him, almost asleep again, just like that. He laughed, right out loud, content to his bones. "Nap time again, hmm?"

"Mmm." Paddy's fingers traced his lips, petting them.

"Good." They'd nap. Eat some more. And then it would be time to go back to work. More and more, Neil worried that he'd be unable to be subjective.

Later, he would decide if he needed that worry or not.

Chapter Nine

Ah, the open road. If a man had to be on land, he might as well be in a fast car, cruising down the highway. Okay, so Sonny preferred backroads to Interstates, but they had a job to do, and the quickest way to get there was at ninety on a major throughway.

Precious got cranky if they deviated from schedule.

They'd only had one run in with the cops, which was solved by spraying shave cream on MJ's mouth and telling those good old boys with badges that he had hoof and mouth disease. MJ might not forgive him for the minty freshness, but it was better than a jail cell.

They'd been on the road twenty-four of the thirty hours it took to get to Lubbock, and Sonny was getting hungry. And itchy. "Wanna stop for grease, Precious?"

"Yeah. Yeah. I need to stretch my legs a little." They were gonna have to put the windows down soon, before MJ lost it. They could stop, though, have a bite, give MJ a nice blow job...

"Cool. Point me toward the sign that looks tasty, and we're good to go."

"There's a little diner up there. Looks as good as any other."

"Sounds good." Little places like that tended to be more private. They could play footsie while they planned. Sonny pulled off, swinging around to a parking place and popping the top.

MJ sighed a little, relaxed some. "Yeah. Yeah. So long as it doesn't taste like Barbasol? I'm happy."

"Sorry about that. But it worked, right? You see how scared they were of you?"

MJ chuckled, blue eyes just dancing, little shit. "Oh, God. I thought that one guy was going to shit his pants."

"Uh-huh. They gave us an escort to the county line, for fuck's sake." That had just about made him bust a gut.

"I'm surprised they didn't call the CDC and take us both into custody."

"No shit. You do win some, though. You ready to eat?" The wildness had gone from MJ's eyes. Sonny figured the man was safe for polite company.

"Yeah. I hope they have onion rings. I have a craving." MJ's eyes dragged over his body, admiring a little.

"Mmm. I like your cravings. They usually end up with me having fun. Except that one time when you wanted fish and I got that bad flounder." That? Had been Technicolor.

"Oh, gag. No. No bad fish. God." MJ shuddered. "I thought you were going to puke up your toenails."

"Lord, yes." And other people's toenails, too. "This smells better."

"This smells like grease and salt. We should be fine." MJ headed for the door, looking almost chipper.

Amazing what happened when the small spaces eased. Sonny followed, rolling his shoulders. Damn, he should have drugged MJ up and flown. Hmm. With as much as they were making on this job they could buy a plane.

Oh, God. Now, that would be fun. With their own plane, he wouldn't have to explain the whole drugging thing. Of course, it took MJ a couple of days to recover from the drugs...

"Huh?" he asked, pretty sure MJ had asked him something.

"I asked what evil you were working on because you look like you're up to something."

"Oh..." Sonny took off his black cowboy hat and set it aside, rubbing his bristly head. "Nah. I was just pondering." He opened the menu. "Oh, they have onion rings *and* fried cheese."

"I need to shave you." MJ ordered himself a Coke, no ice, not even paying attention to the look he got from the waitress.

"Yeah. Everywhere. This sweaty shorts thing is getting gross." That sent the waitress scampering away like her own panties were on fire. Sonny hooted.

MJ threw his head back, just laughing out loud. "You broke that little girl's brain."

"I try, Precious." His foot found MJ's leg under the table, the toe of his boot sliding up.

"You do better than try. Are you eating onions?"

"I am if you are. Unless you think it will burn ... later." See if he could break MJ's brain, too.

"It shouldn't." MJ actually considered it. "If we eat chocolate for dessert, it'll cancel out."

"It will. Cream pie it is, then." They got another waitress, this one maybe ninety, far too old to be worried about a couple of weirdos making eyes.

"Cool. Dude, I want a patty melt and onion rings. Heart attack on a plate."

"And I want the blue cheese burger and onion rings. And some of that fried cheese." Yeah, they'd have to sleep off the artery damage.

They might could use a bed, for that blow job he was thinking MJ needed.

"Maybe we ought to get a hotel. We're making damned good time." He sipped his iced tea, doing the foot thing again.

"Yeah? I could probably handle being out of the car..." MJ flushed a little, shifted.

"I thought you might could." The fried cheese came, and Sonny bit into one too-hot piece. Uhn. Melty. With sauce.

"Yeah. Close spaces." MJ shrugged, shuddered. "Not my thing."

"I know, Precious. We'll get a place with windows." God, he just couldn't imagine being so worried about something. He just didn't have that irrational fear button. Hell, he'd seen MJ with it. The man turned fucking gray and just got downright mean, eyes blank and hard and just ... inhuman as all fuck. Seen him fight like a dog in a pit, no reason in him at all. Sonny hoped to God he never got scared of anything that way. And that he could help distract MJ from now on when it ate at him.

"Works for me." MJ grinned, stole one of the cheese sticks, and chowed down, making a damn near cute little hum.

MJ sure could pick 'em. The greasiest, best, yummy stuff. Sonny grinned and fed MJ an onion ring with the sauce, too. "Nice."

"Mm-hmm." Those lips were shining, MJ licking them clean with these quick, sexy-as-fuck little swipes of his tongue.

Sonny's cock said a fine hello and howdy. That mouth just perked him right up. He crunched down on an onion ring.

"This is the good stuff, Precious."

"Yeah. I was ready." Shit. Every so often he got a look from under those too-long-for-a-guy blond eyelashes that just melted his butter.

"Uh. We could get the chocolate to go." God knew he wasn't much for self denial. He lifted his right boot and let it press against the join of MJ's leg, just the ball of his foot on MJ's crotch. Oh, ho. Look at those eyes go wide. Then MJ sorta scootched and melted, pushing right down against his foot.

"We could."

"I like that idea. I mean, it would be a shame to waste the burgers, but if we got a couple big slices, imagine what we could do."

"Mmm. Chocolate and your skin." Now that was more than interest. That, ladies and gents, was pure-D wanting.

"Yeah." He pressed down with his foot, just enough to feel good, just enough to twinge. And started on his burger. MJ watched him for a bit, just stared at him and ate him up, then that patty melt was picked up and engulfed. One hand dropped under the table, fingers on the leather of his boot. They stroked at MJ's fly, the two of them, both of them starting to breathe heavily as they kneaded.

"Sunshine." MJ stopped even pretending to eat, nostrils flaring as those hips jerked in little motions.

"Uh-huh." Sonny waved vaguely at the waitress. "Can we get two pieces of chocolate cream pie to go, honey?"

MJ groaned, fingers tight around his glass, eyes gone all heavy-lidded and glittery.

His own zipper was rubbing his cock like crazy, making him squirm. The sweet lady with the huge hair brought them pie, and Sonny gave her a couple of twenties. "Thanks, honey."

"You bet," she said. "Now get your asses out of my place and go rent a room."

"You have a suggestion for a good place?" MJ wasn't one to be shamed, really. The man just didn't have it in him.

"There's an old Ho Jo down the way about another mile. Clean, cheap, run by a couple from India that don't speak English and won't pry. It'll do for you."

That sounded like just their ticket to Sonny.

"Clean and cheap. Sounds great." MJ slid out of the booth, sporting wood like you wouldn't believe, and grabbed the boxes of pie.

Sonny winked at the lady. "Thanks, honey. Best meal we've had in an age." She didn't need to know that every meal with them turned into a damned fine thing, what with lips and tongues and all that licking.

"Yep. Nice and slick. Come on, redneck. I have plans and chocolate." Pervy bastard.

"Yeah? I have plans for your ass." If you couldn't shame the devil you just had to jump right in with him. That was what his momma had always said about his daddy, anyway.

"Mmm ... sounds delicious." One big old boy rumbled as they walked by and MJ caught him with a look and that man just sat and stayed.

That man could just have murder in his eyes one minute and pure sex the next. Sonny had seen it, and, man, it never failed to give him the best kind of shivers. He tried not to wonder what that said about him. So long as those eyes were in fuck-mode when they looked over at him, Sonny reckoned he was safe.

They made it down the road to the hotel the hard way. Cockwise and driving wise. Sonny drove, MJ shifted, and they each had a free hand...

MJ was whispering the most perverse shit, making him jerk and buck as he drove the longest mile of his fucking life. He squealed into the parking lot and MJ threw it into park and it was all he could do not to reach right over and pull the man across the seat. They were too exposed. "I'll get the room," he said, his voice a damned growl. "You keep it up."

"My pleasure." MJ threw his head back, heel of one palm pushing hard on the bulge in those tight fucking jeans.

"That means no coming, either." Fuck. He had to remind himself of that as he got out of the car and the stiff placket of his jeans rubbed him like nothing going. Sonny made short work of getting the room. He could apologize for rudeness later, if he ever saw the pimple-faced kid looking at porn mags again.

Which he'd bet he wouldn't.

MJ had lost the shirt by the time he got outside, their duffle in one hand, pie boxes in the other. Fuck, MJ looked ...

Tanned, ripped, scarred, hard and ready for him. He muscled them both over to the room, growling and pushing, getting them in and the fucking door closed. While those hands were full and MJ couldn't defend himself, Sonny attacked. His mouth landed on MJ's neck and his hands went to open MJ's jeans. He licked and sucked, pulling up a mark before heading south, teeth scraping one nipple.

"Fuck, yes. More. Sunshine." He could fucking smell MJ, all sea and sun and man.

"Uh-huh." He licked where he'd just bitten before nibbling across to the other nipple. Couldn't have just one hard, wet nipple when he could have two.

The duffle dropped to the floor, MJ looking for somewhere to stash the pie, heart fucking pounding under his lips. They needed that chocolate, so Sonny took the box as he sank to the floor and set it aside. His mouth slid right down the center of MJ's body, right down that ripped belly and to the waistband of MJ's jeans. MJ groaned, fingers sliding over his scalp, digging in and sorta massaging and begging and demanding all at once.

Uh-huh. Someone liked his sucking, that was for sure. Sonny figured he ought to get with that, too, so he tore MJ's jeans open and fished out that amazing cock, his lips sliding right over the head.

"Yes." Thighs spread, that belly went tight, and MJ started moving, arching up and pushing into his lips. "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Sonny. I. Uhn."

He'd never get tired of that sound. Not ever. Sonny sealed his lips hard and pulled, working MJ with his tongue. This was better than chocolate pie. And he fucking loved chocolate pie.

"Best fucking mouth on Earth." MJ went up on his toes and threw his head back, cries echoing in the crappy little room.

Yeah. Come on, Precious. Come on. He thought it instead of saying it, but as his hands tightened on that fine fucking ass and he sucked hard, Sonny thought MJ would know. Sure enough, MJ jerked, salt and heat spraying over his tongue, just like that.

Sonny licked MJ clean before resting his bristly head against that perfect belly. "Good, Precious. Gonna explode."

"How do you want me? 'M all yours."

"I want..." Hell, what did he want? Sonny tried to get his overheated brain to work as he kinda sprawled back on the floor and worked at his jeans. "I want you."

"Uh-huh." Oh, good man. Helpful. MJ tore his jeans open, tugged them off, then got naked himself.

Naked was just a damned good look for MJ. Really. Really, really. Sonny started stroking his own cock with both hands, wiggling and moaning. MJ straddled his thighs, bouncing a little in a parody of fucking. Those hands joined his, fingers wrapping around and stroking him.

"I ... oh. Precious." Now it was his turn to make those noises, his eyes rolling like dice as his hips went crazy, his ass slapping the floor. More. He needed more.

"Yeah. Yeah, mine." MJ shifted, quick as a fucking snake, and wrapped those lips around the tip of his cock, sucking hard enough that he wanted to scream. He might have, even

though he bit his lip to keep from echoing through the thin-assed walls. His hearing shorted out, his whole body went tight, and before MJ could even take the next deep breath to keep going, Sonny came. Hard.

He just spurted, heat everywhere, MJ snorting and licking him clean, their fingers clean.

"Damn, Precious," Sonny grunted, flopping back on the floor and not thinking about what might be on it. "You kill me."

"No. There's not that much money on earth. Going to keep you."

"Okay." He could handle that, he figured, as he finally heaved up off the floor and held a hand down to MJ, hauling Precious up, too, before glancing around. "How about that pie?"

"Mmm. Chocolate. I'm there." Well, no shit.

"You're always there, Precious, when it comes to chocolate. And me. Let's have some post dessert dessert." He opened a window just a crack before settling on the bed.

MJ nodded, bouncing down beside him, dangly bits just dangling. Sonny grinned, very deliberately opening the pie, scooping some out, and painting MJ's balls with the cold cream. The little whoosh of air and low cry was enough to make him chuckle. All that pretty ink, and a little whipped cream to the nuts made the man breathless.

Oh. Ink. "So what kind of tats are you getting next?"

MJ tilted his head, grabbed Sonny's hand and started licking it clean. "Something not cheesy."

"Well, yeah. I mean, I don't want your ass plastered with that cheese cheetah or anything." That would probably get him hit.

"I don't know. You could get it inked on your cock." MJ snorted, bit his finger. "My balls are melting, man."

"Bitch, bitch." Bending, Sonny licked MJ clean, humming at the yummy cream flavor.

"Mmm. Yeah, but it worked."

"It's good pie." Good MJ. He loved that man more than Twinkies. "Good all the way around."

MJ grabbed another fingerful of chocolate, moaning and humming.

Hell, yes. Good all the fucking way around.

Chapter Ten

Paddy watched the bits of ice shatter, the sound as they crashed against the inside of the test container horrible and wonderful and maddening, and fuck, he wanted to do it again. He loaded the liquid nitrogen again and poured and molded and unmolded and loaded and BANG!

Which, cool—well, duh. Ice—but also, really really time-consuming and shit and why did people really need ice-cold instantly-dissolving bullets anyway?

It just seemed silly.

And he wanted to make something useful like...

Uh...

Well, if he had more time, he'd be more useful.

And more creative.

And his fingers would be warmer.

Oh, he could set shit on fire. That always made for a quick-moving afternoon.

"Ice bad, fire pretty, hmm, sweet?"

Shit! He hadn't even heard Neil come in. Paddy blinked and jerked, eyes wide. Oh. Wow. Neil. Hey. Pretty. Sweet? Him? Weird. Oh, wait. Fire, yeah. "Hey, there."

He headed for the gas lines.

"What are you up to?" Neil settled in on a stool, slipping on a pair of safety glasses. They made his eyes look weird.

"Working. Sort of." Not really. He'd worked. Really, he just wanted to blow something up. He really did. Boom. Or even bang. Boom was way better, though. God, he was bored.

"Paddy..."

"Hmm?" He looked over, having somehow managed to get halfway across the lab while he was wandering and oh, Neil looked good enough to eat, except not, because who the *hell* came up with that gross saying?

"Come here, sweet. I have something for you." Neil had that look. That little smile. I know something you don't, that smile said.

"Oh? What?" Surprises. Too fun. He headed over, not trying to guess, because if you guessed right you were smart and clever, but if you didn't, you were surprised, and surprise was cooler than clever. Unless it was a 'ooh, here's a big scary snake' surprise or 'eek, I have a cleaver' surprise, which didn't match Neil's smile, really.

As soon as he got close, Neil hooked two fingers in his waistband and used the other hand to take off those buggy-eyed glasses. Then he got pulled down for a kiss.

Oh.

Wow.

Hey.

Paddy hummed and leaned right in, letting himself just sort of wallow in the kiss.

At work. Weird. But cool. No, hot. Really hot, as Neil's tongue pushed into his mouth and one hand landed on his ass.

If Bethy came in, she'd castrate him.

Paddy sucked on Neil's tongue a minute, pondering whether it was worth it. Probably, yeah. Neil was. Neil. Yeah. Cool.

"Mmm." Neil eased away, blinking at him, looking more dazed now than buggy, for sure. "Did you like my surprise?"

"Mm-hmm." He touched Neil's lips, just for a second, dissatisfaction just poofed. "You want tea?"

"I would like some, yes. If you could put water on." That laptop bag of joy came out. "I thought you might like to try orange."

Neil rummaged.

"Tea?" That was like Tang stuff. His mother put it in a glass jar and drank it when she was phlegmy. Still, it smelled good.

He found the flask and the potable water and got to boiling.

"Yes, tea. It still has black tea leaves, love." Okay, maybe not so much like Tang.

"Do you think oranges would still be oranges if they were yellow?" Black tea. He wondered idly if freezing tea leaves did anything cool to them.

"No, then they would be yellows. Or some such, I imagine." Neil was laughing at him, but he really didn't mind. It wasn't ugly laughter, and it kinda tickled at the edges of his brain.

"Yellows. Cool." He watched the bubbles forming in the flask, then blinked. Bubbles. Bubbles deep in the ice. Bubbles could hold things, if they didn't break down the bullet's strength...

"Paddy? It's boiling."

"Huh?" Ice didn't boil. Oh. Oh! Water. Tea. Right. Lord. Time shift. Zoom. "I got it."

"Thank you. Have you been having fun?"

"Been working. Been thinking." Been missing Neil. Been wanting out to play.

"Thinking about what?" Neil asked him stuff like that a lot, but it was starting to sound less and less like a guy studying a new species and more like sincere curiosity in a personal way.

"Ice. Bullets. Chocolate. Halloween. Bubbles." He poured the water, carefully not spilling a drop. No burning. None.

The scent of the tea really intrigued him. It smelled like tea, but like oranges, but not. It was neat. He got lost in it until Neil took the cup from him and pointed to his own mug. "Have some with me?"

"I. Yes. Yes, okay. It smells like ... vacation." He poured another cup, the smell getting strong again, capturing him all over.

"It does!" Neil sounded delighted. "Like an orange grove and iced tea."

Yeah. Only hot. And in the lab.

He nodded and tasted, the flavor surprising him with its bright bite. Lord, bite was a weird word for a taste, wasn't it? Bites were for dogs and horses and camels. Oh, wait. Camels spit.

A soft chuckle had him staring at Neil, who shrugged. "I liked camels quite a lot, actually."

"I haven't ever met one in person." Although, he thought riding one would be fun, in an up-and-down-rollercoaster-on-Quaaludes sort of way.

"It is. And they have the most *marvelous* feet." Sipping, Neil wandered, those lean hands poking at this, picking up that.

"I like your feet." Well that was odd. Did he? Yeah. Yeah, kind of.

For feet, Neil's were long and lean. Fine-boned. He approved.

Though he had a sudden image of Neil with purple toenail polish on. With glitter.

He chuckled, blowing bubbles in his tea. Glitter. That was. Yeah.

Glitter.

"Like ice?" Neil asked. Man, he didn't have to even talk to have a conversation with this guy.

"No, like sparkles, like in the little bottles that you sprinkle on glue." Oh, God, he used to love that part. Dumping the glitter on the glue lumps and then blowing.

"Ah. I never got to do that in school. You'll have to show me. We'll make a sign for your lab." That glinting grin was just full of mischief, a real sense of the absurd, of fun.

"Oh..." Oh, yes. A big sign that said, "Leave the Chocolate Here" and "Bethy, Go Home".

"Be careful, or I shall have to kiss you again." One hand ghosted over his back, leaving him with a wow, mmm, tea, want to kiss you now jumble of thoughts.

"Is that supposed to be bad?" He wanted out, all of the sudden, the need sharp and sure and weird as hell because he loved working...

"No. Inappropriate, perhaps. You complicate things, sweet. You really do. I was supposed to remain detached." Okay, that made sense, if Neil was supposed to like, decide if he was sane.

"I complicate everything. I always do. I always have." He could live with that.

"That's all right then." Well, well. Now Neil was giving him that kiss, hands on his wrists pulling him close. He could see Neil's eyelashes, pale at the ends, dark down next to the eyelid. Oh. Oh, orange and tea and Neil. That was something special. Almost as good as chocolate. A laugh slid over his lips, and Neil moved closer, kissing him harder. The man was just shameless, which was totally cool and yet weird and yet cool ... He wrapped his lips around Neil's tongue, sucking and humming as Neil's fingers dug into his hips.

"Mmm." Neil. That was Neil, moaning for him. Just. Wow. That such a sophisticated guy with like, an accent, could moan like that. For him.

"I want. Can't we go?" Somewhere with a bed. With a couch. Anywhere. His little apartment was right here in the complex.

"We might be able to, I think. I'm sure I can convince your boss it was necessary." Those eyes ... Neil smiled. "Is anything burning?"

"Probably." He grinned, sniffing for smells that seemed more dangerous than usual.

"Well, we should shut all that down first, hmm?" Another quick kiss that he felt down to his toes and Neil wandered off checking burners.

Neil was very good at that.

Honestly.

Paddy bet Neil hadn't blown a room up in years.

Maybe ever.

"Oh, I blew up a chemistry lab once in secondary school. Aha. There." The last burner went out when Neil turned the little feeder switch, and then he had an armload of pretty Brit. "Shall we?"

"Really? Good for you!" Any man brave enough to blow up an entire lab—school or not—understood the whole wow-boom factor.

"Well, my headmaster certainly didn't think it was good. Let's go." They went, Neil bopping along beside him, chattering about the British school system. He kind of lost the words in watching Neil's mouth.

Bowed at the top, bottom lip full and not-quite red, not-quite pink—he could imagine it on his skin, could imagine it moaning.

Imagine it wrapped around his.

Yeah.

Neil's cheeks heated, and he got a sideways glance. "If you like, love, I certainly will."

"I..." Okay, that was embarrassing and sort of pushy of him, but yeah. Yeah, he'd like. He'd really like. There were all sorts of things he'd like, really. He could probably make a list.

"I would like it, too, I can assure you." Oh, was that a hand on his ass? Man, he hoped Bethany didn't see them leave.

Oh, hot. Good. Yeah. That hand squeezed, rubbed a little, and suddenly he didn't really care if Bethy did. They got outside and he went toward the elevator while Neil started toward the visitor lot. They both stopped, Neil grinning back at him. "Your place or mine?"

"Your car is cleaner."

"Mine then. We can get out of sight and I can try that thing you want." Oh, man. Woo.

He nodded and headed toward the visitor lot. "How long do you get to stay?"

"Oh, that depends on you, love." Neil grabbed his hand as soon as they were out of sight of the main building. "I hope a good while."

"Tell me what to blow up to keep you working." He winked over, hoping that sounded casual enough and true enough, all at the same time.

"Oh, I think you'll keep me in work a bit. I can always lie and say I need more time for evaluation." Finally. Finally they got to Neil's car, got in. Yeah. Now they could hunker down and touch.

He turned, hand sliding up along Neil's thigh, just touching. "You don't wear jeans very often."

"I don't, no. I simply wasn't raised with them. But you like the way they look on me." Okay, sometimes it was good that Neil could read him like a book.

"I do. They make your butt look hot." Mmm. Neil's butt. Nice and firm, proportional. Muscled but not, gee-I'm-going-to-crack-your-nuts hard.

"Do they?" Moving closer, Neil put one hand on his chest while kissing his chin. "I do like to emphasize my assets. I like yours, too."

Who knew his nipple could be so sensitive even under a lab coat and shirt?

"I have assets?" Mmm. He could eat Neil up with a spoon.

"You do. You have the most fascinating mind of anyone I've ever met. You have the best hair. Your cock is lovely." All the while Neil extolled his virtues the man was petting him. His chest, his belly, his fly...

He groaned and caught Neil's lips with his own, pushing his tongue in to taste. Neil kissed him right back, meeting his tongue and playing it, licking his lips as they parted to breathe. Those hands moved on him, tracing patterns, making him crazy with his clothes still on. He wanted. He wanted skin and tasting and more of those kisses and to hear that amazing voice calling out when things were good.

"Should we go, Paddy? Or should I suck you here?"

Decisions, decisions.

Oh, God. God. If they did it here, somebody might stop them, but as hard as he was he wouldn't last three minutes. Which, okay, not studly, and if they waited he could calm down and he'd do better, but oh. That mouth.

"There's something to be said for urgency," Neil said. The sound of his zipper going down seemed huge, loud and grating. One lean hand closed around him, stroking him hard for a moment. Then Neil bent and wiggled and got down in the seat enough to suck him right in.

His mouth opened and closed, breath caught in his chest. Oh. Neil. That mouth. Oh. Wow. Hot. Hothothot. Those lips tightened around him, riding up and down, Neil's tongue working him. Clever, clever tongue. Good Neil. Everything in him went sproing and wow and uhn and ... Fireworks went off behind his eyes, entire body into it as he shot.

"Mmm." Neil hummed around him before sitting up, patting him, and putting him away. "I think to your place now, love. I'm in no position to drive."

"Uh-huh." He nodded, head all heavy and loose on his neck. "My place."

Wow.

"Oh, you have babyhead." Those lips, warm with his own come, found his neck. "You're adorable you know."

"You make me feel..." He was so utterly taken it wasn't funny.

"Good." The look he got came serious as a heart attack, all steady and solid. "You do the same to me, Paddy. You do, indeed."

"Good. Oh, good. Come on. My sheets are clean." They were in the clothesbasket, but they were clean. Neil was the only guy he'd ever done laundry for.

Laughing, Neil opened the car door and stepped out, waiting for him. He could see the tent in Neil's jeans, so he knew there was more fun in his future.

A man didn't have to be a mind reader to know that.

Chapter Eleven

Three a.m. looked dark. That was Neil's first thought when he woke up, opening his eyes to pure darkness. They adjusted eventually, but Neil still saw very little; all of his vision was focused inward. Something had awakened him, some echo of a thought that was neither his nor Paddy's. In fact, Paddy slept so soundly that his usual surface brain chatter seemed muted, underwater.

Neil squinted, listening hard, but the only thing he could hear was a tiny rumble, like a distant car engine. A big car, one with a well-tuned motor. And then even that was gone.

Restless, Neil rolled out of bed and padded out into the little living room of Paddy's apartment, searching for his cell phone. Somewhere he knew he'd ... ah. There.

He hit the number on auto-dial, knowing someone would answer, day or night. The extremely polite young lady who answered wanted to be anywhere but at work at five in the morning her time, and she was wondering if her boyfriend was cheating on her. She transferred him straight away, though, and Neil waited for the gravelly voice of his current employer.

"Yeah?" The man was hard to read, which Neil supposed was a good thing. Knowing what that fellow knew might be dangerous.

"Is there anything on the radar that I need to know about?" he asked. They might know something and not call him if it was simply a rumor.

"Why, what have you heard?" There was a guarded curiosity, an odd lack of emotion.

"I just had a ... I don't know. I just think someone is coming, really." What else could he say? The man really didn't know whether to believe he could do what he was hired to do, and who could blame him. The only one who had ever accepted it without question was Paddy.

"Well, you're there to know that. If someone is, it is imperative that they do not come in contact with your target. His ... acquiescence is necessary to the project."

"So you've said." The thought gave him a twinge now that had been noticeably absent when Neil had taken the job. He'd thought Paddy would be the usual government drone. Now he knew better. "I shall do my best, but I should think you'd want to look into it. Just in case."

"I'll have it dealt with. Is everything proceeding as planned with your assignment?"

"So far, so good." Really, the man had a one-track mind. "Work proceeds apace."

"Excellent. If there are any complications, don't hesitate to contact me." Cold and slippery.

"Naturally. Thanks so much for your abundant help." He hated to snarl. It was so rude. But really, it was three a.m. and he was awake and had cold dread in the pit of his belly. He rang off, tossing the phone aside in disgust. Maybe some tea.

He heard Paddy's mind, the bright, curious, questioning hitting him in a rush. Where was he? Was he okay? What was

that noise? Why wouldn't Neil be okay? When did it get cold? Why was it dark?

Someone wasn't sleeping hard anymore. Paddy was wide awake. Neil went to poke his head in the bedroom. "Did I wake you, love?"

"I thought I heard you talking to me." Paddy's hair was tousled, curls going every which way, eyes wide. "Were you talking to me?"

"I was probably muttering to myself, love." He might as well have been, at any rate. The edge of the bed gave under his hip as he sat, having been drawn right to Paddy without even thinking.

Paddy's hand slid over his thigh, patting just a tad. "Mutter mutter mutter."

Paddy loved his skin, worried about him not sleeping, wanted to snuggle up and get warm.

"I thought I might have some tea, but you might convince me otherwise." Some lingering guilt kept him from sliding right back into bed. He rather hated deceiving Paddy.

"We could have tea." Visions of oranges and lemons and mint floating through his mind, only to be swept away by a dozen other quicksilver thoughts.

"We could. Have you any honey? I could make us honey lemon tea. Warm and soothing." Following those thoughts was like trying to catch a shoal of minnows with one's bare hands.

"I do. Did you know it's the only food that can't spoil?"

"Really?" His hands moved of their own accord, fingers sliding under the blanket to stroke Paddy's bare chest. "It makes for lovely tea. And honey cake is a favorite of mine."

"Honey cake. Yum. I like chocolate cake with whipped cream and strawberries." Visions of parties and streamers and balloons and a woman that looked very much like Paddy filled him.

Those tiny glimpses into Paddy's life outside the lab fascinated him. He wandered after them idly, seeing a stick horse and a train set and best of all, a junior chemistry kit. It had him smiling, his stiff shoulders relaxing. Paddy scooted up, fingers on his neck, massaging in random circles. There was a simple pleasure he could read, a joy that seemed near impossible and untainted.

Suddenly he needed to taste it, to feel it from the inside out. Neil leaned in, pressing his lips to Paddy's, his tongue opening up that sweet mouth to push inside. Yes. That was it. Better than honey.

Neil. Neil. Good. Hi. Oh. The words flashed through him at lightning speed, then shattered into a shuddering pleasure as Paddy committed to the kiss. That glittery, quicksilver mind made him happy deep inside. He cupped the back of Paddy's head, his fingers sinking into the wild curls so he could hold Paddy to him, kiss him harder. He stroked that little hot spot at the base of Paddy's neck, groaning as the pleasure between them flared, sharp and sudden.

He pushed Paddy down, straddling his thighs and keeping the kiss going, stopping only to breathe before diving in

again. The yesgooduhhuh drowned out everything from his worries to that nagging little echo.

Paddy's fingers trailed down his spine, tracing his tattoo without even seeing it. Arching, he hummed into the kiss, letting it wash over him. The pleasure seemed to double, perhaps triple, and Neil rocked down, his prick hard as stone.

Paddy groaned, green eyes staring up at him, the pleasure and passion in them clear. So giving. Neil shifted up, got them rubbing together, hardness to hardness, loving how Paddy's eyes went wide, how he got a gasp. Paddy's hand settled on his hip, helping him move, both of them finding a rhythm that suited them, right off. His eyes rolled, and Neil rocked, letting Paddy's excitement send his own soaring, feeling touches inside and out. Paddy groaned, teeth scraping against his bottom lip, the pleasure singing between them. Their chins clunked together as he zigged and Paddy zagged, and they both laughed. Then they kissed again and the laughter fled before pure need.

Paddy wrapped around him, fingernails sliding against his skin.

His spine arched, pushing his hips against Paddy's in desperate little bursts, his whole body on fire now. He thought he might be talking, saying things that he wasn't sure he should say. Perhaps he didn't say them out loud. It didn't seem to matter to Paddy, though, what he said. Paddy was all focused on pleasure and heat and need and right now.

They moved faster and faster, the whirlwind rising between them. Neil bit down on Paddy's throat, wanting to feel the sting from Paddy's side.

Oh, bright happy needy sharp good love! The sensations, the thought, flooding him.

"Love. Oh, God." His hips slammed into the cradle of Paddy's, his prick throbbing as he came hard. His whole body shook, his hands clinging to Paddy's arms.

Paddy groaned for him, shifting and sliding. He got to feel Paddy's climax, almost as strong as his own. His head spun, taking him out of himself to a place he'd rarely visited, could hardly remember since childhood, in fact. A place where he felt almost completely merged with another person. Neil tried to slam his guard back into place, but he felt disoriented, like he was waking from a falling dream.

"So good. Make me feel so good." Paddy hummed and muttered, babbling randomly, hands sliding over his shoulders.

That finally anchored him, brought him back down to earth gently. Smiling, he kissed Paddy's chin, nodding. "Yes, love. We rub along well. So to speak."

Oh, goodness, that laughter filled the room, the joy pure and unaffected. Such full, deep laughter made him laugh right along, pushing aside the twinge of guilt that tried to resurface. When they both stopped to wheeze, tears running down their faces, he pushed up and sat on the edge of the bed. "I think I should still like that tea."

"I think you should still like that tea, too, since you liked it fifteen minutes ago..."

"Don't make me hurt you, sweet." He reached out, his hand finding Paddy's thigh unerringly to pinch, to pull the

little hairs there. Paddy squeaked and laughed, pushing closer to him, fingers digging into his ribs.

Oh, ho! Someone wanted to play. Neil dove right in, pulling Paddy to him and holding on while he found each ticklish spot. He rather had an unfair advantage.

"Uncle! Uncle!" Paddy pushed right up against him, head thrown back, cheeks flushed as they laughed.

What could he do but reward that with a kiss, as well as a hard hug. That sturdy body felt so good against him, not even in a sexual way. Just ... touching another person and knowing they enjoyed it.

Paddy cuddled in, holding him close. "This isn't getting you your tea, Neil."

"True. You might have soothed me enough that I will not need it before breakfast, hmm?" Paddy wanted so badly for that to be true, didn't he? Neil settled in, pulling the covers over them. "I think I'll be just fine."

"Good. I ... I'm a fan of just fine in my lovers." Paddy was starting to float, to doze.

"Sleep, love." He might not sleep right away, that lingering feeling keeping him up as he watched over Paddy. But he still thought as long as he could hang about and bask in Paddy's presence, he might indeed be just fine.

Chapter Twelve

MJ stared at his toes, which were propped on the dashboard. Man, they were hairy. Not like terrifying old man hairy or anything, but there were curly blond hairs all over them. Better than Sonny's toes, of course; his toe hair was sun-bleached. Still...

"I have to buy shoes when we get closer. Real shoes."

Sonny glanced over, eyes hidden by sunglasses, but a smile on his face. "Been too long since we worked, huh?"

"Yeah. I hate real shoes." He stretched, wiggling his toes.

"I like the way boots make your butt look, though."

Shooting people in sandals was tricky. Blood between the toes and shit. Bad. Besides, with the kaboom, came shrapnel.

Man, that was almost deep.

"Why, thank you, Precious. I do like the way your ass looks in nothing." Sonny's right hand drifted over to touch his leg.

Man, listen to them, having a pleasant conversation in the car and nobody even had a gun. Their relationship must be maturing.

"Yours is nice bare, but I like the jean thing, too. Your chest, though? You should always be shirtless." Well, unless they were working. Then all that chest hair would get singed.

"Yeah? You just like my fuzz." They laughed about that all the time; that Sonny wasn't exactly smooth as a baby's butt like in all the gay rags.

"You know it, redneck. Just like you like to see all my..."
Tats. Huh.

Tats.

"When the job's done, we should go get ink."

The car jerked a little before Sonny swerved back into his lane. "We should, Precious. We surely should."

"Yeah." MJ grinned, humming under his breath a little along with Don Henley. "Something ours. I still have room left."

Of course, he imagined they would need to go with the no-fucking tattoo artist...

Sonny was all growly and possessive that way. Hell, he might be these days himself. But he could see Sonny, wearing a mark that spoke of him. Of them together...

"Mmm." MJ wiggled a little, ass sliding on the seat, cock perking up. Something ringing one ankle, maybe, or their biceps. Something spiky and black on that tanned skin.

Uhn.

"Mmm. You thinking good thoughts, Precious?" The hand on his thigh slid a little, Sonny's pinky touching his cock, trapped under his zipper. "I know I am."

"Uh-huh. Thinking about black ink on your skin, licking it."

"Oh, I like the idea of that. Yes, indeed." He could tell how much Sonny liked it, because they speeded up, that hand kneading him like crazy.

His knees spread, letting Sonny touch more. "Mm-hmm. It's hot, the sting, the burn. Fucking amazing."

"It'll be hot watching you. And watching you watching me." Convolved as that was, he got it. Sonny could watch him all damned day, get off on him moving, sleeping, or swimming.

"You'll have to go first, so I can focus." Maybe he ought to learn to do it himself. Or. "You ought to learn how. I've seen you doodle."

He could see that eyebrow climb over Sonny's glasses. "You'd let me put a needle to your skin, Precious? After telling me if I ever got near you with one again you'd eat my balls for breakfast with eggs?"

"I don't think you can drug somebody with a tattoo gun..." Could you? Shit. He needed a cellular modem for moments like this. If anyone could, it would be Sonny. That man had a positive knack for poison and morphine and shit.

Sonny grinned again, those teeth flashing in the sun. "Well, if you trust me to try, I can hook up in Miami with someone who can give me a lesson. Or I could just draw up the design and we could get someone else."

MJ thought about it some and what he found maybe wiggled him out some. "You wouldn't do it if you didn't know it would be good. I'd trust you."

Sonny squeezed him, maybe a little too hard. Or maybe just hard enough. That voice came out as pure growl. "I'll do it, then. Fuck, Precious..."

"Uh-huh." He groaned and worked his jeans open enough for his poor cock to breathe.

"MJ!" Sonny didn't sound shocked. Hell, no. He sounded hungry, those fingers dancing over his cock as they almost ran up the back end of a semi. Sonny backed off, though, never letting his attention stray fully from the road.

"Uh-huh. You kill me, making me want so bad, Sunshine." Making him need.

"I. Damn. We need to stop. I need to. Fuck." They were just dangerous, trapped in the car for long periods of time. Sooner or later the natives got restless. If they stopped to fuck, he could get shoes.

"We need to fuck. And have bacon and possibly a beer." And a shower, and maybe a blow job after a nap. They had time.

"We do. Time to stop." He could see Sonny watching the road signs, and knew they were about to hit an off ramp when Sonny took his hand back, both hands on the wheel. They found a truck stop right off, Sonny pulling in back where no one would see.

He launched himself across the seat as soon as the ignition got turned off. He needed. Now. Sonny clashed right with him, one arm sliding around him, the other hand reaching down to cup his cock, rubbing up and down. He grunted, humping like a dog, lips crashing down onto Sonny's. Fuck, no one'd ever been like this.

Never.

Digging in, Sonny pushed at him, thumb pressing his slit, tongue sliding right into his mouth. God, yeah. Yeah. The man knew his hot spots now, worked them ruthlessly. His teeth scraped Sonny's tongue, hands holding that mouth right where he wanted it so that he could. Yeah. Uhn. Right there.

Sonny bit down on his lip as they pulled apart, then dove in again with hardly a breath between, licking at his skin where it had split. He groaned, eyes rolling as he just rode it, ass whacking the steering wheel over and over. Man, that was gonna leave a bruise.

There, that was what he should get tattooed. A steering wheel-shaped bruise. He stopped chuckling over that when Sonny grabbed his balls, squeezing, letting him really feel it.

"Uhn. Fuck." His head rolled on his shoulders like dice on a table.

"That's it, Precious. Come on. Come *on*. Can see you just like this when I tattoo you, you know? See you trying to hold still for me and you just can't." Sonny was fucking relentless, man.

He shot hard, hips moving even after his cock stopped jerking, all caught up in the tug and burn and heat.

"Good. Good, MJ. Fuck, yeah. Want you to..." Sonny pushed him back a little into his own seat, those big hands scrabbling at Sonny's own jeans, yanking them open.

"Yeah. Yeah, gimme." He scooted and bent down, lips dropping over that cock as soon as Sonny pulled it free. His. Fuck, yes. His.

"MJ. Jesus fuck." Sonny pressed right up between his lips, cock hot and salty and good, wet as hell. There was no gentle lead-in there; Sonny just fucked MJ's face like he meant it. He rolled those sweet, heavy balls, pushing through the denim. His head bobbed, throat relaxing as he let Sonny all the way in, in deep.

"Uhn. More. I just. Now." He could feel how close Sonny was, how the man just teetered on the edge for him.

He wrapped his lips around the base of Sonny's prick and sucked for all he was worth. Come on. Give it up, now. Oh, yeah, he got it. Sonny shot like a ton of bricks, hips snapping. Harsh moans sounded, and Sonny's fingers tangled right up

in his hair, holding him there just a moment before pulling him up to kiss him until his ears rang.

They panted together, grinning into the kiss. "Better."

"You know it. We should look for shoes." Sonny nuzzled his throat, always a little warm and fuzzy after he came. "And I need a sketchbook."

"Yeah." MJ took a second to just touch Sonny. Yeah. He would do that.

Wear Sonny's ink.

Fuck.

Chapter Thirteen

"So how's it going with your new shadow?" Bethy's voice, always so weird and rough and all, startled him badly, the vial of ionized water crashing to the ground.

"Shit! Bethy! Don't do that!" Paddy frowned and rolled his eyes. Good thing it hadn't been important.

Or expensive.

Or explosive.

"Don't do what? Stomp into my own lab after saying 'Rick, Rick, Rick!' over and over?" She snorted, pushed her wiry-arsed, kinky-curly hair over her shoulder. "Is he okay?"

"Neil? Yeah. Yeah, he's great. He's gone to ... Uh ... Do something." He'd forgotten what, exactly. Nap. Eat. Find food. Walk. He'd been busy.

"That's good, I guess. So? How long's he say he's staying?" Oh, man. She sat down. He hated when she sat down. That meant she was staying.

"Until he's done, I guess?" Paddy didn't want to think about that. Not at all. He was ... He was maybe more than a little seriously fucked where Neil was concerned.

"Ah, if it isn't the manager. Hello, Bethany." Neil came in bearing a tray from the commissary, and it smelled good. Oh, food. They'd kinda ... played through breakfast.

Well, he'd offered to share his emergency Pop-Tarts with Neil, but Neil had given him this wide-eyed look of something that was either terror or disgust and he'd put them back in the drawer with the can of 1987 Jolt cola, the Slinky that said "My DM is a better roller than your DM", and a package that

either held some old intern's retainer, a Beatles cassette, or the corpse of a giant hissing cockroach.

He couldn't remember and he was sort of scared to look.

"Hey there, Neil. Keeping busy?" Bethy gave Neil a look that sort of made Paddy growly, which was weird because, well, Neil didn't go for middle-aged women with gaps between their front teeth and a serious thing for double knit.

Still.

"I am, yes. I take it you are, too?" Neil passed by, giving him a look meant just for him, one that made him tingle.

"You know I don't work. I just harass the boys and make sure no one blows up the building." Right, like Bethy wasn't one of them. She was just one of them with a better salary these days.

"Which must be a full-time job, indeed. I think we have everything under control here." The strangest look passed between Neil and Bethy, this one making Paddy go hmm instead of grrr.

"Of course, you do. Come see me in my office at some point, yeah, Rick? We've got to discuss progress."

Progress.

Oookay.

God, things were odd around here these days.

"Sure, Bethy. Lunchtime!" He kicked the broken glass out of Neil's way.

"Yes, lunchtime." Grinning, Neil took Bethy's arm and hustled her to the door. "So nice of you to drop by."

Man, Neil was really, really good at that. Paddy was impressed.

The door closed and Neil even locked it. Wow. Okay.
"What's for lunch?"

"Oh, I brought a variety, love. I thought you might be hungry."

Dude. There were sandwiches and some kind of salad and a latte and some Cokes and ... wow.

"Yum." He looked at the window and then took a good, hard kiss. "Thank you."

"Mmm. Yes, that's a lovely thank you." Neil smiled and kissed him back, then went to get a cup of hot water and a teabag.

He grabbed half a sandwich. Ooh. Tuna fish. Yum. "So do you report to Bethy? Or do you have another boss?"

"You could say Bethany and I are on the same level," Neil said, taking what he would call a biscuit and dunking it in his tea. Privately, Paddy thought they were all cookies.

"Oh." Thinking about Neil's job, and him and Bethy, and the whole thing, led to more thoughts about Neil leaving and someone thinking he was crazy and ... Yeah. Okay. More food.

"You're hardly crazy. But I won't tell Bethy that just yet, hmmm?" Oh, that was. Yeah. Okay. Neil picked up ... some kind of lettuce thing, crunching away. "Do you ever see what your experiments actually apply to, love?"

"I'm not sure they really have real-world applications. I mean, I made a thing once that could go from frozen to boiling on command and I thought it could be useful, but the prototype poofed and I got moved in here to play with other

things." They weren't anything but research people. The guys to make the stockholders happy.

"Ah. Well, at least you enjoy your work. It's not frustrating to make things that never get used?" That stare kinda looked like the one Neil had given Bethy.

"My apartment is full of boxes of things that never get used." He built things that didn't have uses. He just made them to make them.

"You are one of a kind, love." Ambling over, Neil gave him a kiss that tasted like citrus and sugar.

The kiss made the uncomfortable worry poof, just like that. He was good. Neil was good. It was all okay.

"It is, indeed," Neil said as they parted, pressing one more touch to his mouth. "Very good. Do you want that apple tart?"

Man, Neil had a sweet tooth.

"No. Go ahead." He wasn't sure apple and tuna went together.

Apple.

Fish.

Fish.

Apple.

No.

No, no, no.

Inhaling the tart, Neil hummed, looking kinda like he did when they had sex. Like all rapturous. He'd had the apple tarts from the commissary before. They weren't that good.

Now the tarts at Amy's Pies? They were like Christmas. Or chocolate. Or warm sheets from the dryer, but with apples.

"I should think that would be sticky..." Of course, Neil looked like he might like the sticky.

"It would stain." He'd like to taste that, though. Neil's skin and apple. Or peach. Oooh. Raspberries.

"No, raspberries leave seeds in inconvenient places." Well, he'd never thought of that. Hmm. He bet if he got raspberry jam heated up he could strain it and then cool it off and then it would be like paint. Oh, he could just see that. A little drop of sweet on the tip of Neil's...

Oh. Man.

Work.

He was at work.

A soft moan brought his attention back to Neil, who stared at him like he was dessert. "Oh. Love. Yes."

Paddy nodded. It would be. Because salt and sweet and, oh, Neil in his mouth. "Want you."

"Yes. We could. Where could we..." He could see Neil shifting, see the way that lean body shuddered for him.

"My office." There was a door. A lock. There was even the ugly green sofa.

"Now, love. Now." Right behind him, herding him, Neil moved him along, heading right for his office. Those hands stroked his back, his ass, really giving him reason to hurry. They didn't even turn on the light. Paddy just turned as Neil locked the door, dropping to his knees as he reached for Neil's fly. Neil helped him, popping the button while he got the zipper. All he had to do was get Neil's pants and underwear down and that thick cock was right there in front of his face, in his hands.

Oh.

Oh, Neil smelled good. Paddy inhaled, the sound loud. Then he opened up and let his tongue slide over the tip of Neil's prick. Yes.

"Sweet. Oh. I..." Cock sliding in and out of his mouth, Neil stroked his hair, his cheeks, encouraging him. Talking to him.

If he had any free brain cells, Paddy was sure he'd be thinking about how he'd never really gotten off on sucking and he hadn't really enjoyed it and how weird it was that he'd almost creamed his jeans just thinking about this. He didn't have any brain cells that weren't incredibly busy going 'uhn Neil', fortunately, but if he had, he'd've worried. Neil really enjoyed it, though, he could tell. The way Neil's hips rolled and the muscles those thighs bunched, yeah, that told Paddy all he needed to know.

Paddy slid his hands up along Neil's thighs, ending with his thumbs rubbing those soft, heavy balls. The rubbing made the scent of Neil stronger, made his head swim a little. Mmm. They should make Neil perfume or incense or something.

Potpourri.

Man, chuckling during a blow job?

Challenging.

His head started bobbing, mouth working hard as his fingers stroked those heavy balls, dragging them down into the bottom of the velvet-soft sacs and rolling them, just enough to make things ache and zing a little, to make Neil grunt and whimper.

Oh, hell, yes.

Paddy closed his eyes and just felt, loving the way the heavy vein on Neil's shaft throbbed against his tongue, the way the tip dragged and left salty kisses. He sucked harder as Neil shuddered, stretching a little as Neil arched. "Sweet. Love, please."

Yes. Yes, love. Please. Paddy groaned and took Neil down to the root, nose buried in the soft, gold curls, throat closing around the tip of Neil's cock. Bitter and salt poured down his throat, so good. Rich. Neil.

His hand dropped to the front of his slacks, tugging at the zipper, trying desperately to get them off, get his cock out. Slipping free, Neil knelt in front of him, kissing him hard, kissing the panicky-need feeling right out of his brain.

Much better. Much. He moaned into the kisses as he sucked on Neil's tongue.

Neil's hands cupped his ass, pulling him up so they pressed together from knees to mouth. His own cock, trapped against his zipper, felt like it might just explode. He wanted. So much. So badly. Right now. He wanted Neil's touch and flavors and pleasure and sounds and everything.

All of it.

Neil gave it to him, hand wrapping around him and touching him just like he needed, and damn, but it felt good. Fine. So...

"Yes, sweet. So fine. You have the loveliest skin."

Neil's voice was so fucking hot. He could come just from listening to the man read the phone book aloud.

Neil snorted a little, thumb working the tip of his cock. "A. Aaron Ablabab."

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

"Ass." Oh. Oh, damn. There. Right there. Neil. Please.

"Yes, sweet. Yes." Neil pushed a little harder, making it burn, making it ache, and Paddy bucked and shot, eyes just rolling with it.

"There. There. That's better." Yeah. Yeah, it was. So better. He nodded, licking and nuzzling at Neil's jaw, sated and dazed and all fuzzy inside. "Come, love. Up on the sofa. I believe a nap is in order."

Oh. Oh, yes. His Neil had the loveliest ideas, even if Bethy was going to kill him.

Chapter Fourteen

The room was about twenty by twenty. Sonny knew this because he'd watched MJ pace it off. Over and over and over. The man really hated enclosed spaces. Problem was, MJ's contact hadn't made a big enough payment. They'd arrived about forty miles from their supplier, gotten a hotel, and MJ had plugged in to check. And kinda had a fit.

So now Sonny lay on the bed, watching MJ pace. And pondering how to get the man out of his fucking mood. Sonny had taken just about all he could of MJ's muttering and mumbling, and definitely all of the cursing he could stand.

Finally, Sonny just scratched his belly and chose his opening salvo. He couldn't sit and think too much on it, or he'd just fuck himself up.

"This isn't the same guy that hired you to blow up half of North Carolina, is it?" he asked.

"What?" MJ stopped, tilted his head like a hound puppy at a whistle. "No. The North Carolina job was a little one."

"Yeah? Because you sure took out enough trees and animals." Oh, he was pushing it there. But it was all for MJ's mental health. Really.

Those big ole eyes just flashed, hot as a wildfire. "Excuse me? I blew up a *company*, a building. The destruction there was killing everything."

"Uh-huh. But man, if it was a strong enough blast to block the road? It was a hefty charge." He kicked one foot up, looked at his bare toes, already starting to lose some of their tan.

"It was the perfect charge. The buildings were *supposed* to block traffic. It's not my fault that I interrupted your meth lab business."

"It wasn't a meth lab. And it sounds to me like it wasn't so perfect. You know how many acres burned because of you?" Come on, MJ, he thought. Come on. Whip up a good foam.

"What the fuck are you talking about? I *walked* away from that. I wouldn't have outwalked a motherfucking fire!" Oh, there it was; the hint of fury, of pure fire.

"Wind was going the other way." Shit, he was caught. Of course, MJ was pissed now, so it wouldn't matter he was lying. "Of course, you wouldn't know, since I was beating you down and knocking you unconscious."

"You didn't beat me down, you jackass. I held my own. Bastard." MJ stepped right up next to him, pushing into his space.

Sonny rolled up to his feet, giving right back with the aggression. It was like dealing with a really territorial wolf hybrid or something. "You were the one ended up tied, Precious."

"You were the one ended up scarred, Sunshine." Fuck, that wild-eyed look was hot.

"You ain't got no room to talk, man." His cock twitched as he smiled slow and easy. "And you were the one who ended up on a *plane*."

MJ's chest slapped against his. "And you ended up gimpy and needing someone to do your grocery shopping."

It was going to have to get physical, dammit. Sonny gave MJ a hard shove, sending him stumbling back. "Fuck you, Precious. I bought you bananas."

MJ coiled in a little, like a fucking snake, and then the bastard pounced, whacking him solidly in the gut and taking him down.

"Mmph." Sonny rolled, whaling out with one elbow, trying to catch MJ's chin. He missed, but he got one shoulder, the solid thwack speaking volumes.

"Fuck." MJ winced and growled, pushing him down against the floor good and hard.

His head banged and Sonny saw stars even as his teeth clamped together around his tongue. Cussing viciously, he shoved the heel of his hand up under MJ's mouth, popping MJ's head right back on that neck like a Pez dispenser.

MJ grunted, forearm landing on his throat with a smack. Jesus.

Sonny wiggled, trying to get free, but MJ straddled him just the right way, leaning down to cut off his air, his windpipe closing right up when MJ pushed. Shit. Shit. He struggled harder, his hands scrabbling at MJ's arm, even as spots began to swim before his eyes and his ears started to ring.

MJ's eyes glittered down at him, then that arm eased up, let him breathe. "Easy now."

He flopped back to the floor, his tense muscles all going limp as he wheezed. Crazy fucking bastard. God, Sonny loved that man, but damn. Damn. His chest was massaged, easing the cramps out of his muscles and helping him breathe. Shit.

Made him wonder how many people MJ put to sleep and had to bring back.

"We gonna kiss and make up now?" he croaked, reaching up to stroke MJ's arms.

"Mm-hmm." MJ was watching him like a hawk, leaning down to bring their mouths together. The first kiss was gentle as fuck; the second was deep enough to curl his toes. His hands slid farther up to clench in MJ's hair, holding that mouth to his, pushing back against MJ's tongue as the man tried to invade his mouth. Never give in, that was his motto.

MJ grunted, fucking his lips, trying to cut off his breath again. It was working. Sonny humped, his cock all but drilling into MJ's hip while he opened his mouth and just let MJ in, sucking in air at the same time. Jesus. He got a hand curled around his prick, MJ rubbing good and hard and making him feel it. Shit, the man was focused.

They finally broke so MJ could breathe, and Sonny lurched up to bite at the skin and muscle of MJ's shoulder. MJ needed to just feel for a bit. Just groove on them together and on how pissed off and hot Sonny made him. He figured the biting would help.

"Fuck. Fuck. Sonny." MJ's hips pushed down hard, grinding against him, even as those shoulders tugged away from his mouth.

The man made him forget everything. Why they'd fought, why they were struggling for the top. All Sonny could do was listen to that hot voice and feel MJ against him and go crazy. He wrapped around MJ, both arms and legs, clinging like a

limpet. And he bit some more, bringing up a mark that would stay for a fucking week.

"More. Need fucking more." MJ rolled until they were on their sides, chin lifted to give him more skin. Hell, yes.

Now they were in the fucking groove. Sonny licked the mark he'd just made before moving on, searching out more sensitive flesh, more hot goddamned sounds. MJ's collarbones got him cries, the hollow of the tanned throat had those fingers wrapped around his head, tugging him closer. Someone needed what only he could give. Made him hard as a rock, made him worried he'd come all over them before MJ got what he really had to have. So Sonny closed his eyes and grabbed another spot, his lips closing around one of MJ's nipples before he bit down deep.

"Yes!" MJ bucked, rolling him over, straddling him again. "Need. I fucking *need*, Sonny."

"Got me. Take what you need, Precious." He met that intense stare head-on, his short nails scratching down MJ's chest and belly, scoring a little. Then he traced the ink at the base of MJ's cock, pressing just hard enough to make the big vein running beneath throb for him.

MJ licked his own palm and reached back, wrapping that hand around his cock to slick it. Oh, fuck yes. Just like that. Of course, then MJ took him in deep, that fine little ass squeezing him tight.

Sonny shouted, his hips popping up to slam him right into MJ's body. "MJ. Precious. Jesus Fuck. I ... oh."

Fuck, he'd live his whole goddamn life and remember the way MJ arched above him, hard and needy, black marks

friggin' shining on that skin. His cock ached, but Sonny held off as long as he could, his muscles like stone as he gritted his teeth and grabbed MJ's cock, stroking like there was no tomorrow. He watched that body ripple, watched MJ's skin go deep red underneath as hot blood rushed to the surface.

"Fucking love you, you redneck bastard." The words were almost a snarl, MJ's body squeezing him like a fist as heat sprayed over his hand.

"MJ!" He lost it, his vision going all cloudy just like it had when MJ was strangling him, his hands clutching at whatever part of MJ they held. Sonny came so hard he grayed out, his own shout echoing.

All that hot, muscled body landed on him, MJ just heavy as fuck.

The sweat ran under his fingers when Sonny stroked MJ's back, easing them both back to earth. "Better, Precious?"

"Uh-huh." Lord, MJ could snuggle when he wanted to.

They both settled on the bed, their skin sticking together, their arms and legs all tangled. And if Sonny was the only one awake to hear the little chime on MJ's laptop that said he was getting an email, well so be it.

There would be time for work later.

Chapter Fifteen

Neil loved Paddy's stream of consciousness thoughts at work. He liked them even more at home, though. Paddy's home, the tiny little apartment hidden away on one end of the complex that had all of the distractions a man could want, including petrified pizza crust under the desk.

Kicking one leg over the arm of the couch, Neil listened and hummed along, making Paddy's thoughts into a little song. Not quite a nursery rhyme, almost a limerick. It kept his mind off other things.

Things like the little niggling voice he heard, closer now than it had been before, louder, telling him that Paddy was in danger. They didn't know Paddy was the target, and how Neil knew it was they, he wasn't sure. It just seemed like two distinct thoughts.

Sipping tea calmed and distracted, too, even if it was served in a mug made to look like a mutated fish, emblazoned with 'Product of Chernobyl', instead of a proper cup.

And even if it made Paddy laugh at him.

Paddy was cleaning, he thought, or perhaps the man was looking for something. Whichever it had started out to be, Paddy had been distracted by the computer email beeping, two books, a rainbow Slinky and a...

Fossilized frog.

"How's the tea?"

"Quite good, despite the mug. How's the, er, frog?"

"Hard as a rock and sorta dusty." Paddy grinned over at him, admiring him openly. "You know that the cup doesn't make a difference, right? Tea is tea is tea."

He could hear Paddy begin to wonder if different thicknesses of ceramic or china altered the cooling or sedimentation rate or if the glasses could somehow hold a taste.

"Actually, it rather does matter, but more for cultural reasons." He turned the mug around and around, smiling at it. "I like this, though."

Mainly because Paddy liked it.

"Oh, good." Paddy either found what he was looking for—a CD that was popped into a laptop, music filling the air—or he simply got distracted again, heading over toward him. "I have Pop-Tarts. Are you hungry?"

"Um. No, not really." He could eat, but not those sickly sweet things that had been in the cupboard far too long. "I might be in a bit. Shall we order pizza?"

"Sure, they're on speed dial." Paddy settled alongside him, stretching and sliding one hand on his leg. The touches were quite unconscious and quite addictive.

Neil curled alongside Paddy, closer even than Paddy had got them, letting touch add to Paddy's hum, drowning out the rest. "Oh. Better."

He earned a smile and a nod, but what he focused on was the deep wave of pure pleasure that poured through him, a crystal clear moment of satisfaction. His prick hardened, but that wasn't even his focus. Paddy was, pure and simple, and

all he could do was stare, taking in every little detail, before ... "Before."

"Hmm? Before what?" Paddy's mind began swirling again, curious and interested and happy.

Well, damn. "I have no idea. Sometimes I pick up random thoughts from elsewhere, and they come out aloud." That much was true, anyway. He hated lying to Paddy, and tried not to do it in the great scheme of things.

"Oh. I bet that could get awkward." Paddy rolled a bit, head landing in his lap. "From now on, I'll just respond in kind, like a word-association game."

Delighted, Neil laughed and dug the fingers of his free hand into Paddy's ribs. "Perfect, love. That will make the voices in my head all you."

"Oh. Oh, your poor..." Paddy started laughing, the sound quite merry, pure joy. "Your poor head!"

"You keep me quite happily amused." Neil had to kiss that laughing mouth. Had to.

He leaned forward and Paddy lifted to meet him, the kiss sparking another laugh, a low moan that was shared between them.

"Mmm. Good. Oh, love, good." They shifted again, Paddy turning and straddling him so they pressed together, rocking. The thoughts that danced through his lover—for that was what Paddy was, surely, not a dalliance or a distraction, but a lover—were like being privy to a clever porn movie. One featuring him and Paddy.

His heartbeat kicked up and he felt a flush all over as he nodded. "Which would you like to do first?"

"I have to choose?" The images flooded him—Paddy riding his cock, Paddy's tongue tracing his tattoos before heading down toward his crease, Paddy pushing deep inside him, his fingers sliding on Paddy's skin.

"I..." His moan surprised him, so loud and strident. His hips rose and fell, his head falling back against the roll of the chair.

Paddy reached down, worked his slacks open as those thoughts came faster, near crashing against him. His fingers pushing deep into Paddy's body, Paddy lapping the cream from the tip of his cock.

Oh. Oh, oh, oh. He could do any and all of that and be the happiest man on earth. Neil pushed up into Paddy's searching fingers, letting his prick slide along the contours of flesh and bone, letting the friction give him what he needed.

They were forehead to forehead, those amazing green eyes staring into him as Paddy moved, worked him. Images of Paddy bent over a chair, of him on Paddy's lap and jerking, his own hand pumping furiously—they were enough to drive a man to madness. No one had ever done this to him, no one had ever capitalized on his ability this way. Trust Paddy to be the one. His breath came harsh and hot as his body rolled and pushed. He felt lost in the pleasure, barely able to tell the fantasy from the reality.

He saw Paddy's smile, saw the joy in those eyes as the vision of Paddy kneeling in a shower, his cock spreading the swollen lips, slammed into him. "Yeah. Love."

Neil grunted as he came after hardly even a touch, the sweet visions too much for him to bear. He held Paddy's arms

and simply spent himself, taking a kiss that left them both breathless and panting.

Paddy blinked, eyelashes tickling his skin. "That was fun."

"You? What about..." He wanted to make Paddy feel good, too, but he was so languid, so floppy, that it was too hard to move.

"After pizza. I'm happy." The odd thing? Paddy was. Exceptionally so.

Such a bloody generous man. It made Neil feel even worse, but he pushed it away, wanting to bask a bit. Just a bit ... please.

Paddy kissed his jaw, tugged him down to cuddle. "Rest, yeah? I'll order in a minute."

Starting to wonder if Paddy could read his mind, Neil nodded and smiled, kissing what he could reach of Paddy's skin in somewhat random patterns. He would rest. They both would.

Somehow he had a feeling they would need their strength.

Chapter Sixteen

Man, he'd forgotten how good it felt to be packing. The pistol hadn't lived in the small of his back in ... a while. Too damned long. MJ grinned, remembering how a certain redneck had taken his pistol from him one chilly, foggy morning. Shit, the bastard had even figured out he was left-handed.

"You know..." He looked over at Sonny who was trying to decide whether they were going up through the mid-west or keep going south through Texas. "You're lucky I didn't shoot you that first morning."

"Huh?" Sonny looked up from his map, grinning a little. The payment had come through and they'd hit California. The last week had been spent playing janitor, setting those clever little Semtex charges all along these huge fuel lines beneath the compound, setting everything to blow. Now, they were just waiting for the right moment to slip in, grab that damned hard drive, and set the timers—one for the evacuation alarms, then the ones for that happy kaboom three and a half minutes later. Sonny was planning their route home, just in case someone chased them like last time. The fire department would take at least four minutes to get to the compound, but there were always police, always risks.

"I was just thinking about how I could have shot you. Missed all this. It would have been a waste of a perfectly good redneck."

"You know it, Precious," Sonny said, leaning back and stretching. Joints popped as Sonny really pushed into the

stretch, showing off for him. "Just like it would've been a total waste if I'd hit you hard enough to crack your head open."

"I'm too hardheaded for that. You might have choked me, though." He licked his lips, considered getting naked again. The ankle holster chafed.

"Uh-huh. You have proven that. All I need is some morphine, though, and down you go." That long form unbent, Sonny standing and pacing a little. The jeans and cowboy boots had been replaced by serviceable black fatigue-type pants and some rubber-soled boots. Sonny did know how to do a job, he had to admit.

"Yeah, yeah. You and your happy little auto injector thing." He stood, checking Sonny's sidearm. H&K USP, top of the line, nice and new and shiny and ... "Shit, I wish we could go on a live run with this."

"Patience is a virtue, Precious. Chill out. We'll get the call." Sonny grinned, shaking his head. "Always so eager to do violence."

"I want you armed." He wanted Sonny safe. It was like a fucking itch.

"It's okay. You wouldn't steer me wrong, and it won't jam, test run or not." Moving like a big old cat, Sonny came to him, hands settling on his hips while Sonny nipped his neck.

Distracting. Sonny was distracting as fuck. "I hate waiting, Sunshine."

"I know that, Precious. It ain't my strong suit, either." Those hot as fuck lips worked up under his ear. "Whatever will we do? Especially since we have to stay dressed and

armed and all. You know how fucking sexy you are with a gun in your hand?"

"You are a sick fuck." Christ, MJ adored him. "It's one of your best qualities."

"You think? I thought you liked my ass. And my sparkling sense of humor." Damned if Sonny didn't start a slow grind against him, fingers petting the holster at the small of his back.

It made him kind of twitchy, another man's hand near his piece. The weird part was, it made him kind of hot, Sonny's hand near his piece.

"Not gonna mess with it, Precious. Not in a bad way." That wild grin told him that Sonny knew. Crazy redneck bastard. One of Sonny's long assed legs wrapped up around his thigh, holding them together as Sonny kissed him like there was no tomorrow.

Fuck, there was nothing like that mouth. Nothing on earth. MJ shoved into the kiss, hands wrapping around Sonny, gun pressing against that tight ass. A hard moan pushed into his mouth, Sonny humping back and forth between his hands and his pelvis, cock hard in those roomy pants. Sonny kissed him, tongue fucking his mouth, daring him to respond in kind. He rose right to the challenge, rubbing into Sonny as he pushed into that hot little mouth.

They turned in a slow circle, Sonny moving them, that clever bastard finally getting his ass back against the little round table by the bed, stepping between his legs to rub some more. Then the man just bit his lip. Hard.

"Fuck!" He snarled a little, pushing back, their bodies slamming together.

"Uh-huh. You like it. Admit it." Laughing, Sonny pushed and pushed, that tight, hard ass rubbing back against his hands, against that damned gun. "Come on, Precious. Really give it to me."

"Always fucking pushing." The table groaned and shifted, the butt of the gun pushing against Sonny's ass.

"Always. Just need you, is all." God, Sonny did like that, didn't he, the way he went absolutely crazy.

Yeah. Yeah, he knew about needing. He groaned, looking for somewhere to lose the gun so he could use his hands.

He finally settled on the bed, tossing it there. The safety was on, so they should be good. Sonny laughed, licked at the split spot on his lower lip, stubbly chin rubbing his skin.

"You're dangerous." He got a double handful of ass, squeezing tight, chuckling as the crappy hotel painting crashed to the ground.

"So are you, Precious. Want you so fucking bad." The table creaked when Sonny crowded all up on him, all but climbing him to press down harder. Damn.

He spread his legs, braced himself, and gave Sonny something to rub against. "I'm right here. Come on, man. Show me."

Sonny showed him, lining them up through their clothes and rubbing their cocks together while he kissed at MJ's chin and throat, leaving stinging little bites as he went. All the while, Sonny's hands slipped and slid, pinching and petting

and loving. Shit. Shit, Sonny made him do stupid shit. Made him need...

His thoughts stuttered as Sonny's nails scraped a hot spot. "Right there. Again."

"Here?" One thumbnail scratched his nape. "Or here?" Sonny pinched his nipple through his shirt with the other hand. "Shit, Precious. You're hotter with your clothes on than any other guy I've ever done naked. Gonna come."

He nodded and gasped, head smacking hard against the wall as he arched. Yeah. Coming was an exceptional fucking idea.

"MJ!" He could feel it, the very moment that Sonny lost it, all that heavy muscle rippling against him. Sonny's hips snapped against his, adding just enough friction...

"Uhn..." The tension inside him let loose with a pop and, oh, fuck, yes. That was. Uh-huh.

"That's it, man. That's it." Sonny stroked his back, stopping just short of his holster, up and down and back again. "That's it."

He was about to nod and get all boneless when his cell phone rang.

Shit.

"Time to get to work, Sunshine. Gotta pay the bills."

Gotta make the world a better place and all that happy bullshit.

"Mm-hmm." Sonny laughed, smacking his ass before straightening up and bouncing a little. "Now what the hell did you do with my gun?"

"You really need to keep track of that, Sunshine. It's a bit important." He flipped the phone open. "Talk to me."

Five minutes later, he knew it was time, their best opportunity in three days of waiting right on them. Sonny had them both cleaned up, taking care of him while he was on the phone. They were ready.

"I'll call when the job has been completed. I expect full payment immediately, as per our agreement." He didn't wait for a response, he just clicked the phone closed and nodded to Sonny. He didn't need their answer. "You're driving?"

He got a look. "I only let you drive when I'm bleeding profusely. You ready to ride?"

He had his sidearm, his spare, his timers, his knives, his emergency bag. His redneck.

Yes.

Yes, it seemed he was ready.

"Let's ride, Sonny."

Chapter Seventeen

"Dude, it's my ass if I get caught."

Sonny could see the tension across MJ's shoulders as his Precious resisted the urge to whap the little man across the face. This little asshole didn't have a clue about what would happen if they got caught wandering around this particular thermodynamics lab, especially one where the security cams just conveniently went out. "You're good, man. I just left my security card in there when I was cleaning. Just let me in, I'll pop in and out."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'll be quick as a bunny." Innocent. Try for innocent, MJ. You had to be. Once.

A damned long time ago.

The guy pulled his key card out, triggered the voice recognition switch and, as the door opened, boom. There was Sonny with the syringe and Mr. Worried about His Job went down with a thump.

"Nice work."

"Anything for you, Precious." He grinned over, bouncing a little on his toes, helping MJ drag that deadweight into the lab and shut the door behind them. "So do you think this guy's research is really the great evil they make it out to be? Or do they just do that for your benefit, make them sound greasy?"

MJ thought a second, chewing on his bottom lip. "I don't know. I imagine both, but I don't stop to get to know them, if I have a choice. That makes it messier, when you know."

"Yeah." Shit, all he needed was to put MJ into a thinking mood. Sonny turned a corner, making sure there wasn't another door beyond the office. "I wasn't trying to accuse you of anything, you know?"

"Huh? Shit, it's a job. This mark makes weapons; I destroy them. We both chose our lines of business."

Better. MJ had a conscience. It was just wrapped up in a serious moral flexibility. It was fascinating. "So what are we gonna do after, Precious?"

"Get a shower, get our bags, and drive north. Maybe stop and see my mom?"

"You mentioned that before. Is she gonna hate me?" Somehow the thought of meeting MJ's momma terrified him. It really did.

"Not a chance. She'll stare and offer you hummus and a toke. Mom is incredibly flexible."

"Cool." Sonny tilted his head. "Does she know what you do?"

"She might have once. She doesn't anymore. She's kinda ... lost in a haze." MJ grinned, the look a little tight. "When my pop finally went over to the Alzheimers, she never bounced back."

"Ah." Yeah, he could relate to that. His momma had been just fine with his asshole of a daddy even through all of the mistresses, but when he'd died, she'd just wandered around lost.

MJ nodded, bouncing a little as he started searching for the hard drive, for the files they needed. "It's not here, Sonny.

Not the laptop, nothing. Shit." MJ wasn't even talking to him; the man was just jabbering, nerves firing some.

"So, what now?" Sonny beat a tattoo on the edge of a desk. This whole being trapped in a lab without windows was gonna give MJ an aneurism.

"I don't know. We'll have to wing it." MJ grabbed his mini-laptop, tip-tapping away, dialing into God knew what. "Guy we're hunting lives in the compound. Second floor. East wing. Has a fuckbuddy that's here on a work visa, but not government that we can find."

"Doesn't look like a bodyguard, though, right? I mean, if I remember all the specs." He thought he did. He hadn't killed that many brain cells.

"No concealed carry license. No PI. or bodyguard license. Hell, both these guys are skinny. No. Not protection. Records show the dude's a consultant."

"A consultant? That sounds ominous. Like a therapist or something." He amused himself by imagining MJ going to see a therapist. Oh, Christ on a crutch, that was a funny thought. Shit, some scary doctor-guy would tell his Precious to get in touch with his feelings and would end up with a smoking hole in the center of his desk.

It might be worth seeing.

"You ever set a bomb off under a psychiatrist, Precious?"

"What?" He got one of those looks again, one eyebrow up in MJ's hairline.

"Oh, just wondering." God, he loved that look. Made the waiting game bearable when MJ got all worried that he'd lost his mind. "I mean, someone, somewhere had to think you

needed therapy, tried to get you to talk to some egghead about your feelings."

"Not since Sister Mary Patrick sent me to confession when I was ten. Well, there was that situation in Amsterdam, but it was fixed with a roll of duct tape, a water hose, and a live eel."

Sonny hooted, whapping MJ on the back. "You're something else, Precious. So, do we wait for nightfall and go grab it?"

"We've got most of the people still in and out, ready to evacuate. Let's go in now. If we have to, we'll wait to leave. Blow things in the morning, but I really just want it done. I hate random casualties." MJ closed the laptop, screwed the silencer on his piece.

"Sounds like a plan." Way better. Waaay better than waiting until night. Hell, they might have time for supper and pie.

"Okay." It was like flipping a switch and it still creeped him out, the way MJ could go cold and sorta empty. Still, it worked.

He followed MJ's lead. The man was the boss at times like this. He just offered backup and a getaway ride. MJ made it across the big-assed place like he owned it. Then a flight of stairs, a couple of wires cut. It only took a second for MJ to jimmy the lock—a squirt of something from a bottle, a jiggle, and they were in, MJ moving toward the wall of the little foyer.

Sonny checked the danger areas, knowing it was probably unnecessary, but not wanting to get sloppy. He moved slow

and easy, his rubber soled boots not making a bit of noise. Someone was making noise, though. Lots of it. Kinda moany.

Lord. Figured. At least if they were getting busy the job would be quick and the guy might give up the hard drive without a fight.

MJ crouched down, moving quick as anything toward the noise, piece in hand. They made it to the messy little front room—the place looked like what Sonny imagined a fucking frat house would look like with the pizza boxes and bottles and piles of books.

The hall to the bedroom was pretty short, just an empty bathroom on the way. Sonny checked it, checked the corners of the little return by the bedroom door, nodding when MJ looked at him.

MJ reached for the door when the fucking knob started turning and MJ stepped back. He pulled his handy-dandy little dooper gun out as the door swung open part way and a tall, naked blond appeared. MJ got a bead on him, muzzle lifting up only to be met with a baseball bat smashing into the silencer. Well, fuck.

It was amazing how fast things could go to hell in a fucking handbasket. Sonny swung around, leaving the Glock in its holster, trying to get the unwieldy outfit he had loaded with some serious drugs into play. It had a muzzle that was just slightly too damned long and he almost blew it as the naked guy swung on him. He managed to blast off two rounds, though, and without hitting MJ. Go him.

MJ growled low, biting out a couple three cuss words while he dropped the mangled gun to the carpet and reached for

his ankle holster. Of course, that's when the little weird-assed naked whirlwind came screaming out of the bedroom, leaping on MJ's back and whacking him on the head with a ... bag of M&Ms? Sonny popped off two more shots at the weaving, tall, tattooed guy with the nice butt, then went for the dervish on MJ's back, hauling at him. He could hardly shoot the man while he was on MJ, could he?

"You leave him alone! There's no cash here, assholes! If there were, I wouldn't share! Leave Neil ALONE!" Oh, for fuck's sake.

MJ growled and slammed all of them back against a wall, sandwiching the little freak between them and cutting off the screams before the cavalry came running. "Goddamnit, grab the little fuck!"

They had to get the little shit to shut up. Sonny clamped a hand over mouth and nose, effectively cutting off the guy's airflow. Thank God the other one went down like a felled tree, landing at MJ's feet, almost sending them all ass over teakettle when they bounced off the wall.

MJ stepped over tall, skinny, and unconscious, and spun around. "Why does it always have to be a challenge with...? Rick?"

The little shit in his arms blinked and relaxed, nodding furiously.

"Well, fuck."

Sonny looked from MJ to the back of the curly red head of the guy MJ held like a lover. Which was weird, when he thought about the correlation between violence and fucking,

at least where MJ was concerned. Sonny shook his head. "You know this guy?"

The red curls bounced again and MJ sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "Yeah. We're fucking frat brothers."

"You're kidding me." He let go of the guy's mouth, as he figured there would be no screaming now that it was all old home week.

"Boomer? Boomer, what are you *doing* here? Everyone said you were dead. Everyone said you died at school."

MJ groaned. "Rick, what's your real fucking name?"

"Huh?"

"Your name, Rick."

"Padraic Almon Bair. Why?"

Boomer ... Oh, God. "Boomer?"

"Shut up." MJ glared at him, then stared at the guy. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Uh ... dangling?"

"Don't make me hurt you, Rick."

"Well, you have a *gun*. Isn't that why you're here?"

MJ rolled his eyes. "It doesn't have to hurt."

It was like watching a tennis match. Good thing he wasn't a jealous man, because that kind of banter belonged in the bedroom. "Does this mean we don't get to kill him?" Sonny asked.

"I might have you do it. It's sort of shitty form to off a brother, you know?"

"Yeah. I guess ... I mean. Is it gonna piss you off if I do? I know how you are." This was gonna be a quandary, he could tell.

"It would piss me off. Do you need money, Boomer? I'll write you a check, no sweat. I don't mind. Hell, you could've just knocked and *asked*."

MJ looked like he was in the middle of a nice bout of apoplexy. It was surprisingly adorable. Sonny figured he'd have to try it out himself later.

"How much could you write a check for?" He grinned, shifting his hold to get a better grip and getting a squeak. Oh right. Nakedness.

"What do you need? And is Neil all right? You didn't kill him, did you?" The Rick-person started wriggling, kicking some. "Honest to God, Boomer. If you killed the only steady guy I've had in ten years, I'm going to kick your butt."

"Sunshine." MJ was just staring, looking dazed. "Shut him up for a while? We gotta think."

"Okay." There wasn't anything handy to use as a gag, because the guy wasn't wearing clothes, so Sonny just hit him over the back of the head. That smashing thing he was good at. Even MJ could attest to that.

When both naked guys were laid out on the floor and Sonny had grabbed a sheet to tie them up and gag them with, just in case, Sonny went back to where MJ stood, gun in his hand, hand pressed to his forehead.

"So, were y'all good friends? Boomer?"

"No. He's younger than me. I already had my first M.S. when he showed up..." MJ chewed on his lips, pondering and fretting. "And don't call me Boomer."

"Why not, Precious? It's cute as hell." Never a better time to poke than when a man was in a dither. "So what are we gonna do with them?"

"We should just kill them both, make it look like a robbery and go." Uh-huh. Right. Robbery. That so wasn't MJ's style. Besides, nobody'd fucking believe it.

"Uh-huh. That's probably what we oughta do, but you ain't gonna." No way. And Sonny knew MJ's weird sense of loyalty. Anyone he allowed to call him by a nickname wasn't getting shot while he was asleep. Problem was, they couldn't just leave them here now, not with the redhead knowing who MJ was and shit.

"No. No, I'm not. Fuck." MJ walked over to the bed and sat, nose wrinkling. "Christ, it smells like a brothel in here."

"Go them." Sonny went over and sat next to him, bumping shoulders. "Look, we have a damned big trunk. We can take them with us, decide what to do on the road. We'll grab everything we can find in here, get the hell out. This joint's wired to blow. Better to get moving."

"It won't blow until I tell it to. Shit, I hate to move them. We'll have to wait for dark, but that'll probably work, though. Hell, we could book it north, then head toward the Rockies."

"Mm-hmm. You know I like booking it." It would be just like old times. On the run, shit in the trunk.

"Okay. Let's cuff them both and keep 'em under, but nothing where they'll puke and screw up the trunk and shit."

"Gotcha. We'll have to put the weaponry in the back seat. Good thing I hollowed out under the cushions, huh?" He hoped for a smile on that one, at least.

MJ nodded and reached out for his thigh. "You know it. I need somewhere to stash you when we get close to a liquor store."

"Uh-huh. Asshole." He leaned to give MJ a hard, bracing kiss. "Okay, Precious, I'll get the riot cuffs and all. Why don't you see what we need to take with us?"

"Well, clothes for one. Nothing we have'll fit either one of those two." The light was back on in MJ's eyes, that quick mind working and bouncing. "Any PDAs, laptops, anything."

Better. Sometimes he worried that the man was broken, but he always came back. Sonny nodded, getting up to go grab the pack they'd left in the front room. He came back with riot cuffs and his syringe pack. "So get them some clothes. And their IDs and shit if you can find them."

"Yeah. I'll pack enough that it looks like they've run together, should someone decide to sort through the rubble." MJ stood and started rummaging. "As big of a mess as this is, no one will ever fucking know. Of course, I could always set a charge in here. That's always handy in times like this."

Sick bastard, wanting to blow shit up.

"No shit." Yeah. Yeah, they could do this. They'd figure out what to do with two people in the trunk later. Lord.

"We'll drag them to the landing and back the car up, yeah? That'll be faster. We have about three hours before a shift change." MJ hooted as he grabbed some keys from a pair of slacks. "And we got a rental car with plates we can swipe for the first hundred miles or so."

"There you go." He grinned, kissing MJ again as the man went by. He just couldn't help it. There was something about MJ on adrenaline.

"Mmm. Too bad we have hostages. I could so suck you off in the car on the way out of town."

"Who says you can't?" Squeezing MJ's butt before turning to drug the one he'd just hit, Sonny wiggled his own ass and laughed. "Come on, this is weird with them naked."

MJ looked them both over, nose wrinkling. "No shit. It's almost like we're the fucking bad guys."

"Yeah." Sonny hooted. "Imagine that."

MJ swatted him on the way to the dresser. He held up a Star Wars T-shirt. "Oh. Tacky."

"Hey, now, don't knock the force." Sonny helped search, finding a laptop bag that looked too snazzy to belong to the redhead. "Think this belongs to the hot one?" he asked, wagging an eyebrow.

"Don't make me beat you, asshole. One or two shots will cure him of the pretty."

Oh, ho. Look at that pissy line MJ's lips took on. "Oh, come on, Boomer. You know I like blonds."

Shit, MJ could draw quicker than anyone he'd ever met. Ever. He stared into the muzzle of the gun. "Don't call me Boomer."

Lord. A man might think he had to watch what he said. "Sure, Precious. Sure. You know I will never, ever, do it again."

He even managed not to snort.

"Man, you're no fun to threaten anymore." MJ rolled his eyes and tossed over sweats and T-shirts. "Get 'em dressed, redneck."

He took a deep breath when MJ wasn't looking. The man thought he wasn't scared anymore? Shit. Sonny slid the soft clothes over the two limp forms, quiet as a church mouse.

MJ worked quick, filling three gym bags and a suitcase with personal shit and clothes, CDs and papers, all sorts of random crap.

"Don't forget the laptop in your hurry. And I think there was a little handheld." Although it was entirely possible that was a video game. They got the rest of the shit together that they needed. Then it was a waiting game. "So what would you do to me if I called you that again?"

"I could stick you under the back seat of the car." MJ grinned, making sure all the curtains were drawn tight. "Either that or I could tie you in the passenger side and make you watch while I drive."

"That would just be cruel." Grinning, he checked out the back window, looking over the access, then pulled the curtain tight tight again, because God knew MJ would freak if he didn't.

"I'm a stone-cold bitch." MJ stood over the Rick-guy and stared down. "Shit. He hasn't aged a bit. It's creepy. He seemed like a sweet kid, too."

"Well, what kind of sweet kid does thermonuclear bomb testing or whatever?" Shit, that was just fucked-up.

Something weird as fuck crossed MJ's face. Something he hadn't seen before. "You'd be surprised. How long 'til it's dark?"

"Half hour? Maybe forty-five minutes." Thank God he'd set his watch to California time. "Whatever will we do for that long?"

MJ was already pacing, going from room to room, eyes on those closed windows. "How long?"

"Don't make me drug you and drag you, too, Precious." If he didn't think the security might be smarter than MJ thought they were, he'd start a fight.

"You reach for that paintgun and you'll be writing left-handed for months."

"Lord, you just want to kill my poor hands, don't you? Come and sit with me, Precious." He went on out to the living room, leaving the two sleeping beauties in the hall. Moving pizza boxes and shit, he sat down and beckoned.

Sorta did his heart good, too, the way MJ came right over, pretty eyes fastened onto his. That shit made a man feel right.

He pulled MJ down against him, knowing now was no time to get busy, but knowing that he could calm MJ right down with a little petting and shit. Generally. "We'll figure it out, man. No worries, huh?"

Sonny ran his fingers up and down MJ's arm, slow and sure.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine. We will." MJ looked at him, focusing, trying. "I'm getting too old for this game. No wonder we're semi-retired."

"Uh-huh. Well, how often are you hired to fuck with someone you know and like, huh?" His hand slid right up to cup the back of MJ's neck, rubbing away the stiffness.

"Never. Hell, that's why I really prefer explosives over theft. It's much more my style." MJ leaned back into his touch, humming a little.

"There you go." Sonny massaged harder, really giving MJ the goods.

"Oh. I should have had you in Singapore..." MJ's lips opened, eyes actually falling closed.

"Uh-huh. You have to take me everywhere now, lover." Leaning close, he let his lips touch MJ's, his tongue sneaking between to taste. "And you'll have to tell me about Singapore, sometime. And I'll tell you about Meridian, Mississippi."

MJ smiled for him, nodded. Precious loved his stories, loved to sit and listen and laugh.

He could bullshit with the best of them, for sure. They leaned together for a bit, and Sonny chuckled a little, thinking how they'd retell this one over and over. "This will make a great one to share over tequila, man."

"Mm-hmm. On the boat. In the water with the moon in the air."

Oh, hell, yes. Out in the open water with nothing around them.

"Why the hell did we do this again?" he asked, laughing against MJ's mouth. He took a nice, deep, long kiss this time, knowing it was almost time to go, wanting the closeness.

MJ dove right into it, tongue sliding along his, stroking him. When the kiss broke, those bright eyes twinkled at him. "Because we're going to make three-quarter of a million, once everything is said and done, Sunshine."

"Oh, right. That's a good incentive." Yeah, they could buy an even better boat. Though really, he liked their little baby just fine. "You about ready to hit the road, Precious?"

"I think we should. Santa Barbara creeps me right the fuck out. Any place with talking crosswalks can't be all right."

"I'll get the car, okay? You get the shit next to the back door and see if you can't ... well, find a blanket or something." Taking one last hard kiss, Sonny got up and checked the Glock before heading off to pull the car around. They needed this shit at least partly done, and with any fucking luck they'd had their one mishap.

He didn't think MJ could deal with another.

Chapter Eighteen

Oh.

Oh, man.

Uh.

Ow.

And sorta urk.

And whoa. Dark.

Paddy started trying to move, stretching his legs out and hitting ... something?

Someone?

He opened his mouth to ask when whatever nasty thing was in his mouth stopped him.

Oh.

So entirely not anywhere near okay.

He kinda remembered a fight and a weird, tall, scary guy and Boomer. Or, at least a scarred up, scary, older, kinda mean version of the guy he remembered as Boomer.

He tried to think, he really did, but the—car? Truck? It was awful uncomfortable to be an SUV—hit a bump and he hit his head and the options were to stop thinking or start puking and he had this thing in his mouth and there was something in here with him and...

Yeah.

No thinking.

Sleeping.

Waiting.

Maybe when he woke up, it would have been that pizza he and Neil'd eaten.

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

Sausage had scary shit in it.

Chapter Nineteen

Well, shit.

How the fuck did he end up with two hostages, one five-alarm fire, and one ear that just wouldn't stop ringing?

Well, he knew about the ringing. He'd had to go back in and blow the first set by hand. Didn't give them near enough run-time.

Still.

Shit.

MJ bounced a little, sucking on a peppermint and staring out the open window. "I can't tell them we kept him. It'll ruin our viability."

"So we don't tell them. They'll never know. And hell, we can get rid of them later, you know?" Sonny was in his element, the wind whistling as the car motivated down the road at high speed. But not high enough to get them arrested.

"Yeah. Yeah. I fucking hate when things don't go according to plan." He stopped, tilted his head a little. "Well, except for a few times. There was this crazed meth dealer in North Carolina one time..."

"Uh-huh. And this terrorist who just assaulted him and threw him down a hill..." Sonny grinned wildly at him. "Man, I want a corn dog."

"And a chocolate milkshake." Hell, yes. Yes. Something normal and good and chocolate.

"Yeah. I mean we have Ding Dongs, but that just ain't cutting it. If we park way out in the lot and one of us stays with the car, we could get some."

"Works for me." He unwrapped another mint. "You think I should check on the baggage in the trunk or are they still safe back there?"

His Sonny was the man when it came to non-lethal shit. It was vaguely creepy, but incredibly handy.

"They should be good. I'll let you get the food and give them a little look when we stop. The only thing I worry about in an old car like this is the exhaust, though with the revamped engine..." Shrugging, Sonny flipped on the blinker and changed into the slow lane, heading up the next off ramp with a food and lodging sign. "I need to change the plates anyway."

"Yeah." His mind swirled as he tried to figure out whether to hit his hidey-hole in Arizona or listen to Sonny and head north.

"You're thinking hard, Precious. We definitely need chocolate. We should stock up at the convenience store, too. Eventually we'll have to feed them." They coasted into a fast food place that looked just a little greasy spoon and local, the kind of place that no one would ask questions.

"Yeah, they'll need water, too." He looked over at Sonny. "I've never had hostages before."

At least he got to blow shit up.

"Don't worry, man. I'm a professional. If anyone sees them, we'll tell them it's a Halloween prank." Oh, that grin was just so full of shit.

"You do seem to have a natural talent for kidnapping, I'll give you that." He reached over and goosed Sonny good and hard. "Two corny dogs, two tater tots, two shakes?"

"You know it. No. Make it four corny dogs. I want two. That hauling limp bodies thing is heavy work." They chuckled together and Sonny leaned over, surprising him with a hard kiss.

Oh.

Oh, that was what the doctor ordered. "One more?"

"Uh-huh." Their teeth clacked, Sonny kissed him so hard, one hand cupping his cheek, the square of thumb and palm fitting his jaw perfectly. Shit, yeah. There was nothing like Sonny and his fucking oral fixation to put a man back on track.

"Mmm. Better, Precious?" Sonny licked his lower lip, thumb rubbing his cheek.

MJ pushed the kiss deeper, leaning into Sonny's hand and fucking that sweet mouth. He finally leaned back, lips tingling and swollen. "Yeah. Better."

"Good." Sonny looked just as heavy-eyed and bruised-lipped as he felt. They both got out of the car in unison, Sonny checking the backseat while he wandered off toward the drive-in.

He got the food, although they didn't have tater tots, so he got curly fries. It sort of weirded him out a bit, that he knew Sonny wouldn't eat plain old fries. On the other hand, he had two hostages in the trunk of the car and, so long as they didn't suffocate and start stinking things up, he thought they were dealing with them pretty well.

Sonny leaned on the trunk while he trudged back, arms crossed over his chest. "They're both still out, but the fumes aren't a problem. I just dosed them good. We probably need to stop somewhere soon, though, and try to rouse them up, give them water."

"We're four hours out from one of my bolt-holes. Haven't been there in five years, but the chances are good it's still there. I know the bills are paid." It wouldn't be luxury, but it would be solitary as fuck.

"Sounds good. Point the way. After corn dogs." Grabbing a bag, Sonny headed for the little picnic table off at the end of the lot, a scraggly little tree hanging over it.

"They didn't have tater tots, but the shake machine was working." He dug out the mustard packets and handed some over before he sat.

"Cool. You didn't just get ... oh, you rock. Curly fries." Sonny's boot rubbed up against his leg. "This bolt-hole have more than one room?"

"There's an underground cellar for our friends. Then a nice airy bungalow for us." He hoped time hadn't changed things from airy to decrepit.

"There you go. I'm all over that, Precious." He got a look, those dark eyes serious as a heart attack. "Want you."

Yeah. Yeah, he and Sonny always needed after they had an ... incident.

MJ didn't argue; he just nodded. "Hard and deep."

They had enough lube for that, no sweat.

"You know it."

The way Sonny ate a corn dog ought to be illegal. He'd never thought that kind of food could be sexy until Sonny. Hell, he'd thought Twinkies were gross, once upon a time. He moaned a little.

"Huh?" Licking mustard off his upper lip, Sonny glanced over, hot as the midday sun. "What is it?"

"You and your mouth. I'm sure you're illegal in at least twenty states." Possibly thirty, thirty-five. That mouth was special.

"You want it, you got it." Sonny winked. "Of course, we're baking our buddies out in the sun, so we might oughta wait."

"Picky, picky, picky." He nodded and slurped on his shake, leg shaking as he pushed himself to quit thinking and quit fucking around and get into work-mode.

"You're rocking the table. Maybe sugar was a bad idea." Oh, the bastard. Crumpling up the trash, Sonny got up and then came around to haul him up, too. "Come on, Precious. Sooner we go, the sooner we can fuck."

"You going to let me drive?" Oh, fucking sounded like a fine idea. He was a fan.

That got him a loud snort. "Hell, no. If I want us to get there in one piece so I can have a piece of this?" Sonny squeezed his ass. "I drive."

"Yeah, yeah." He stole a kiss, biting good and hard on Sonny's lip as he pulled away. "Let's go."

They hit the road again after that, Sonny driving straight through with that single-minded intensity he admired so damned much. The man had priorities, and followed directions pretty well.

He actually dozed for half an hour after they crossed the Gila River and headed south. Sonny'd take care of shit long enough to get a nap.

When he woke up Sonny was poking him, right in his ribs. "Which way, Precious? Which way. Come on."

"Ow. Dammit. Uh." He frowned, trying to remember. "South through the saguaro. What we're looking for is a little wash called Durango."

God, he hadn't come out here in a long fucking time.

"You all right?" That hand slid down to his leg, squeezing a little. "I promise I didn't drug you."

"Not even a bit?" He chuckled and nodded. "I'm good. Probably need to get into my bag and grab a red. I'm not usually this stupid sleepy. Oh, right up here, take a left."

"No, no reds. I don't need you that jazzed. We need some downtime for at least a day, then you can bounce all you want." The car turned, zipping down the increasingly narrow roads under Sonny's deft control.

"Suck my ass, redneck. I don't bounce." Did he? He possibly could. Especially if he was all nervy. Which, the longer he had people in the trunk, the more he got. Nervy, that is.

"I'm working on getting us there. But you gotta bathe first. Your ass is probably all sweaty from that seat," Sonny said, hooting. The man did amuse himself.

Assuming there was water at the house and someone hadn't bogarted it. Of course, he'd called Carrie Ann from Yuma, told her to make sure there were towels and lights and

some food. He'd change the security codes on the gates and house when they got there.

He flipped his phone open, intending to call and check with her, but the reception out here was worse than crappy.

"The fence there, follow it until you come to a gate. That'll be ours."

"You're worse than my daddy, with all your bolt-holes, Precious." They finally got to the gate and it looked to be in pretty good shape. He had to hop out to open it. Sonny grinned over at him when he got back in. "I hope we have electricity."

"Carrie said she's been staying here two or three times a year on retreat. We should be good." He hoped.

"Oh, good." The bungalow came into view, and sure enough, Carrie had done all right by him. It looked neat as a pin. "Who's Carrie?"

"My cousin." Mom's dealer. Deep sea diver. Slam poet. Political activist and sometimes Greenpeace film crew. He'd introduced her to her first rally. Mom'd been so proud.

"Oh. Well, that's cool." He thought Sonny *might* have been a little jealous. Just a little. It was cool.

"She's a sweetheart. Knows her way around a boat. Stay here, Sunshine. If you see anyone, you get the hell out of here." He slipped out of the car, looking around for signs of a set-up, of trouble. Carrie was family, but everybody had a price.

"Yeah, like I'd leave you..." he heard Sonny mutter as he walked off.

Yeah, yeah. Sonny seriously lacked self-preservation sometimes. He checked around the house, looked in the basement windows, then inside. All clear.

Good girl, Carrie.

He nodded to Sonny, reset the electronic security with another code.

Sonny pulled right up to the door and came around to pop the trunk. That, at least, he did cautiously. But Rick and his ... whatever didn't pop up or anything.

"They still with us?" He headed down the porch step, watching for snakes.

"Yeah. Yeah, they're breathing just fine. The blond is a little green about the gills, but they'll be fine. We'll have to wake them up and get some water in them, though." Sonny had said that before, earlier, so if the man was that worried, they needed to do that ASAP.

"Okay. Let's get them in and I'll drop an IV line in them both."

"Oh, good idea, Precious." Giving him a grateful smile, Sonny grabbed Rick under the arms and started hauling, the strength in that big body always fucking amazing.

"I have one or two of those every so often." He grabbed some of the bags, dragging them up to the door. "We'll put them in the basement."

"Okay. I hope the stairs are short." Panting, Sonny dragged Rick right on in as he opened the door, heaving the limp form up and over the doorjamb, then toward the basement when he led the way.

The basement was cool and comfortable and secure. "Put him down. I'll get cots set up and the IVs started, man."

He didn't even wait to see where Sonny dropped Rick. He just started hunting sleeping bags and cots.

A few minutes later Sonny was back carrying the other one, and carrying him a little too damned carefully for MJ's taste. A lot more carefully than he had Rick.

Asshole.

Rick got the cot. Tall, blond, and skinny got the fucking floor.

Bastard.

MJ considered kicking the man. Hard.

Sonny helped him out with the last IV, glancing at him out of the corners of those damned dark eyes and grinning. "So, Boomer. What now?"

"Don't make me kill you, Sunshine. I just got used to working with a partner."

"Partner. Yeah. Come on, they'll be fine down here." Sonny headed right back up the stairs, long legs pushing that ass so it moved just so.

His mouth watered—literally watered—at the sight and he headed up behind, feet pounding on the stairs.

His.

Sonny turned on him at the top of the stairs, pushing him up against the wall beside the door, that sweet, hot mouth crashing down on his like a ton of bricks. There was no joking or teasing now, just pure need.

His fingers dug into Sonny's hair, pulling the sorry, beautiful son of a bitch closer. He opened wide, tongue

pushing back, fighting Sonny for more. He got what he asked for. Sonny pushed against him, kissing deep, tasting him. Bruising his lips. God, Sonny knew just where to bite, just where to squeeze.

More. Fuck, yes. More. He dragged his nails down Sonny's spine, hard enough to make his Sunshine hiss. Fumbling a little, Sonny ripped at MJ's clothes, grunting when cloth ripped, but not stopping one bit. Nope, Sonny kept at him until he was naked, pinching his nipples and cupping his cock. The kiss went wild, one of his legs wrapping around Sonny's hip as he humped. Fuck, he needed. Now.

Sonny put both hands under his ass and yanked, pulling him right off his feet so they could get more friction. Then the man bent and bit his neck, hard, surely leaving a lurid mark.

"Fuck, yes!" He got both legs wrapped around, hips rolling furiously so their cocks got the pressure they needed.

"MJ. Precious. I need so fucking bad." Sonny's eyes met his, just wild for him, Sonny's lips swollen from his kisses. His. Not some naked dude in Rick's apartment.

"Yeah. Yours." He leaned in, forehead to forehead, knowing they couldn't wait now, they both needed. "Come on. We'll get the fucking edge off and settle and you can fuck me until I scream."

"Uhn." Just like that Sonny came, the scent of come strong and hot, Sonny's hips snapping against his. "Oh. Fuck..."

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh." He reached down, got his fingers wet with Sonny's come. He shot before he had his fingers sucked clean.

"Christ, MJ." Sonny kissed him so hard he tasted blood, his lip grinding back against his teeth. He had to grin when they broke for air. That finger licking thing got Sonny every fucking time.

"Better." Not fucking done. Not yet. But better.

"Uh-huh. Need anything before we really get good?" His feet touched the floor, Sonny easing him down and patting his butt. "Because I'm gonna tear you up and I won't want to stop for a bathroom run or a drink."

"Just secure the door here and get the fucking lube. I need."

"Mine." Sonny got the door, putting a chair in front of it, then followed him to the little bedroom, crowding him, carrying their bag. The man had the right priorities.

"You know it. Yours." He tugged the blankets off the bed, settling right down so he could watch Sonny move.

Sonny stripped off the rest of the clothes before rummaging for the lube. Then Sonny stalked him, advancing on the bed like the predator he was, cock already rising again. "Ready to ride, Precious?"

"You ready to make me scream, Sunshine?" He spread his legs, fingers wrapping around his cock.

"Uh-huh. I am so ready for that, babe. I tell you what, this whole delayed gratification thing is not my bag." The bed dipped, Sonny crawling up between his legs, pushing his hand away from his skin. "Stop that. Mine."

"Prove it." It was all he could do to not arch up and beg for it, but he didn't. Go him for having a little self-control.

"Always with the dare." The cap from the lube went flying, and Sonny slicked up two fingers, shoving them right into him without even a warning, stretching him so hard and fast he saw stars.

"Sonny!" He grabbed his knees, pulling up and back, giving it right up.

"Yeah. Yeah, MJ. God, fucking hot for me." He wasn't quite over the sting when Sonny's fingers pulled out and Sonny's cock lined up to push into him, but the burn made it even better. Hotter.

"More. More, now. I need this. You." The tension in him made his shoulders leave the mattress, belly tight as a board.

"More. God." He got more, Sonny pushing in over and over, just slamming him. Those big hands bracketed his hips, yanking him up so Sonny could change the angle, pegging his gland again and again.

MJ just let himself go, crying out over and over, letting all the stress and bullshit out. Yes. Need. Good. Fuck. Grunting, Sonny gave it to him, sweat dripping down Sonny's face, that fine skin flushed deep red. Sonny always gave him what he needed. Always. One big hand finally cupped his ass, the other reaching for his cock, just like Sonny had promised.

"Sonny..." He groaned, prick jerking, heat spraying over Sonny's hand, dripping onto his belly.

"Oh fuck, Precious. Fuck, yes." Sonny looked right into his eyes and came, filling him up so hot and good his prick gave one last twitch of approval.

"Love." He reached up, traced Sonny's lips. "Much fucking better."

His finger slipped right into Sonny's mouth and Sonny sucked it, licking it. "You know it," Sonny said. "Needed you."

"Yeah. Balls to bones."

"You know it." Flopping next to him, Sonny grinned, one hand laying possessively on his hip, fingers moving idly.

"We're napping before we think, yeah?"

"Door's secure, right?" He dragged Sonny's jeans over, grabbed the .45 and shoved it under his pillow.

"It is. We're good." Sonny nuzzled up to him, spooning before he could roll back to his back. Yeah, that was the life.

Even if they were still on dry land.

Chapter Twenty

His head might simply fall off. Neil decided that it might be preferable if it did. His mouth felt like Napoleon's entire army had slept there on the night preceding Waterloo. His head pounded, and his stomach felt utterly revolting and also like it might revolt.

And someone, somewhere, was ... broadcasting.

Moaning, he tried to roll over and tell Paddy to stop; his hangover was too bad to listen to such wild thoughts. But he found himself unable to move, his hands caught behind him, something covering his mouth. And that, naturally, was when he began to panic, thrashing about fiercely.

The babbling got worse, Paddy escalating from wildness to pure hysteria, the thoughts slamming against him. Neil tried to roll, and something crashed down on him, something that felt like supple plastic and a metal pole. The noise became deafening in his head and he screamed behind whatever it was in his mouth, trying to drown it out.

Something creaked and groaned, then someone landed against him, all knees and elbows poking against him, weight holding him down.

Neil tried to breathe, tried to get his head together. He knew how to find his center, knew how to build his mental wall brick by brick. It was Paddy against him, confused and hungry and panicky, too, and every brick Neil tried to put into place against that bright, sharp mind slipped right out of his mental hands. Paddy's pointed chin caught the cloth in his

mouth, dragged it out of his lips with a tug and a sharp flash of pain.

"Oh. Oh, God." His voice came out raw, like someone had taken a rasp to his vocal chords. But his mouth was free.

"Paddy. Paddy, please."

Paddy went still, the thoughts suddenly sharp, focused.
Neil. Neil. Alive. Neil. Oh, god. Neil.

Yes. "Yes. Love. I want to try to get to your mouth. Can you hold still?" His own thoughts were working just fine. It wasn't just Paddy he heard, though. That was what was so ... deafening.

Sex. Violence. Boomer. Explosions. Cars. Drugs. Booze. Fear. Worry. They just kept coming, swirling everywhere. Paddy, though, stayed still for him, panic turning to curiosity, fear into crushing relief that he wasn't dead.

"That's it, sweet. That's it." Ignoring Paddy's weight and the stinging pain in his arm, along with the deadness in other parts of him, Neil leaned, searching Paddy's face with his lips. When he found the edge of a gag he grabbed it with his teeth and pulled.

"You're alive. I thought. I was so scared. I thought you were. I really did." Paddy's voice was as hoarse as his, rough as sandpaper. "There's something poking me. In me."

"I know, love. I can't figure out..." Neil closed his eyes and fought the nausea that almost overwhelmed him. "I think. I. It's a needle."

Ew. He could hear Paddy's dislike of that thought, but under that was the fact that his slippery lover was almost out of the cuffs.

Bless him. If they could just have their hands, just sit up, they might be able to handle this. "I'm sorry, love. I should have heard this coming. I did. But you captivated me so..."

Oh.

Oh, ow.

Guilt flooded him, sharp and heavy and overwhelming and black.

"No. Oh. Paddy." Neil gave up getting free for a moment in favor of a desperate kiss, needing to feel the touch of Paddy's skin, needing to pass on how much he needed Paddy. In his life, not just as a job.

Paddy sobbed into the kiss and the memories of a scarred blond overlaced with a much younger man. *Boomer. Boomer. Boomer.* They broke to breathe, both of them wheezing.

"Who. Who's Boomer, Paddy?"

"I went to school with him. He's the one who came to the apartment. I offered to give him money."

"Well, we're neither of us dead, are we?" Neil remembered now that there'd been men. He mostly remembered the big one, with the dark eyes and the shaved head.

"No. No. You're not dead. I'm sorry, Neil. I don't know what I did..." One of Paddy's hands popped free, the little wince of pain worth it.

"Oh, good lad." He laughed, the sound rusty and pained, as someone upstairs snorted and rolled over and started nibbling on someone's skin...

"Okay." Yes. He needed his hands. He felt like a tiny child, struggling to do the least little thing, his body betraying him. When his hands came free, Neil groaned, his numb shoulders

and upper arms starting to come back to life in the most uncomfortable way.

Paddy started crawling, hunting for a light. The worry and the panic were starting again, Paddy starting to think, to get scared. The nausea overwhelmed him, and Neil curled into a ball, clutching his belly as the dry heaves overtook him. Oh, God, just let him die. Poor Paddy. Neil felt utterly worthless.

Of course, his Paddy managed, didn't he? Lights came on and Neil found himself dragged onto a cot and covered up with a sleeping bag. He wasn't sure if the constant babble was out loud or not, but the triumph when Paddy found a chest freezer and camping supplies read clearly either way. His fingers scrabbled at the sleeping bag when he tried to sit up, but they fell back to his sides, his arms throbbing. Paddy moved around, muttering, and Neil thought about how Bethany had said Paddy was completely unable to deal with the realities of life. That woman needed to be fired.

Something cold and sweet was pressed between his lips. "Popsicle. Suck. It'll taste good. It's purple. Purple tastes good. There's a propane stove. There's got to be fuel. I found matches."

Paddy wandered off again, pulling boxes off shelves and rummaging.

Neil sucked. Oh, grape. Not a flavor he remembered from his childhood in England. Still, it soothed his sore throat and gave him something to focus on.

Whoever was upstairs was awake. Moving. Stalking around.

Paddy wasn't paying a bit of attention, using a screwdriver and a spatula to tear the back off a radio.

A radio?

"Paddy," he croaked. "What are you doing, love?"

"Making a taser, if I can find enough wire in here. Maybe a little bomb, but I'm not so good with those."

"Boomer is. Boomer's quite good with bombs. Sonny drives. They want bacon and eggs..."

Paddy nodded. "Boomer's the best. He can put a bomb in a lock, blow it, and you never would know he was there. I thought he died. Everyone thought he died."

"Paddy, love? Is there a trash can? I need to..." The heaves were about to be less dry.

"Close your eyes and breathe. Don't puke on the circuits." Paddy started hunting, thoughts chasing themselves in tight, furious circles.

Dizzying. "Yes. I mean no. I shall try not to. Hurry, please?" Oh, he was going to lose it. He was. Especially as a wave of anger hit him from upstairs.

A mop bucket got pushed into his hands, then Paddy was gone again, creeping up the stairs to look at the lock, to listen.

Good lad. Neil heaved, his meager stomach contents leaving him, the Popsicle utterly wasted on him. Sighing, he lay back on the cot, the pain in his arms finally starting to calm down, allowing him to think a little again.

Paddy was listening at the door, focused and still, trying to figure out what was going on, what they were doing here.

Neil 'listened' as well, trying to get his fogged brain to focus. "Something about money. They took money for you, Paddy, for your work."

That black guilt was back as Paddy listened, making the sounds of Paddy's thoughts sluggish and viscous.

"Come here, Paddy. Please?" He needed to touch Paddy's skin, needed to be with him. More than he needed to know what was going on. They weren't dead. That had to mean something.

Paddy slipped back down the stairs, face pale as cream. "You want another Popsicle? There's orange. I think I can make the taser work."

My fault. This is all my fault. They came for me. Neil came to watch me. They hurt Neil because he was with me. My fault. Oh, God. My fault.

"Lovely, all of it, but first I need you. Please, come here to me." He put every bit of persuasion he could into his voice, all of his fondness for Paddy there, too. "Come on."

Paddy shuffled over across the concrete, teeth working the thin bottom lip. "I'm sorry."

"I should be apologizing to you, sweet," he said, rolling up to grab Paddy's hand. "I was supposed to be keeping an eye out for you. Sit with me a minute. I promise to be less worthless soon. The drugs are wearing off."

"You're not. They hurt you." Paddy eased him back down, fingers petting him, mind swinging from an overwhelmed silence to the fluttering of a hundred little birds.

Neil closed his eyes a moment, hanging on to Paddy so there would be no more running about. His mind swirled, then

settled, then swirled again. "You're not exactly unaffected. Now. First things first. Did they leave us water?"

"There's a hot water heater and a case of gallon jugs that are full. There's camping stuff." There was no way those men upstairs would have left them with all this. They were supposed to still be unconscious.

"Emergency provisions, then. Excellent. Well, help me sit up, then, so I can find water and rinse my mouth out." He grinned, needing to ease Paddy's mind. "So I can kiss you."

"I ... I have enough propane to blow the door, but it'll be messy. I'm not good with bombs, but the DC adaptor and the 9-volt and the wire ... I could make the taser work." Paddy headed to the wall of black metal shelves, pulled out a case of gallon jugs.

"Good. Sooner or later they have to come down. You can get one, I can get the other. Blowing the door should be unnecessary." And dangerous. Not something he wanted Paddy to try in this frame of mind.

"Yeah. Yeah." Paddy poured a measure of water into the cup of his own hand, tasted it. "It's not cold, but it's wet."

Then the jug was lugged over.

"I'll settle for wet." Oh, yes. When he rinsed and spit into the mop bucket, then drank deeply, he felt much better. The blanket felt scratchy under him, and really, that seemed a relief. Normal sensations were setting in. "Kiss me?"

"You sure you want me to? I got you kidnapped. That's usually bad."

"Paddy. Don't be an arse. Come here and kiss me." Tugging, Neil brought their mouths together. He'd been fully

aware of the risks. He just needed to get them both out of here alive.

Paddy tasted sour and Neil could tell how hard this was, how scared Paddy was, and how much Paddy was trying to hide that from both of them.

He stroked the back of Paddy's head, soothing him. Yes, his Paddy was a creature of habit. Work, pizza, work. Just Neil coming into his life had shaken things up and now this. Poor, sweet, Paddy. Trying so hard. Neil kissed the fear right out of him for a moment, leaving them both breathing hard, shaking.

"We'll get out of this, love."

Paddy nodded. "If I have to, I'll make the bomb and make Boomer let us go."

"There you are. However, I think if you know him, we might have leverage." He laughed aloud at Paddy's reaction to the way his accent took 'leverage'. "Now. Shall we look about some?"

"If you feel up to it. There's lots of stuff down here." Paddy looked around. "It's weird, not knowing where I am."

"Arizona," he said absently, standing and wobbling like a newborn foal. He caught Paddy's shoulders, swaying. "They gave us an odd cocktail..."

"The desert? Don't fall, now." Paddy's hands trailed over his back, petting him.

"No, no, I won't. And yes. Somewhere dry." Wasn't Arizona all dry? Shaking his head, Neil put one foot in front of the other, sort of dancing.

"Okay. Dry. You look a little green, Neil. You want some trail mix?"

His stomach rolled. "No. No, but if you can find something like crackers..." He needed to stop whatever that was that came from upstairs. Someone's thoughts, chaotic as a hurricane.

"I'll try." Paddy sat him back down and started rummaging. "Ketchup. Tabasco. Ew. Squeezy peanut butter. Applesauce. Oh, cool. Saltines. They may be thirty years old, but they look crispy."

"Saltines. Give." That would settle him out some. Oh yes. And peanut butter. Later, when he needed protein. Joking, he looked at Paddy's haul. "Are there Pop-Tarts?"

"Not yet." Paddy sat on the floor, started working with the wires and radio again. "There better be some upstairs."

He couldn't help but stare a moment. Then he laughed again, the sound just on the edge of desperate. "We could knock on the door and ask."

"Not until the taser is done. Then I will."

"Good thought." Sliding down to the floor, he leaned on Paddy, knowing it was probably hampering the work, but the contact blocked out some of the other noise.

Paddy relaxed against him, fingers periodically on his thigh, his arm. "I want to go home."

"I know, sweet. We will. Somehow." First things first, get over the drugs. Second, look at their little prison. Third, listen in when it didn't hurt and find the weak spot to play to.

Grass green eyes stared up at him. "We will. I don't want to hurt anyone, but I won't let them hurt you either."

Neil nodded, tracing Paddy's cheek with his fingers. "No hurting if we can help it. I find it a good sign that we're alive, love. Those men are quite capable of killing us."

"Boomer wouldn't do that. He's a good man. We were frat brothers."

"Ah. That explains a great deal, actually." The anger, the frustration, and the odd sense of loyalty: it explained it all.

"He died in an explosion. It was terrible. They closed the frat house soon after. Got us all internships in different places." Paddy wrapped the wire around and around in a coil.

"So, this was not your typical beer and party fraternity, then. And he's hardly dead." Paddy. Oh, love, what they've done to you, he thought. It was much worse than Neil had imagined.

"Well, obviously. I don't know. Maybe it's like an amnesia thing. No, that doesn't work. He recognized me. His head is scarred, though." Paddy stopped, focusing on the wire a moment, clever fingers reaching for the wires in the radio.

"Well, we'll hope he can be reasoned with." Touching Paddy really, really helped. So did the saltines.

"I offered to write him a check." Paddy frowned, grabbed the jug of water, and drank deep.

"Are you all right, love?" It occurred to him that while he'd been wrapped up in his own misery, they had probably done something to Paddy as well, something unpleasant.

"Yeah. Yeah. I. Yeah. I'm okay. I just need to finish this so we can get out of here." Paddy was worried about the light bulb, about being stuck down here in the dark without being able to find their way out.

"I imagine they have emergency lanterns or torches," he said, stroking Paddy's back. "Would you like me to look?"

"Torches? Like tiki torches? Those could be handy." His mind was suddenly filled with images of Paddy shooting flaming wooden carved spears at the men upstairs and sending them screaming.

He chuckled. "No, as in, oh. What do you ... flashlights?" He leaned a little more, kissing Paddy's throat.

"They can be good clubs. The other would have been more fun." Paddy's lips were soft on his temple, his jaw.

"Of course they would have. You have a strange addiction to flame, love." They'd get out. Of course they would. And he would not retch. No indeed. Nope, as Paddy would say.

"Burning is good. It is." Paddy patted him, staring up the stairs, that amazing mind running in faster and faster circles. *Fire. Ice. Boomer. Explosive. Propane. Propane.*

Neil staggered away, searching for a trashcan or some such. It wasn't Paddy's fault. It was just ... too much. Somewhere upstairs, someone was furious, mind racing. And someone else was laughing. He might not survive this, not with Paddy's fear and worry creeping back in, slamming into him as he gagged and retched.

Neil finally curled into a ball on the floor. "Paddy? Please. I'll be all right. It's the drugs." if he could just get Paddy back into normal thoughts...

Drugs. Drugs. My fault. All my fault. Paddy's hands were icy cold when they dragged him onto the cot. "You stay there. I'm going to get you some help."

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

Then Paddy grabbed up his makeshift taser—that didn't work, Paddy knew it didn't work yet—and the canister of propane. Then Paddy headed up the stairs and started banging furiously.

"BOOMER! BOOMER! Neil's sick! You fucking let me OUT!"

"Paddy! Wait. Please." Oh, God, his head was going to explode. It just was. Doubling up, Neil brought his knees to his chest and rocked, his head feeling like it was splitting open to let his brains flow out like lava.

Then the whole world went dark again, fading away in a dizzying swirl, the last thought in his lacerated brain for Paddy.

Chapter Twenty One

The pounding on the door had Sonny rolling out of the bed and reaching for the Glock, his heart fucking pounding. What the fuck? What *the* fuck? Then he heard the voice, calling for Boomer, and he realized their new guests weren't out cold, tied up, or even docile anymore. "Precious, I think your old buddy wants a powwow."

"Huh. Little fuck's loud isn't he?" MJ didn't look nearly as stressed after a nice nap, grabbing his weapon with that surprising, creepy ease.

"BOOMER! I'll set this place on fire! You watch me!" Yeah, the little guy could shriek.

"Yup. Kinda like you when you tell me not to call you Boomer. How does he get away with it?" Sonny grinned, watching MJ move. It was one of his favorite things in the world.

"He's young and silly." He got a quick grin, eyes dancing. "You think I should get dressed before I answer the door?"

"Well, that depends. You think he can damage your parts? I like your parts." Oh, he did. He so fucking did.

"Rick? He's into fire. I'd better put some clothes on." MJ wiggled his ass as he bent over, tempting the hell out of Sonny. His hands actually flexed. Damn. He had to touch, just before it disappeared under cloth. Sonny dragged his thumb along MJ's crease before getting up and putting on jeans. He oughta act as backup.

"Mmm. We could just shoot them and be done with it..." Tempting asshole.

"Boomer! Boomer, please. He's really sick! I'll give you what you want, but Neil's sick!"

"He's your old frat buddy..." It would be a shame to shoot the blond. He wondered what kind of rage that would bring on if he said it. It might be entertaining.

"He is, and a damn smart kid, too." MJ sighed, cracked his neck and back. "Come on, let's calm Rick down and get some Phenergan in his man."

"Yeah, okay. I suppose you want me to stay away while you give the shot?" He wagged one eyebrow, really laying it on.

He got a sharp, pissy look. "You watch it, Sunshine, or I'll just shoot your new boyfriend and he'll stop being an issue."

Oh, ho. Sonny went over, loosely grasping the wrist of MJ's gun hand before taking a kiss. "You know you're my one and only. He's really gonna hurt himself. We should let him out."

"Yeah. Yeah." It sorta felt good, the way MJ relaxed and believed him, heading right out the door. "Keep your pants on, Rick. I bet you need to piss, huh? You want some food?"

"I want out, Boomer! Neil's sick. Really sick. He needs..." MJ opened the door, the little guy tumbling out, propane tank in one hand, weird ... thing in the other hand.

"Dude, you've been awake awhile." Sonny moved around, leaving MJ a clear line of fire if need be, watching whatever it was in the kid's hand. That was freaky.

"Neil's sick. You have to help him or ... I'll shock you."

MJ looked, shook his head. "Dude, you have your connections backwards. You're going to end up hurting yourself. Put down the propane."

Sonny hooted. "Besides, you couldn't shock MJ here if you put on a dress and did the hula. He's seen it all. I have a shot for your friend. It'll make him feel better."

"You promise? You're not going to hurt him?" Shit, had he ever been that innocent?

"Nope. Gonna make him all better." Oh, man, that look was evil. He wasn't gonna hurt the guy, but MJ sure was.

"He's really sick, Boomer. Why did you take me?"

MJ sighed, took the electronic thing from Rick and held his hand out for the propane. "Why do you think, Rick? Give me the propane."

"No. It's mine. And I don't know."

"Rick, don't be bitchy. You want your man helped? You hand over the tank. Now."

Sonny stepped in, smiling a little, turning on the redneck charm. "MJ's a little pissy because you ended up being a friend. He wanted to hurt you, he would have, you know? Come on and hand over the propane, honey. Before someone who can help your buddy gets hurt."

The canister got handed over, the guy pale as milk and shaking bad. Lord.

"Rick. Come on. Sit. You need some juice, huh? Sonny'll go deal with your man." Look at that. MJ being all nice and stuff. The man was a true sucker for a hard case.

He'd be jealous, but MJ wasn't looking at the feller like he looked at Sonny. Not a bit. He slipped on down the stairs, and man, the kid wasn't lying. The blond was just heaving, shaking, and didn't really even look awake for it. Man, even he didn't react that badly to the drugs.

Sonny gave the guy a shot, watching as the convulsions slowed, then stopped, before untangling the IV line and hooking the saline back up.

Poor guy.

"Is he okay?"

"Rick, sit down."

"I need to know if he's okay, Boomer."

"I'm losing patience, Rick."

Lord. Patience was not one of Precious' virtues to begin with. Sonny trotted back up the stairs. "He'll be fine. He had a bad reaction. The shot is working, though, and he's resting."

Rick sat there, a glass of orange juice in front of him. MJ looked at the guy like Rick was a curious little bug. "See? Not dead. Now tell me about the weapons. How did you get into it?"

"Huh?"

Sonny squatted in front of the kid, looking at him. Yup. Shocky. "Drink up, honey," Sonny said, putting the kid's fingers around the glass.

"I don't have any weapons. I don't even have any good kitchen knives left from the last breakup."

Sonny looked at MJ. "He's babbling."

"You think a Valium would help?"

"Maybe? I could give him another shot. He doesn't seem to get sick off them." They had to do something. Those hands were really starting to shake. Sonny worried the kid would have a psychotic breakdown.

"Okay. He's smart as fuck. I'd hate to ruin him."

"I'm sitting right HERE!" Oh, yeah. Psychotic breakdown. MJ'd shoot him for sure.

"Okay, Rick, right? Drink your orange juice, Rick, and then Precious here will explain." Explain what for sure he didn't know, but calming the little guy down seemed to be the most urgent bit of business.

MJ nodded, reached out to push the orange juice over, a bit of powdered something poured right in. Shit, MJ was good at that. He'd have to watch for that little trick. He did wonder if that accounted for some of his heavier sleeps. But it worked. The guy drank deep before setting the glass aside. Then all they had to do was wait. Sonny could almost feel sorry for him.

"I didn't ... I don't know why you picked me."

"We didn't pick you, Rick. We were hired to take your place out, get your info." MJ put some bread in the toaster.

"Take it out? My research? Why? Where are we?"

"He doesn't mean dinner and a movie, honey." Lord, those bright green eyes had a real cluelessness about them. Maybe the kid had no idea who he worked for.

"But. I'm a research guy. Neil's the important one. I'm just a scientist." Rick's eyes rolled a little, pupils huge.

"How much did you use, Precious?" Sonny murmured, watching the kid sway. He thought maybe MJ had gone overboard.

"Pill and a half. It'll put him out. What does he mean about the blond?"

"I dunno. He was sick as a dog, though. Passed out and still puking. I set him up so he wouldn't choke and got the

saline going. Want me to get this one comfy?" They had pillows and blankets.

"Yeah. He's about to topple over." MJ caught Rick as he fell, head lolling.

"Let's get him all laid out. Then we can make a plan." Something. Anything. They worked better with a plan.

"Plans are good, Sunshine. I'm a fan. Grab his legs."

They got the guy settled, nice and tight, like a bug in a rug. Then Sonny checked their other guest, who was sleeping peacefully. Woo.

"Well, that didn't go exactly as I thought it would, Precious," he said as he topped the stairs.

"Well, we're not both professional kidnappers. Just you. I'm still learning." Smart-ass.

"Don't make me beat you. We don't have time to make it good." He winked, even as his stomach growled. "Oh, wow. Okay. Hungry."

"Uh-huh. Bacon. Eggs. I think I saw English muffins in the freezer." MJ could focus on the important stuff, for sure. It was one of his most attractive traits.

"Cool. Man, this whole not killing people is hard work."

"No shit. It's way more complicated than blowing shit up." MJ grinned over at him, holding up a bag with tomatoes and peppers in it. "How did you ever get into this line of work?"

"There was this surfer guy who was trespassing. Believe it or not, I never did it before you." Just ran whiskey.

"You were so good at it. It's a natural skill." MJ grabbed a knife. "Go grab the muffin deals."

The freezer yielded muffins, the fridge butter. They could have a feast. "What can I say? You bring out the best in me."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You were looking for a reason to expand beyond meth." The bacon went into the pan, onions and peppers flying under MJ's knife. Lord save him from his Precious learning to cook.

"Watch it." When the knife stopped a minute he whapped MJ's ass with a dishtowel he'd found in a drawer. "You know those peppers would go way faster if you blew them up."

"I think they call that roasted, Sunshine." MJ twirled the knife on his index fingers, the asshole just showing off.

The base of Sonny's thumb throbbed, reminding him how good MJ was with a knife. Better not to get in the way of it. He thawed the muffins before toasting them and smearing them with butter.

"You're avoiding thinking about what we're gonna do with them."

"Well, what kind of choices do we have? Kill 'em or keep 'em."

"So what do we do if we keep 'em?" There. Not burned things. Yay.

"Uh ... put 'em on the boat and find a deserted island?" MJ flipped the bacon without burning anyone.

Mmm. Bacon. There was something about pork fat that was just like an aphrodisiac to a Mississippi boy. Sonny wandered over, leaning his chin on MJ's shoulder. "We could lock them in the basement with food and water."

"Mm-hmm. We could give them spoons. Eventually they'd dig themselves free." MJ leaned back, ass rubbing against him.

Chuckling, Sonny rubbed right back. "That little redhead would dig out in a day or two."

"He's a smart little bastard. He'd build them a bunker and burn the house down."

"You really like him, don't you?" That would complicate things, but dammit, how could a man kill someone he liked? MJ didn't have many friends. "That piece is about to burn."

"He knew me before. There aren't many." MJ rescued the bacon, flipping it over. "You want to beat some eggs?"

"Yeah." Moving away reluctantly, he left MJ with a sharp pinch on one ass cheek. Eggs. He could do eggs.

"Hey, I have to watch you and voluntary egg-making. You didn't just drug me, did you?"

"No. I made you bananas and gravy. How hard can eggs be?" He grinned and cracked stuff, making sure none of the shells ended up in the bowl. "Oh, Fire King bowls. My momma had those."

"Yeah?" The first round of bacon came out, started draining on paper towels. "Are they good bowls?"

"They last a long time and come in obscene colors..." Lord, the things you remembered. He got the eggs whipped up and wandered back over. "Pour about half that off for me?"

"Sure." MJ grinned at him, pouring out a good bit of the grease. "You want the veggies in the eggs?"

"Yeah. We'll do like a scramble thing. They do them in restaurants." He could do that. If Leon at the Waffle Hut could, he could.

"Cool. I'll hunt for cheese." The chopped and mangled vegetables were handed over. Man, that could have been his fingers if he'd gotten in the way. Sonny shook his head, whistling a little as he started sautéing. Only MJ could make a kidnapping all normal and domestic.

"The problem with letting them go is that we've been paid like they're dead. I got a bonus and everything." MJ pulled the muffins out. "That could be difficult for us."

"Wouldn't be the first time someone was unhappy with us." Of course, MJ had his professional reputation to think about. "Then again, it might behoove them to kinda go into hiding."

"Given that I transferred three-quarters of a mil for the job and there's another quarter waiting when the information from the hard drive is delivered? It would behoove all of us."

"Too true." Hey, the eggs and veggies looked much better cooked in bacon grease. Way to go Sonny! He grinned and slid half onto each plate MJ had gotten. "Muffins all toasty?"

"Yep. Bacon's all crispy. We're good." MJ plopped down at the table with bacon and bread.

Sonny added the egg plates and sat, grabbing a muffin. "Okay. So we just have to talk them into going off to Borneo. I can be persuasive, you know."

"I've noticed that about you. If they won't listen to you, then I'll start working on them." Oh, Lord. MJ's method of working involved screaming and blood and the periodic kaboom.

"Uh-huh. No torture. You like this one, remember?" His foot landed on MJ's and Sonny tickled with his toes.

MJ laughed around a bite of eggs. "There's always the blond."

"You're obsessed, Precious. Besides, that Rick seems to think he's important." Hell, he'd probably say the same thing about MJ if someone had kidnapped and drugged them. Oh, wait. Someone had.

"Yeah, maybe we can get some cash for him, if he's someone special."

"So pragmatic. I could think of other uses for him..." It had been at least twenty minutes since he'd needled MJ.

"Boomer."

Oh, ho! Those eyes went hot just like that. "Don't call me Boomer, asshole."

"Why not? It's cute as hell. And very descriptive. It suits you, Precious. Oh, hey, do you want some juice?" Look at the flush on those fine, tanned cheeks.

"I. Am. Not. Cute." Oh, man. That was adorable. He was going to get his ass kicked.

"You are. You have this little dimple just below your lower lip that gets deeper when you get pissy." He ought to know. He'd seen it. A lot.

"I'm going to hurt you." MJ's lips twitched though, didn't they?

Batting his eyelashes, Sonny wiggled, licking his fork. "Come and get me, Precious. I can't wait."

"Like I'm going to miss the chance to have bacon..." Now that was damn near an insult...

Torn between pouting and laughing, Sonny grabbed another piece of bacon and crunched. Not bad. "Good thing you're not a tofu fan."

"I grew up on it. I gave it up a long time ago. They're good eggs." Ooh. High praise.

"We're a good team." He deliberately didn't mention that one of his onions looked like a chopped up voodoo doll. Sonny sighed. "I really hate leaving shit dangling. But I just can't see killing them."

"Well, we can't keep 'em doped. We'll kill them that way. You think we should head for the boat after we deliver the information?"

"Well, that would get us away from anyone who might try to track us." Yeah, and they could always lose the baggage at sea if need be.

"If we're careful about stopping, we should be good." MJ's toes tickled his ankle, teased his foot.

"Mm-hmm." Now that his belly was set, other things were growling. "They'll both be out a bit, and we both ate onions."

"Lock them both in, I'll start the download, and we'll have more than a bit." That was a pure hunger right there. A need.

God, this man. He just made Sonny insane in the best possible way. "We can do that. You get naked again, Precious. Be waiting for me."

"Me. Lube. The bed. All we fucking need." MJ half-stood, kissed him hard enough that his head spun.

He staggered off to lock up the guests, his cock aching in his jeans. Jesus. Ninety to nothing, just boom. MJ always had him ready to go. The blond was calm, breathing easy, and

Rick was curled up into a little ball, eyes moving like mad behind those closed eyes. Sonny didn't want to give him any more drugs, but man, that wasn't restful. Couldn't be. He left them a lantern, made sure they had water and shit. Hell, that basement was well-provisioned. Just in case, he looked around for anything that might be used as a weapon.

He dragged the shovel, a little hand axe, and a screwdriver upstairs, locking the basement door behind him. Then he headed back to the bedroom, where MJ was kneeling on the bed, naked as a jaybird.

"Oh, fuck, MJ. You're enough to make a dead man rise." Sonny tore at his jeans, needing to be there, skin to skin. Like, immediately.

"I need you. Alive. Now, Sunshine." MJ reached around, two fingers disappearing in that tight ass.

Sonny moaned, his hips already starting to rock, even though he was nowhere near that ass. He couldn't decide. Watch? Or fuck? Watch? Fuck? Oh, God. He wrapped his fingers around his cock and pulled, trying to think.

MJ looked back over one shoulder, fucking himself faster, harder. "That's mine."

"Uh-huh. Okay. Good." Babbling like the damned fool he was, Sonny staggered over to the bed and grabbed the lube. As soon as he was all slick he knocked MJ's fingers away from that fine ass. "And this is mine," he mumbled, shoving in hard.

"Yes!" MJ's head slammed back, ass squeezing his prick, muscles rippling around him.

"Uhn. Precious ... fucking needed this." That ass squeezed down on him, his cock feeling like it was in the best kind of vise. Damn. Sonny started moving, his muscles straining, sweat just pouring off him. All that teasing, all that poking, it had just been foreplay.

They kept moving, found a hard, sweet fucking rhythm, skin slapping together. MJ took it, begged for him with that hot fucking ass. Goddamn. To think he was the only one, the only man who'd done this. It still fucking amazed him so much. Moving harder, Sonny leaned and bit where MJ's shoulder joined his neck, intending to draw blood.

"Sonny. Sonny, I. Uhn." Right there. He was gonna get his ink there. His spot.

Licking that little bit of skin, Sonny memorized the location, pushing into MJ over and over. "God, Precious. You have any idea how fucking amazing you are? Jesus."

"Yours. All fucking yours. Oh. There. Right there. Again." Demanding. Pushy. Needy. Just like him. Two of a goddamned kind. His hips smacked MJ's ass, his hands landing on those narrow hips to pull back and forth. He needed more, deeper, harder. Now. MJ's cries got louder, muscles jerking, gripping his cock like a fist. Reaching beneath them, Sonny grabbed MJ's cock, stroking it hard and fast, needing to feel MJ come around him. Wanting it beyond anything. He heard something—could have been his name, could have been cussing or begging. It didn't really fucking matter. All that mattered was the way MJ went stiff, the way that tanned body went tight and heat sprayed over his fingers.

Sonny grunted, letting his head sag so he could rub his cheek against the bruise he'd left on MJ's skin. Then he came like the proverbial load of bricks.

MJ groaned, holding him up, supporting them both. "That didn't suck at all, Sunshine. Not. At. All."

"Nope. No sucking. Just a good hard fuck." He chuckled, licking sweat off that sweet skin.

"Mm-hmm. Just what I needed to take the edges off."

"Yeah. We need to schedule one of those in at least every three hours. Maybe more." They eased apart, Sonny flopping on his back and hauling MJ to him.

"At least as long as we have all these edges..." MJ could snuggle with the best of them, which always surprised him, given that whole no-closed-places deal.

Still, the guy was like an octopus. "Think it's safe to go back to sleep? I don't want another rude awakening."

"You locked them up and didn't give Rick more propane?" At his nod, MJ grinned. "We're fine. Rick'll sleep for twelve hours, easy."

"Okay. Then I vote we stay right here." His hand rested right on MJ's hip, and he had to grin about how he'd found that spot for the tattoo up on MJ's neck. "Dream of getting ink."

"Dream of you inking me." MJ was damn near asleep already. He'd plumb wore the man out.

He could happily dream of that.

And he was pretty worn out himself. Sonny drifted off, hoping to hell he didn't dream of propane instead.

Chapter Twenty Two

He woke up slower this time, nothing in his head working. Paddy wasn't scared, wasn't mad, wasn't curious. Nothing. Like really. Weird. Possibly scary. He rolled over, heading to look at Neil, who didn't look crazed and hurting and sick anymore. Well, that was good. That meant he could go look in that freezer. He could work with Freon.

Well, he could if he could stop spinning around and around in a circle looking for a...

A...

A...

Screwdriver.

Yeah.

One of those.

Neil moaned a little, making him forget the screwdriver. Especially when Neil sat bolt upright, hair standing up everywhichways. "Paddy?"

"Huh?" Neil really needed a brush.

"Oh, thank God. I couldn't ... I couldn't hear you." Neil blinked at him, those eyes wide and weird, like a squirrel maybe, or a raccoon, or some other night dwelling animal...

Of course, those thoughts led to teeth and those tended to wig him out. Although, really, Paddy kind of thought that a three-legged rhinoceros could waltz through the room right now and he wouldn't care.

Weird.

"Are you ... are you all right, love?" Neil's knees didn't work. It was bizarre looking, but when Neil tried to stand his

legs went all scarecrow stuffed with straw, and he kinda plopped on the floor.

"You should be careful. Your knees aren't working." He headed over to the freezer, staring down at the top. Ding Dongs and juice boxes. Okay. "Are you hungry?"

"No?" Not that Neil sounded sure at all. "What's wrong, Paddy?"

"I..." Well, really, nothing, because if something was wrong he'd be wiggled out and he wasn't, or if he was, he couldn't tell, and if he couldn't tell, then he wasn't really wiggled, right? That sort of worked. "I had juice and then I woke up."

"Oh. They must have drugged you again. Whatever they gave me seems to have stopped the truly frightening nausea." A warm weight landed against his legs and when he looked down Neil was sort of. Well. Huddling against him. He could crawl, at least.

"Are you okay? I was going to take the freezer apart." That's right. He was going to find the uh ... long, pointy thing before Neil's knees distracted him. He smoothed down Neil's hair, just petting a little.

"I'm a bit off. So are you. You're ... flat. Barely making a sound. It's disturbing." That accent made Neil sound so matter-of-fact and normal.

"Uh-huh." He stared at his hand in Neil's hair. It didn't feel like his hand. It felt like someone else's hand going through someone else's hair. Of course, he didn't know what someone else's hand felt like and the hair was someone else's. That

sort of made him wonder if his hair felt like his own or someone else's...

"There you are." Neil sounded like he was smiling. Oh, he was. Yay. "So why are you taking apart the freezer?"

"Freon. Haloalkanes heated in a copper tubing become phosgene. If they breathe it, they'll choke and gag." At least he thought so. It shouldn't kill them, really. Unless he was remembering wrong...

"Who are they? Did you manage to talk to them?" Neil sort of rubbed on him like a cat.

"Boomer and another guy that I don't know. I don't think he was in the program with us. I think I would have remembered someone like that." Big. The not-Boomer guy was really, really big. "They said they had to do something with us."

"Paddy, my love. Who is Boomer?" Hadn't he told Neil who Boomer was? Of course, Neil had been really sick. Like making him worried Neil's intestines would come out sick. Which, ew. And not just a little ew, but ew enough to sort of poke through the fuzzy, happy shit.

"We were in the program together. In school. Not for long, well, I mean, together, not in school. He's older."

"Ah. That intensive school you attended. Right. And they need to do something with us. Well, I suppose it was just a matter of time..."

"Well, yes, except no." Paddy was fairly sure the problem was because Boomer knew him. It also explained why he hadn't been shot, though, which wasn't a problem. "What was a matter of time?"

"So how do we get out of this basement, love?" Neil tried to crawl up him, but ended up in a pile on the floor again.

"Well, bugger. Why on earth won't they work?"

"I don't know. They worked before. Let me look." God, he hoped he didn't need that screwdriver. Neil's knees looked fine. Not like the bones or joints had been taken out, which he wouldn't put past Boomer. But there was no gooeyness. So. It had to be something not fixable with a screwdriver. Well, woo. "Maybe you should have a juice box."

His ma used to give those to all of them when they got hot and dizzy and ... "We're in the desert."

"Are we? How extraordinary. Yes, I think I could have a juice and a Ding Dong. Maybe the sugar will get my brain working again." He'd have to get them, though. Neil couldn't get up.

"Okay. You stay there. You have that knee thing."

Maybe he'd trip over the screwdriver on the way to the freezer.

"All right, then." Neil sort of lolled, watching him, hands moving restlessly over the floor.

He slid the snacks and the juice over, then dug in the freezer for more Popsicles and ... Spinach. Ew. No. Blech. Oh, maybe there'd be a big chicken. Oh. Oh. Chicken gun. He'd always wanted to build one of those.

"Why a chicken?"

Oh, hey, Neil was like, getting back to normal.

"Airplanes. And because they're dead already." Neil sort of gave him a look, so he kept on. "The government shoots chickens at airplanes to make sure seagulls can't crash

through and folks get all huffy if you kill birds just to shoot them."

Besides, seagull gun sounded stupid.

"Oh, you mean a gun that shoots chickens. I thought you meant..." He got a sudden image of a dressed roasting chicken shooting little bombs out its cavity.

"No, the air pressure that would take would just be insane." He stopped.

Frowned.

Huh.

That was weird.

He needed a Popsicle for sure.

Possibly a juice box.

"Come sit with me a minute, love." Neil held out a hand sticky with chocolate frosting, a tiny smile playing around Neil's mouth.

Oh. Smiles. Cool. He'd hunt chickens later. He settled close, careful to avoid any possible knee weirdness.

"There. Now, how about you have your juice? We need to regroup, hmm?" Neil touched him, fingers trailing down his arm.

"I tried to fake them out with my taser, but Boomer's smarter than me there." Not smarter than him in his field, though.

"Well, I do appreciate the attempt. I just need to get my legs back under me, and let these drugs wear off. Then I might be able to focus on them."

"I'll figure something else out. They took the screwdriver and the propane." He should have kept quiet, but he'd been

scared for Neil. Really and truly scared and pissed off all at once.

"Well, you got them to help me a great deal, so thank you." Neil kissed his chin. "Would you like half a Ding Dong?"

"Sure." He kissed Neil full on the mouth, just because he hadn't and he needed to a little.

"Mmm." Neil kissed him right back, nothing deep and hard, just like they had all day and nothing pressing to do. Who knew, maybe they didn't. Oh. Better. Much better. The kiss eased back, then the chocolate and cream and sugar yummy was pushed in his lips. Oh, good.

"There. Chocolate is good." Laughing, Neil licked his lower lip even as he chewed, sharing the flavor. "Makes it much easier to sit and think. Or at least it seems so."

"Yeah." Of course, that whole licking thing didn't help his whole thought-process thing, did it? No. It just made him kind of gooey, in that non-funky, non-screwdriver requiring way.

"Better?" Neil asked, stroking his cheeks, peering into his eyes. There was a smear of cream on the corner of Neil's mouth.

"Uh-huh." There weren't any paper towels in reach, so the only thing to do was lick the cream away.

"Mmm." Well, Neil seemed to like the licking. Heck, Neil seemed to like him sitting close, too. One arm went around him, and Neil's elbows clearly worked better than his knees.

"Tastes good." Felt good. "How's your knees?"

"I dunno, really. I suppose I ought to try them again, hmm?" Neil didn't seem to want to move, though, just leaned harder against him.

"Maybe you should let them ... harden." He wrapped around and held tight.

"Okay. I'll let them solidify again." Turning right into his arms, Neil hugged him, holding on like he was the only solid thing in the world. "I can hear you now."

"That's good, right?" He leaned close, met Neil's eyes. He wanted it to be good. He wanted things to just be ... right.

"We'll be fine. This, for right now, is perfect." Neil gave him a kiss, lips nice and warm and chocolatey.

"Yeah." Except for the gooey knees, no screwdriver, no propane, stuck in the desert part? It was cool.

Mostly.

Face in the crook of his neck, Neil just sat there, holding him, breathing with him. He almost thought Neil was asleep until the man started mumbling. "So they couldn't kill us because Boomer knows you and the other one is Boomer's lover, did you know? And he doesn't want to kill us really, but he figured they were getting paid for it, and he dreams terribly loudly."

"Does he? I thought he was dead. Everybody thought he was."

"No, love, the other one. He dreams loudly. Why did you think Boomer was dead?" There was more curiosity about him in that than there was about Boomer. He could hear it, like a whisper on the back of his neck.

He vaguely thought that should wig him out, but it didn't, and he had enough to worry about, so he let it go. "There was a big explosion and a body and he was gone. He'd been there so long; he was like a ... wunderkind, really."

"So what on earth is he doing with the, er, what do you call it? Redneck? He likes to watch your friend eat Ding Dongs." Neil sounded faintly outraged by that.

Well, that part at least made sense, if they were lovers. Paddy liked to watch Neil eat. On the other thing, though, Paddy didn't know. "Maybe Boomer likes big guys?"

"Well." Moving, Neil sat up and blinked at him. "I'm going to fall asleep if we stay like this."

"Okay. I can help you get on the cot, if you want." Freon. Right. He needed an accelerant, too. And a way to keep Neil from breathing it.

"No. No, I need to stay awake and think. I just can't seem to ... I can't make my mind work." Shaking his head again, Neil blinked at him some more before sort of ... falling on him.

Oh, God. Please. He didn't know anything about fixing sick people. Okay. Okay. Relax. He could do this. See him cope. "I can prop you up?"

"Oh, I'll be fine. My back is just as spongy as my knees." Man, he had a sudden image of some weird British movie he'd watched in college where this guy kept saying he wasn't dead.

And that wiggled him right the fuck out.

Because what if Neil was dead?

What if he wasn't awake?

What if he was stoned and he didn't know it?

What if Boomer'd poisoned him and he was really dying and just wanting to be with Neil really bad?

"Stop. You're just having a lingering drug hangover. I'm perfectly all right. Just ... floppy."

"Floppy and perfectly all right don't *go* together, Neil."

"Well, you react differently, hmm?" Lolling like a baby, Neil laughed. "Really, if the situation were less dire I might be amused."

"Are they going to kill us?" Well, there. There it was. Right out in the open.

"From what I hear? No. At least not now. Of course the big one's thoughts are interspersed with 'mmm Twinkies' and lascivious thoughts of Boomer's ass." Neil laughed, one hand patting him clumsily.

"Ew. Just ... ew." Boomer was scary. Scarred and not sexy and just scary. Smart, though.

"I think that must be why his mind hurts mine. When I try to touch it. There's something about you brilliant types that leads me in little circles. You don't hurt, though. You feel good." Neil's voice started to fade, getting muffled.

"Well, good. You'd tell me, right? If you stopped wanting to hear me?"

"I can't imagine not wanting to, love. You're perfect for me, hmm? Do you know you never once questioned when I said I was a mind reader?"

"Should I have?" It just seemed ... perfectly reasonable. It still did.

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

"Well, most people have issues. You just seemed to accept me. I knew right then." Rambly Neil was starting to be cute.

"Knew what? That I wouldn't drag you in circles?" He kissed Neil's nose, watching Neil's eyes cross.

"No, I knew I needed you in my life." He got a sloppy, happy kiss. It was like Neil was drunk on the sugar from the Ding Dong. Still. He'd take it. He would, for as long as he didn't make Neil crazy.

Paddy leaned into the kiss, loving Neil as best he could while he tried to figure out how to get them out of here.

God, he was so incredibly fucked.

Chapter Twenty Three

Either Sonny needed a shave or a Brillo pad had gained sentience and was rubbing his belly. And, given that even those extremely expensive Brillo pads didn't come equipped with lips, and Carrie was extremely into organic green cleansers, he figured it must be his redneck.

Not that he was opposed to sentient cleansers, as a matter of course. They could be useful. Dangerous, if they unionized, but generally cool.

He reached out, let himself pet the curve of Sonny's scalp. He loved the whole not-quite-egg-shaped thing, the way the skin dipped behind Sonny's ears.

"Mmm. Hey, Precious?" Lazy, slow, Sonny moved up his body, kissing his chest and arms.

"Hey." He kept touching, fingers moving to Sonny's shoulders which, apparently, didn't need shaving. That shouldn't surprise him. Sonny had a lot of things on his shoulders; muscles, tanned skin, occasionally a freckle ... But not hair. Hair on his chest, yeah. He kept his eyes closed, hunting the barest hint that would give the freckles away, but no. Just smooth. Fucking cool.

"Afraid I might not be me if you look?" Sonny's chuckle stirred the air at his mouth just before Sonny kissed him, long eyelashes touching his.

No. No one tasted like this but a certain redneck he knew. MJ figured it was years of moonshine pickling Sonny somehow.

One big hand slid under his head, into his hair, tilting him up so Sonny could kiss him harder. That made the bruise on his neck and shoulder twinge, the one Sonny had left there, biting so damned deep. That made him groan, made things tingle all the way down his spine. The kiss went from good morning to fucking bone-melting in seconds, just driving through him.

A deep, hard noise came from Sonny, telling him Sunshine agreed one hundred and ten percent. That big body covered his, Sonny's cock hot against his hip. Oh. Good fucking morning. He wrapped his leg around Sonny, getting them set just right.

"Uhn." The kiss broke just long enough for Sonny to rub bristly cheeks against his, then they were at it again, lips and tongues fighting for every taste and feel. Sonny started a slow, rolling hump, pressing down then up. It was just like being on the boat, and fuck if that thought didn't make him grin. He went with it, meeting Sonny's rhythm and making the bedsprings creak. That damned redneck laughed at him, and they grinned like fools as they moved together, Sonny pulling him even closer, rubbing and rubbing. He grabbed hold of Sonny's bottom lip with his teeth, tugging just enough to make Sonny feel it. Addictive asshole.

"More." Rocking on him, Sonny urged him on, pushing him higher and higher. "Need more, Precious. Please."

"Yeah. Hell, yes." He bit at Sonny's lips again, digging into Sonny's thigh with his heel. Grunting, Sonny started really moving, the bed squeaking for them like crazy. Sonny's cock lined right up with his, hard and hot and wet, pushing against

him until his eyes tried to roll back from the feeling of the friction.

"Shit. Right there, Sunshine. Just there." The tip of his cock rubbed just right, his thighs jerking as it zinged through him.

"Uh-huh. Yeah. Fuck." Working him hard, Sonny kissed him, tongue slipping right into his mouth to fuck it in time with the movement of their hips.

When he shot, it was almost a surprise, the tight spring feeling inside of him letting go with a sproing and an uhn. Sonny hollered, hips pumping as hot come coated his belly, Sonny coming hard, too, just for him. Then that fucking heavy redneck collapsed on him. Flop. "Oh. All naps should end like this."

"Uh-huh. Hey, Precious," Sonny said again, this time smiling against his neck. "You feel damned good."

"Uh-huh. Ready to get moving soon, though. I want to get home." He missed their boat.

"Me, too. We'll just take the baggage with us. Figure out what to do on the water." It was amazing what the boat did for both of them, the water seeming to center them.

"Works for me." He grinned, fingers rubbing the base of Sonny's neck.

"Mmm." Those dark lashes fell, Sonny's eyes going half-lidded as he rubbed. "Oh, that feels ... yeah. Precious."

Oh, he could get off on that look. MJ dug in, fingers working harder. "Good?"

"Uh-huh. Damned good. Got muscles like frozen rope." Poor Sunshine. All that driving did a man some damage, as much as Sonny loved it.

He pushed Sonny over, straddled that fine ass, and got to work, humming aimlessly as he pushed and rubbed. His redneck was something—all muscle and strength, wrapped up in a sweet package. Sonny purred like a big fucking cat for him, too, stretching out and going boneless, letting him work. He got happy sounds, the muscles under his hands flexing and releasing, finally relaxing like nothing going. MJ leaned down, kissed the back of Sonny's neck. Oh. Better. He ran his thumbs all the way down Sonny's spine, fingers sprawled out on either side.

"Thank you," Sonny said, all muffled and happy sounding, that bristly head resting on Sonny's arms. Arching into his touch, Sonny hummed. "Damned fine hands, babe."

"Mmm. I like touching you." He loved how Sonny liked it.

"Uh-huh. And I like how you like touching me, and you like that, and it's a vicious cycle, Precious. Sucks to be us." Sonny had the weirdest sense of humor.

"Dork." He leaned down, bit Sonny's shoulder good and hard.

"Mmnuh." That whole body curled up for him, from toes to head, as Sonny rolled up supporting them both on those heavy arms. "Again."

So fucking strong. His fingers pushed down along those stunning goddamned muscles as he bit again, deeper and harder. One shudder shook Sonny's body, and the moan he

got was so long and rough that he went looking for another sound just like it.

It was like a game, finding the spots along Sonny's shoulders and back that made those amazing sounds.

"God, MJ. You. I ... Damn." Yeah, he was getting incoherence. Damn. That was a good sign. He could feel Sonny's hips moving that ass back against his crotch, too. Someone was getting it up again.

"Uh-huh." Down, down—he dragged his teeth along Sonny's spine, heading toward that tight little hole. Muscles moved, shivering as he worked across them. He could hear Sonny's breathing getting harsh, could feel the heat of Sonny's skin as the man started to sweat.

"Want to fuck you." He spread Sonny's cheeks, thumbs rubbing the tight hole before he leaned in and licked it. His.

"I'm all for it, Precious," Sonny said, pushing and pushing back at him, that ass so hard he could bounce a quarter off it. "Want you."

"Mm-hmm." He licked and rubbed, moaning against Sonny's flesh as he pointed his tongue and pushed in.

"MJ!" Sonny was damned oral, usually the one doing the sucking and licking, but the man loved it when MJ did this to him, let MJ know every time. Body and soul. Sonny's cock waited for him, heavy and thick, so MJ started stroking it in time. Not enough to get Sonny off, but enough to make his own personal redneck beg for it.

It worked. "Goddamnit, Precious. Fuck me. Need you. Come on." Yeah, begging. Demanding, more like. Impossible

bastard. Sonny smelled so good, and the tip of that cock leaked for him like crazy.

MJ used that wetness to slick his prick up, then he rubbed the head of his cock against Sonny's hole. "Right here."

Right fucking here, Sunshine.

"In. In. Now." Opening right up for him, Sonny let him in, let him slip right past the tight ring of muscles and get seated deep inside. His hips settled against Sonny's ass and he panted, resting a second as his eyes dragged over the bruises, the bite marks. The muscles.

Then he had to move, because Sonny wasn't gonna let him be still. That rough-shaven head rolled up and back and Sonny started straining, moving, hips rocking into him as those thigh muscles flexed. MJ found his balance and grabbed hold of Sonny's hips, slamming into that sweet ass, pushing deep.

"Uhn!" He got the best fucking sound, half shout, half groan. Sonny gave as good as he got, just going to town, squeezing down on his cock with those damned strong muscles, making his eyes roll in his head.

"Come on. Come on. Need you." Their skin slapped together, bruises popping up under his fingers.

"Yours. All..." Sonny trailed off, gasping, hips snapping as he came right into MJ's hand, just giving it up, hot and wet. That sweet ass clamped down on him so hard he thought he might die. Amazing way to go. His eyes rolled back into his head as he lost it, pounding Sonny's ass as he shot.

Only when he was done did Sonny ease them back down to the bed, those arms all bruised up pretty for him, sweat running down Sonny's back. "Jesus, I needed that, Precious."

"Uh-huh." Needed. Yes. Mm-hmm.

A low chuckle sounded, Sonny wiggling to get them comfortable. "Now, that was a self-satisfied sound if I've ever heard one."

He patted Sonny's ass, nodded. Yes. Incredibly satisfied. "All your fault."

"I'll take the blame, Precious. Every fucking time." Sonny was good that way, always willing to be the one in charge of the sex.

"Let's go home." He licked the curve of Sonny's ear.

"To the boat. Yeah. We need to go. We'll figure it all out there." Sonny nodded, one hand reaching back to slide along his hip.

"You know it." They could. After food.

And a shower.

Possibly a quick nap.

Oh, and explaining the situation to Tweedledum and Tweedledee in the basement.

After that, though? He and Sonny could head home.

Chapter Twenty Four

Neil woke Paddy, who had fallen asleep leaning on the freezer. He had a feeling their hosts were coming, and his feelings were rarely wrong. Especially since the big one, whose name was Sonny and who really wished they hadn't left the Ding Dongs in the basement, was so loud, mentally. So.

"Paddy, my love. Wake up. I think we're about to get a visit."

"Huh?" Paddy snapped awake, eyes flying open, worries about his knees and screwdrivers and tasers and the desperate need to pee mingling with a pure panic that Paddy hadn't taken the freezer apart yet.

"Shhh." He touched Paddy's cheek, letting his thumb stroke the high crest of cheekbone. "It's all right, love. It's fine."

"I ... I won't let them hurt you. Okay?" Paddy leaned forward toward his touch as the door opened, sunlight glowing in the doorway.

"Of course you won't. And I'm feeling much better now." They didn't have guns this time. Well, not loaded with drugs. They were going to try to reason with him and Paddy, he supposed.

"You two awake down there?" Boomer came halfway down the steps, so cautious. That man was ... difficult to read at best.

"Yes. We're awake." Paddy stood, standing between him and the men on the stairs.

"Yes, quite." Neil put a hand on Paddy's back, reminding the man he wasn't alone.

"Then come on up. We have things to discuss."

He could hear Paddy debating his options, so Neil gave that back a little shove. "Yes, let's all go up and talk like humans, hmm? No more drugs."

"You don't make it necessary; I won't force it." Of course, Neil wasn't so sure about Sonny on that point.

"Well, shall we?" Better to get them upstairs before Sonny pulled out that syringe. It might make Paddy twitchy. Just a bit.

"Okay. Okay. Just. Be careful." Paddy might simply vibrate into pieces, honestly, but Paddy's hand was strong on his elbow, helping him up the stairs. Bless his heart. This whole situation was just well beyond anything in Paddy's experience. Only for Neil was Paddy keeping it together, and that warmed him beyond reason. He sent a thought, not knowing if Paddy would get it, but needing to let them man know how very much Neil loved him.

It surprised him not at all to feel Paddy squeeze his arm in response, to feel Paddy settle a little beside him.

"Come on, Rick. Keep your shit together. If I was going to shoot you, I'd have done it while you were asleep."

"My shit is together, Boomer. I just want to go home."

"Well, honey, you can't," Sonny said, looking sympathetic. "We do have a plan, though."

"What? Why? I have ... my work."

That was, apparently, the wrong thing to say, because Boomer grabbed Paddy, thoughts suddenly ice-cold. "What? You think those men need more ways to kill, Rick?"

"Stop it. Just stop it, now." Pushing up between Paddy and Boomer, Neil growled. "Just quit. Honestly, do you think they tell him what he does? Did they tell you when you were in the program?"

Those ice-cold eyes landed on him, information slamming into him as sharp and hard as bullet blows. Guilt over things built. Fear. Love. The look in the eyes of the first man he killed. Pure panic at hearing Paula rot in the dark. "Sit down, man. This is between me and Rick."

"There's no need to manhandle him," Neil came back, making his voice calm as could be.

"You'd best sit, honey. Precious doesn't take well to folks arguing with him," came from Sonny.

Neil stared. Was that man flirting with him? How extraordinary.

White-hot fury flashed from MJ-Boomer-Precious and then disappeared. "Sit. All of you."

Paddy shook a little, looking back and forth between all of them. "Why ... why do I feel like everyone knows something but me?"

"Come and sit with me, love." The place had one little sofa. Let the other two sit apart in the chairs. He felt he and Paddy needed the safety in numbers. Paddy came to him, both of them settling as MJ propped himself against a wall and stared at them.

"So, here's the deal. We got offered an enormous amount of money to grab some information and one hell of a bonus to kill you. Obviously, you're alive. We have a bit of an issue."

Oh, poor Paddy. Hurt warred with confusion and heart-racing whydotheywantmedead fear. Neil reached over and took Paddy's hand.

"So, what do you want from us?" Neil asked.

"We can't stay here. We're going on a trip. You have two choices. You can cooperate and not fuck with me and sit in the back seat with your hands bound. Or we can knock you both out and put you in the trunk."

Neil glanced at Sonny, concentrating hard, and he would swear those dark-dark eyes widened a little. Surely not. Of course, drug-fogged he might not be as gentle as he could be. Still, Sonny's thoughts backed up Boomer's offer. "Where are we going?"

"East." The water. The ocean. A boat. MJ needed them off the land.

"We'll need a decision like now," Sonny chimed in. "You've got a get out of death free pass. I say you take it."

"But ... I need. My home." Poor Paddy.

"Let it go, Rick." Burned. Paddy's flat, the compound, the entire thing had been blown up and the remainder burned to the ground.

God. That would send Paddy into a tailspin. "Sweet, I think that if you're supposed to be dead and you aren't, it would go badly if you showed back up at your place of business."

"But. But you're not supposed to be. They'll come looking for you."

"For me?" Oh, good God. He really didn't want to get into his reasons for being with Paddy. "I doubt it. I imagine they think me dead, too. Hmm?"

He looked over at Boomer, meeting those stone-cold eyes.

"I would imagine. So, you two can have a shower, get some clothes on. Eat. And we'll go and no one dies, right Rick?"

"I. Yeah. I could use a shower."

"One step out of line, brother, I will blow your brains out, clear?"

Paddy nodded, one leg vibrating.

"That's quite enough of that. Paddy needs the restroom. And I need some food that is not pure sugar." Neil raised one brow at Sonny. "I'm afraid there aren't many Ding Dongs left."

"Sonny makes good eggs." MJ sighed and pushed himself upright, headed over to the couch and held Paddy's jaw, forcing Paddy to meet his eyes and looking close. "You need a Valium, Rick. I won't put you to sleep, but I don't want you having a psychotic break."

Pure fury rose in his chest for a moment and Neil wondered at himself. It was all about how Boomer touched Paddy like he was allowed to, and he clenched Paddy's hand hard so he didn't reach up and smack that hand aside. "Stop. You already drugged him and that's why he's having such difficulties. Feed us, let us bathe. He'll be fine."

MJ looked over at Sonny, shrugged. "Your call, Sunshine. You're the camp doctor."

Sonny came over and nudged Boomer out of the way, staring down into Paddy's eyes. "Yeah, okay. We need to just give them a minute. Let them go take a bath. Can't hurt."

Paddy nodded and stood, just about ready to bolt. "Where? Where is the bathroom?"

Boomer pointed and Paddy ran, feet pounding on the ground.

Poor love. Neil stood more slowly, staring MJ down. "I do thank you for not killing us."

"Don't push. He was creating things to hurt people. If it wasn't me, it would have been someone else."

"Yes, well, I'm sure you've never done anything to hurt anyone, have you? No, I'd say you're worse, because at least Paddy was all unknowing, thinking his research was simply that. Data collection. You know it, when you pull the trigger, don't you, Manning," he said, spitting out MJ/Boomer's real name.

His back hit the wall, MJ in his face, one hand around his throat. "Who the fuck are you?"

All he could do was croak, and through the buzzing in his ears he heard Sonny drawl, "Precious, he can't answer if you choke the life out of him. I know it would amuse you, but..."

"You are enjoying this altogether too much, shithead. Go see if Rick's trying to crawl through a window and quit protecting your boyfriend."

"Oh, you're hurtin' me." But Sonny winked and wandered off, hips swinging, long legs working. Neil would have appreciated it if his eyes weren't bugging out and his tongue wasn't starting to turn purple.

"Now, you listen to me. I don't know who you work for or what your game is." Those fingers loosened just enough that he didn't black out. "But you're going to tell me what I need to know or I will make your life a living hell. Clear?"

"Mm-hmm." Yes, of course. As soon as he could breathe enough to make sounds beyond ugh and oi.

MJ dropped him back onto the sofa, hands fisted at his side. "Who do you work for?"

"For Padraic's employers, naturally." His hand only shook the slightest bit as he massaged his sore throat. "I was supposed to protect him from people such as yourself. Sadly, you were simply not loud enough."

"Loud enough for what?" He could hear MJ working over that, the idea of him being a bodyguard.

Lack of oxygen must have fogged his brain. Neil simply smiled. "For me to know you were coming. Have you any tea?"

"Green tea." MJ arched an eyebrow. "Sonny must have given you too much."

"No, I really just like tea." What else was he supposed to say? I'm a mind reader who should have heard you coming, but Paddy drowns out everyone? Given MJ's reaction to his real name, Neil felt it highly unlikely that the truth would be well-received.

Sonny finally came back, and Neil breathed a sigh of relief. Ah, distraction.

"He's not trying to get out, but I think he's horked up his small intestine," Sonny said, coming to stand close to MJ

"So long as he doesn't hang himself with it, we're fine." MJ kicked his ankle. "Go deal with your primary, bodyguard. He seems to be queasy."

Gladly. Neil leaped up like his pants were on fire, feet slapping on the ceramic tiles as he headed right into the bathroom to kneel on the floor next to Paddy. "I, for one, could use a shower. Hmm?"

Paddy nodded, looking about as white as goat cheese. "Yeah. Yeah. I. Yeah."

His Paddy was trying. It wasn't working, exactly, but Paddy was trying.

"Come on, love. Come on. They need us to do this sooner rather than later." He tugged, pulling Paddy up to stand so he could turn on the water. "There. Sounds good, hmm?"

"Yeah." Paddy stripped off, helping him off with his sweats before stepping into the water, face turned up into the spray.

Neil stepped right in with Paddy, hands on Paddy's back, beginning to massage the tense muscles he found there. Poor Paddy. His thoughts seemed almost ... stalled. It was as if Paddy couldn't cope, so he'd stopped thinking altogether. Paddy's body, though, it was responding, muscles easing under the water and his touch. Yes, Neil thought. Just like that. He hummed tunelessly, moving closer, letting his body and his thoughts soothe. They were alive. They were going to stay that way. It would all be fine. Paddy leaned back against him, eyes closed. One hand reached back, sliding over his thigh, petting him.

"Better, hmm. I always find I think better when I'm clean." Murmuring nonsense, he leaned a little, his hands sliding around to the front so he could stroke Paddy's belly.

"I don't know what to think." Paddy liked that—liked his hands, his touch. It made Paddy feel real.

"Well, how about we focus on the here and now. Here being right here in the shower, the now being me touching you, yeah? I like to touch you, love." Paddy was starting to think, though, thoughts zinging about, mostly about him. It was quite a relief.

"Good. You won't stop, will you?" He could almost see himself through Paddy's eyes. It felt good.

"No, love. I won't stop." Resting his cheek against Paddy's back, Neil let himself relax, too, let himself touch. He'd come close to losing his head with MJ. He'd have to be more careful.

He could swear he heard Paddy murmur, "Need your head, Neil."

"Indeed. It's one of my best attributes. You like my mouth, too." He grinned. Goodness, no one had ever heard him like Paddy. No one.

"I do. I like your smile." Home. Paddy wanted to go home. To the lab. To the park. To bed.

Poor love. He let his hands wander, stroking hips and thighs, then chest and arms. "I'm sorry, sweet."

"Me, too. This is my fault. What ... I don't know what to do."

"It's not your fault. It's the people you worked for." He kissed one shoulder blade, luxuriating in this tiny moment to enjoy Paddy's skin.

"Bethy's going to be pissed..." Paddy hummed, cuddling against him.

"Oh, yes. Yes, she is." They swayed a little, turning so he could get more of the hot water. God, that felt good. His skin felt crusted with God knew what.

"Let me get the soap." Paddy turned, the little green bar sliding up over his belly.

"Mmm. Oh, love, you're good to me." Neil hooked one arm around Paddy's neck, pulling him down to kiss him. There. Yes. That was absolutely necessary. Paddy loved him. He heard it, felt it, clear as a bell on a cold morning. Loved him. Neil nodded against Paddy's chin, squeezing them together as hard as he could. "I love you, too, sweet. I love you, too."

It was going to be okay. They would get out on the road and have an opportunity to run. Then Neil would take Paddy and they'd find somewhere to light. Somewhere remote.

It was unfortunate, but Neil believed Boomer wasn't the biggest of the sharks that were swimming and looking for Paddy's tail.

Not the biggest at all.

Chapter Twenty Five

On the road again.

Sonny hummed under his breath, happy as a pig in shit to be back in his car and headed home. Even if the two very nervous-looking passengers in the backseat were kinda cramping his style.

There had been no roadside blow jobs or obscene Ding Dong or Twinkie eating tricks at all. He was getting a little buggy.

"Everyone all right?" he asked the car at large.

MJ was sprawled, feet up on the dash, book in his lap. "I'm cool, Sunshine. You want a beer?"

"I thought it was illegal to drink beer and drive," came from the backseat, the prim and proper British accent making him laugh.

"It is. But I'll take one anyway, thanks, Precious." MJ chuckled and stretched, plucking a cold one out for him. Tweedledee and Tweedledum were both riot cuffed and looking a bit pissy about it. He winked in the rearview mirror before he took the beer MJ popped open for him. "Y'all need a pit stop, you let me know. We can pull over."

They'd given the little one half a Valium before they'd started and the jitters and shit had faded. Neil, though? Shit. It was too fun to needle MJ with that one to drug him.

"I imagine you'll need one before we do," Neil said, his tone arch as could be. Sonny's momma had been able to talk like that, though her accent had been heavy south.

"You are a snide fuck for a man who protects a man that creates weapons for a living." MJ arched one eyebrow, needling Neil right back.

"I protect Paddy. Period. And you know, for someone who blows things up, thus ruining acres of land that might have been reclaimed by forest, or oceans that are now soiled with tanker run-off, you have no bloody room to talk."

Oh, man. Sonny had said something like that to MJ more than once. It always ended in violence.

"I only do controlled explosions, you ill-educated shithead." MJ's hand clenched, the knuckles creaking.

"Were you in the one at school? Were you even *there*?" Rick blinked up, frowning. "People missed you. They shut everything down after you left; sent us all out to internships."

"Internships, my ass." MJ snorted. "Of course I wasn't there, Rick. I had to get the hell out."

"He's a clever one, MJ." Sonny put the beer in the hand he was using to steer and rubbed MJ's leg with the other, trying to calm him down. Oh, man. That thigh was hard as a rock, muscles like cords under his hand.

"You didn't like school?"

"Jesus, Rick. You can't be that naive. They were using us."

"Stop. Stop the car and stop pushing him. It's bad enough you keep plying him with drugs." Neil sounded pissy.

Sonny looked back in the rearview. "Only if you really have to piss."

"Or unless you want to be shoved in the trunk." MJ looked almost gleeful.

"Now, Precious, don't be mean to the nice man." He let his fingers do the walking, slipping right up to MJ's zipper placket.

"There's a nice man?" MJ scooted a little, rubbing against his touch. "Where?"

"Right here, MJ. I'm always nice to you, huh?"

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Neil said. "Would you like me to urinate in your car?"

"Sonny might rip your cock off for that. Blood is okay, but piss and puke? Not in the car." MJ grinned, pushed his fingers down against those sweet, soft balls.

God, he wanted to stop the car, put the passengers in the trunk, and fuck like bunnies. Sonny sighed. That just wasn't logistically possible. "I'll pull off at the next exit. Y'all promise to behave we can even get food."

"Oh." Rick nodded, almost bouncing. Yeah, after all the puking, the poor guy probably was starving.

"That would be lovely."

He could just see Neil leaning into Paddy, cheek rubbing on the little guy's shoulder. It was kind of cute. But it wasn't as good as the feel of MJ pushing his hand rhythmically against that hardening cock.

"Something good and greasy, Sunshine, where people won't take notice of us." And where MJ could get them out without mass murder if need be.

"Got it." That meant no fast food. Teenagers were too damned curious for their own good. And it meant no homegrown diners. They needed a small Denny's or something.

"Mm-hmm..." MJ's hips rolled, just a little, that heavy cock nudging him. "Not yet."

"No?" Sonny teased, pushing and prodding. "You sure? I mean, we might have your Rick expire of hunger, and if the Brit pees in my car I might blow a vein."

"No more company on road trips, Sunshine. They cramp our style."

"I know." He grabbed the tab of MJ's jeans, giving Precious no more warning than that before he yanked it down. He grabbed that sweet cock, pulling at it a little awkwardly, but determined. "We got time for you to have a quick one."

"Boomer!"

"Shut up, Rick. I'm busy." MJ arched, hips pumping, helping. That was his man.

God, Precious was adorable. Sonny ignored the shocked noises from the backseat and went to town, really giving MJ what for. Damn, yeah. Hot and smooth, MJ's prick leaped in his hand, just making his mouth water.

"The shit I want to do once you get us home..." MJ's head rolled, one hand joining his to pump that pretty cock.

His own cock ached, but he had to focus on the road, not dropping the beer, and MJ's pleasure. "Come on, Precious. Come on."

"Uh-huh..." MJ grunted, one knee coming up as spunk sprayed over his hand. Oh, hell yes. Just like that.

"Oh. My. God."

The outrage in Neil's voice made Sonny just roar as he looked over at MJ, watching that flushed face settle into slack, post orgasm relaxation. "I think we offended someone."

"Yeah? Go us. I'd hate to get out of practice, man." MJ licked his lips, grinned like a fool. "Wait 'til I blow you while you're driving. They'll love that."

"Oh, yeah."

"Oh, I think not. Is it possible to STOP NOW?"

Well, hey, the guy could achieve full volume. Sonny sucked down the last of his beer and handed the empty to MJ, ruefully noting that he should have licked his hand clean.

"Sure, English. Keep your pants on."

"I," Neil countered, "am not the one with them undone."

MJ chuckled. "Well, if you're a *very* good asshole, maybe we'll undo them on the next leg and Rick can help you out."

"BOOMER!"

Sonny just loved that man. He really did. There. He saw a sign for a Village Inn and pulled into the right lane so he could hit the off ramp. "We'll stop and pee and eat, but I swear, one false move and I'll let Precious here have at you."

"You'll have to cut us loose. People will notice if we eat like squirrels."

That must've tickled MJ, because Rick got a laugh. "Maybe. Maybe not. Still, I'll snip you."

"Snippy is what Mr. Blond and British does, Precious." They coasted on up the off ramp, turning left and heading right on into the parking lot of the restaurant. It was a good time of day to stop, between lunch and supper rushes. It would be slow, maybe one waitress on, and at this hour she'd be more interested in having a smoke out back than looking at their odd bunch.

"Yep. We could turn him into INS." MJ leaned over the back, cutting Neil's cuffs, and Sonny heard MJ whisper. "Do not fuck this up, man. I will make you sorry if you do."

Man, there was nothing sexier than MJ threatening people. Except MJ with a gun. Or MJ with a knife, though that tended to be painful for him.

"We won't. We just need food and a bathroom, Boomer. Honest." Boomer. He loved it.

Sonny rummaged and got a bag, cleaning up beer bottles and peanut butter cheese cracker wrappers. "Come on, you two. Boomer," he added as he got out of the car.

"Don't make me kill you, Sonny." MJ pulled on a loose jacket to hide his holster. "You're terribly cute."

"I know. It saves my ass over and over. That and you like to fuck it." Bingo. He was right on the money. No hostess; the waitress seated them and she hardly had time to look at them. Her boyfriend was in there. "Okay, MJ. You take Rick here to the potty."

"Goodie." MJ chuckled and stood, hand on Rick's elbow, steering the guy.

"Stay there," he said, when Neil would have followed. "You and I go next."

Neil rolled his eyes, but stayed, opening the menu and wrinkling his nose. "Well, I suppose I could have a salad."

Drumming his fingers on the table, watching the bathroom door, Sonny shook his head. "Nah, they spray it with that lettuce preserve stuff. Get something fried. That high a heat will kill anything, honey."

"Do y'all know what you want to drink?" Bubblegum snapping, lips painted like a whore—MJ was going to love this little girl.

"Hot tea, please," Neil said immediately.

Sonny looked at him, head tilting. "They make tea hot? I'll take iced tea, honey. And we've got the two others."

"I want coffee and water, please." MJ sat and Paddy did, too, looking a little like a rabbit in a snare.

"Paddy? What would you like to drink?" Neil put a hand on Rick's arm, shaking it a little.

"Coke. I want a coke with ice, please."

"Cool. Hot tea, cold tea, water, coffee, Coke. You guys have different tastes."

MJ snorted. "You have no fucking idea."

The waitress hooted as she left, and Sonny gave MJ a wink before hauling Neil up. "We'll be back."

"No blood in the bathroom, now. Someone might notice." MJ's laugh was altogether too amused for decency's sake.

"Now, why would there be blood when other things would be so much more fun. Come on, English." He stared at MJ out of the corner of his eye as they left. Oh, ho. Look at those eyes flash. He'd have to make sure there wasn't salt in his tea when he got back. God, he loved needling MJ.

"One of these days he's going to kill you, you know."

"Uh-huh. But what a way to go." In, then out of the bathroom they went, both of them sharing a sigh of relief. He even washed his hands, because, damn, Neil seemed prissy. "Come on, let's go order some food."

Neil nodded, then the guy blinked. "We need to return to the table."

They hit the door and headed down the restaurant in time to see MJ with a lighter and Rick with a couple of folded up napkins and a straw.

Oh, holy Jesus.

"No setting the place on fire, Precious, that would get us noticed in a hurry." Sonny blew out the flame and sat, nudging MJ's leg under the table.

Neil just gave Paddy this look.

Paddy blinked over, but MJ just grinned, eyes twinkling. "Rick has some interesting ideas about incendiary devices."

"No. Nothing is going to burn and/or explode. Who wants an appetizer?" He sat, whapping MJ lightly. "I want fried cheese."

"I ordered some of those and some onion rings and chili cheese fries for Rick and Skeletor over there." MJ put the lighter away, looking not the least bit repentant. Asshole.

"At least I'm not a psychopath who truly believes he's saving the world," Neil said, curling his lip.

"Is that what they told you, Rick? That the weapons would help?" MJ's hand slid over Sonny's leg, petting nice and easy.

"I meant you."

Sonny sighed. "You two are like dogs in a pit. Leave it be so we can eat."

"Dog fighting is atrocious, Sonny. Pick another analogy." MJ stretched up tall as the short little fuck could, bones just creaking.

"Okay, you're like two Aqua-Netted skanks at a football game, fighting over the quarterback." His fingers went right for the stretch of skin between MJ's shirt and waistband.

"Fluorocarbons eat the ozone, but I'd fight over a quarterback." MJ chuckled, hands dropping.

"What did we do, Paddy? There we were, minding our own business..." Neil turned big eyes on the little guy, reaching out to touch a little, too.

"Apparently it's my fault. I don't know. I offered to write them a check."

"I'm only teasing, love." Those long fingers stroked the back of Rick's hand and damned if the little guy didn't relax.

He knew that one.

MJ chuckled, winked over to him. "We're gonna have to put them in the hold in the boat with a shitload of lube."

"Yup. They don't get hand jobs in the car."

The waitress plunked the appetizers down in front of them just as Sonny said that, popping her gum loud enough that they all ducked.

MJ, the shameless hussy, just grinned up. "I'd like a patty melt, please."

"You bet, sugar," the waitress said, giving MJ a blinding smile. "What about y'all?"

"I think the chicken fingers," Sonny said. "With blue cheese, not ranch."

"Pancakes. We'd both like pancakes, please, and bacon." Rick nodded to Neil like the man'd said something.

"And the blueberry syrup. Paddy likes that." Neil gave Paddy this look that seemed almost too damned intimate to

intrude on. Figured that they'd end up with the weird gay mark. Not that a raging homophobe would be better. More fun to poke, but not long-term better. "So, how much longer will it take to get us ... wherever it is we're going?"

"Three days, give or take." MJ shrugged, took an onion ring. "Then we'll get to the boat and things'll be a little less tense."

He leaned back, munched a minute, licking marinara sauce off his lip before crunching on the cheese stick.

Rick blinked over. "Three whole days?"

Looked like blond and snide didn't like the idea. "What? You don't like my driving?"

"No one can complain about you behind the wheel, Sunshine. You're a demon."

"Demons aren't *good*, Boomer." The little guy was looking to get stomped.

"I've never been wrecked with someone in the car with me..." Sonny grinned, watching two horrified faces and one amused one.

"Yet. You forgot yet, Sunshine. I rolled my last car, totaled it." MJ's smile faded just a little, hand sliding up his back to touch that bullet hole.

"Yeah, well. That's why you don't drive." He leaned into the touch, thinking about that whole mad chase across country. Knock on wood, this one would be better. He got a refill on his iced tea and they demolished the rest of the appetizers before anyone spoke up again.

Rick managed to snarf all the chili cheese fries before the pancakes showed up, and man, one of these things was not

like the other. It was fascinating to watch, really. He didn't think anyone could eat more than him. He was flat wrong.

"It's always the little ones that burn it off, yeah?" MJ shook his head, grinned. "He doesn't look older."

"You do." Rick winced and shrugged. "What happened to your face?"

MJ's fingers stroked the heavy scar and Sonny's prick gave a jerk. That? That scar was his. "Gun fire. Lover's quarrel that I got in the middle of."

Sonny pinched MJ's thigh good and hard; him and Woody hadn't been lovers in a long damn time. The problem was that Woody hadn't figured that out.

"Ow."

"You know it."

Sonny fought the urge to stroke MJ's cheek, too. "Hazard of the job, right, Precious? Bullets tend to fly around him."

"They do. It's unreal." MJ stole half of a chicken strip and gave over a pickle and some fries.

"Perhaps because you're an adrenaline junkie who doesn't know when to keep your head down, hmm?" Oh, Neil was almost as good at needling Precious as he was.

"No, it has more to do with the fact that they give idiots weapons who don't need them." One eyebrow arched. "If you were protection, why weren't you carrying?"

"I'm rather a different kind of guard than that," Neil said, eyes skittering away from Paddy's.

Oh, ho. Somebody was telling a fib.

And didn't MJ latch onto that like a hungry baby to a tit. "Oh? What kind of guard, then? Please, enlighten me."

Neil drew himself up. "I'd rather not. As much as you value yourself as a man who can keep secrets, Manning, I should not like to trust you with mine. I'll just let you go on sharing Robert Junior's here."

MJ stopped and stared over the table, hand clenched around his water glass. Sonny heard the glass crack before the water spilled. Jesus fuck.

Grabbing his napkin, Sonny mopped up before looking at MJ's hand. "Mister, I don't know how you know so much about us if you didn't know we was coming, but you'd best stop that personal shit before he kills you."

"Finish your food, Rick. It's time to go." MJ's voice was dead-cold and enough to make him shudder.

"I'm done." Rick was watching them all like he was at a tennis match.

"Well, I want a box," Sonny said, trying to keep it light while he wrapped MJ's hand in another napkin. "Honey? Can you bring us a box and the bill?"

"Sure. Everything okay?" She mopped up the table a little. "I'll be right back."

MJ never so much as looked away from Neil, just stared with that cold, laser-thing going on.

"We're fine. Fine. We just need to get back on the road." God Almighty, MJ was gonna kill the man. Neil, though, that skinny British bastard just stared right back.

Rick nodded, found a smile for the waitress. "Boomer doesn't know his own strength. Can we have four slices of pie to go? That'll fix him up. I'm sure of it."

Well, hell. Look at that, the little guy being helpful and shit.

"Oh, pie is good. Give us banana cream, French silk, apple, and peanut butter cup." He knew from pie, and something with whipped cream would help, just like Rick said.

"Surely will." She flounced off, ponytail bouncing.

"I ... Is he okay? Do we have ... bandages in the car?" Rick looked so fucking earnest. There was no fucking way this little bastard was a big-assed arms-maker-guy.

"Yeah, we have a full kit. He'll be fine. Right, Precious?" Lord, what a fucking situation. Sometimes he thought they were all nuts.

"You'll have to kiss it and make it better, Sunshine." Come on. Come on, girl. Get those pies out here.

Bless her, she did, along with his change, and Sonny grinned right at MJ while he put his money in his wallet. "I'll kiss anything you want. Come on. y'all. And you..." He leveled a look at Neil. "Keep your mouth shut."

MJ stood, the napkin in his hand slowly turning red. "Come on, Rick. Get the pie. Walk nice and easy."

"Okay. Okay, I've got them." Rick grabbed the two bags and moved, right beside Neil.

A man had to admire that protective instinct. Especially since Sonny had the same kind of feeling for MJ. They got back to the car and Sonny immediately put the cuffs back on the two passengers and put them in the backseat. "Don't make me gag you," he told Neil.

Neil sneered. "No, dear, you'd like that too much."

MJ growled and dropped the napkin, hand going for his piece. Rick squeaked and scrambled into Neil's lap, cuffed hands over Neil's mouth.

"Perfect. Come on, Precious. Help me put the pie in the cooler and let me look at your hand." Sonny whapped MJ right in the kidneys, pushing him around toward the trunk.

MJ followed him, eyes blazing. "What was that for, jackass?"

"You can't pull a gun on someone in a parking lot, Precious." Looking right into MJ's eyes, Sonny invaded MJ's personal space, bumping chests. "Stop letting him get to you."

"How the fuck does he know that shit, Sunshine? How does he know all that, and if he knew, why didn't he run?" MJ was as close to really wound up, to really fucking scared as Sonny'd ever seen him in the open.

"I don't know." Reaching up, he stroked MJ's cheek, that scar bumpy and odd under his touch. "We'll find out, but not now. Now we just have to get home. 'Kay?"

"No more road trips with company, man. It sucks." MJ leaned toward him, nuzzling just a little. "And I get the chocolate pie."

"Of course you do. Would I get French Silk for anyone else?" They shared a quick kiss behind the open trunk, Sonny tasting blood when he pulled away. "Now give me that hand."

Chapter Twenty Six

"He's going to hurt you. Really hurt you." Paddy stared at Neil, heart pounding so hard it ached. "I. He. Did you not see him?"

It was like ... a snake. A big snake. With teeth and venom. And it wouldn't take but one bite...

Neil's lips moved against his hand and those gray eyes gleamed at him. It was like Neil thought it was funny, which he just didn't get at all. He was either missing something or ... missing something, he guessed, if there was anything about this whole thing that was funny. He was tired and scared and pissed and heading farther and farther away from home and the lab and his car. His mom's birthday was coming up and she was going to want to hear from him and...

Okay. Okay. He was cool. "I don't want him to hurt you."

"Shhh." Moving his hand away with a hot, wet tongue, Neil smiled at him, this time more like repentant or something. "I'm sorry. I'll try not to aggravate him anymore. I just hate being rather underpowered in any situation, hmm? Are you all right, love?"

"No. No. No, there's nothing all right with this. Nothing at all."

He could feel Neil's hands move, the twitch of them as Neil tried to reach up to hold him. "Oh, sweet. You're doing so well, you really are. I'll behave, I promise."

"I just don't want him to hurt you. He ... he's." Cold. Scary. Broken. Weird. Really smart, and Paddy still thought Boomer was the smartest guy he'd ever met.

"He's quite mad, love, but he seems to function." He wasn't sure if he heard that out loud or in his head. Neil's lips didn't move sometimes. They did kiss him, though. He checked to make sure the trunk was still up and snuggled right in, kissing Neil good and hard, just for a second. Just in case.

Mmm. Oh, that's better than the food. Thank you. Neil's lashes tickled his skin, they were so close.

"You still taste like maple syrup." He rubbed his nose against Neil's. "You have to be good or we'll both be shot before we can be naked and excited and stuff."

"They did promise us lube." Oh, right, they did. Kinda. Maybe.

"Yeah." Lube. Really, he'd be happy for a real bed, a locked door, and twenty-four hours to just touch.

Neil's eyes went dark. "Oh, yes. I think that would be lovely. Imagine all the things we could do." He had a sudden, graphic image of him on his back and Neil between his legs, sucking him.

Oh.

He didn't blink, just stared into Neil's eyes and shivered. Neil's mouth was. Especially when Neil. *Uh-huh*.

"Yes, just think about that, sweet." He got another kiss, enough to make him moan. Neil was proving that that mouth was good for a lot of things. A lot. Besides trouble.

The trunk slammed shut and he jumped, but he stayed close, fully intending to keep Neil busy. No needling Boomer. Boomer could be mean. Neil rubbed noses with him as the car

doors slammed. *I can be, too. But I'll be good for you. I do love you, Paddy. You know that, hmm?*

"I know." And Neil knew, too. Neil'd known almost before he had, he'd bet. Neil was ... special.

"You're quite special, too, love. So smart, so good. I sound like an utter sap, hmm?"

"Yeah, but that's okay. We're sort of in a weird place. Sap works." He leaned in as Boomer's door opened and thought.

Just don't let them hear you.

"Mm-hmm." That was the last sound Neil made, keeping his promise to be good. Well. Sort of. Neil kissed him again, just to be evil.

He heard Boomer snort, heard a beer pop open. "At least his mouth is busy now, huh, Sunshine?"

"You know it, Precious. Anytime you want to put yours to use, let me know. I can drive while you suck."

Oh. Ew.

"Mmm ... I have pie." He'd never heard anyone make those words sound dirty before...

"Oh, I do like your cream, Precious." Oh, man, they were getting...

Gross, he heard in his head.

Paddy chuckled and nodded, smiling into Neil's eyes. Now, if it was Neil, it would be fun, a little silly, a little sexy. Neil's eyes twinkled and he got a very tight image of a pile of whipped cream sort of shaped like a fig leaf. Paddy started laughing. He couldn't help it; the image was so funny, so cute, and he had been so stressed that it just bubbled out.

Laughing against his mouth, Neil leaned back so he sorta fell forward, pressing them together. Neil's chin was a little sharp on his shoulder, but oh, it felt good.

"Did you drug them again, Sunshine?"

"No. I thought about it, to calm you down, but I didn't. Must be the chili cheese fries."

"Good to know. They're much safer." Boomer stopped for a second. "Well, unless Rick starts farting. Then we should shoot him."

That just made him laugh harder. Neil laughed with him, trying to hold onto him with those bound hands. Yes, Neil thought he should let out the most toxic gas imaginable, thus killing Sonny and MJ, or at least immobilizing them.

Oh, yeah. He could just see it. Ladies and gentlemen! Come one, come all, see Paddy Bair and his Poots of Death!

Laughing right out loud, Neil leaned against him some more, loving on him. Even in this weird fucking situation they just made do.

They might make it through this whole thing.

They might.

Paddy grinned, stole one more kiss. Yeah.

Them and the pie.

Chapter Twenty Seven

The third day on the road was getting pretty damned long. They were so close, and yet, thanks to the passengers, they were so far away. Sonny figured they were going to have to stop for the night and do the last four hours or so in the morning. Honest to God, he figured Neil had developed his vicious bout of motion sickness just to piss MJ off.

Sonny looked over at MJ, who had stopped drumming on the dash and was now staring straight ahead, face stony, one hand stroking his gun kinda longingly. "We need to stop, Precious. If I have to hear him hork one more time I'm gonna hurl."

MJ nodded. "Yeah. Let's see if we can get something with a suite."

"We gonna trust them on their own?" Sonny squinted, trying to get his tired eyes to focus on the road signs.

"Well, we get a suite and we can keep them in a room and we can have a little privacy."

"True. Okay, then. I swear to God, English, didn't you take Dramamine?" There. Comfort Inn and Suites.

"No more pie for him, Sunshine."

"Oh, God. Don't make it worse. He just needs out of the car, okay?" Little Rick sounded fucking stressed.

Hell, he'd be stressed, too, if MJ suddenly started spewing intestines or whatever the fuck that man was heaving up. It was foul, whatever it was. "It's all right, Red. We're just teasing him a little. Can't have a road trip without good-natured bullshit."

He pulled off at the next ramp, his shoulders and back screaming at him.

"I'll get the room, huh? Make sure those two are locked in together and then you can take a long-assed shower, huh?" He must look as sore as he felt, the way MJ was looking after him.

"Yeah. Yeah." He could usually drive for hours and not feel it, but the tension of having the other two, and one of them sick ... well, it wore. "We can run to the gas station over there and get Blondie some of that anti-nausea liquid."

"Yeah. Grab some drinks, too." He dropped MJ off at the lobby, his Precious damn near stalking into the place.

Sonny sighed. "Can y'all be good in the backseat while I get the shit? I don't think we want Neil there in the store."

"We'll be good, Sonny. I swear. Just get him some medicine, please?"

Grimacing, he nodded and pulled the car around. "I'm not a mean bastard, honey. Really. I'll be right back. You run, MJ will hunt you down, I bet you know that."

Rick laughed, the sound a little hysterical. "Neil's not ready to run yet. MJ can hunt us tomorrow after we've all had a nap."

He kinda liked the kid. He really did. Laughing a little himself, Sonny nodded, checking Neil. Green as a frog. "Okay, I'll be right back."

He got like three bottles of cherry-flavored anti-nausea stuff, some Cokes, a pack of cigarettes, and about a million packages of Twinkies, Ding Dongs and Zingers and assorted

chocolate. He was back at the car before Neil even stopped gurgling.

"I saw MJ head toward the back." He nodded at the kid. MJ'd called. Suite with kitchenette. One door out. Third floor. Secure as they were going to get and if they had to spend a couple days, they wouldn't kill each other.

"Come on, then. Let's get this one settled." Lord, that poor Brit was just sounding like he was gonna die, panting like a hot dog.

They manhandled Neil into the room, and MJ was there to greet him, looking like home. Goddamn.

"Okay. Rick. Get him in the shower with drugs. You two have the room with the door. Use it." MJ was focused on him, eyes heated. His Precious was pissed and tired and frustrated and that meant one of two things.

A good fuck or a good fight.

Maybe both.

Thank God.

The door clicked shut and it was so quiet he could hear the hum of the clock on the little table. "Alone at last."

"No more company on road trips." MJ stepped right into his space, hands landing hard on his shoulders, fingers digging in.

"No shit, Precious." His head rolled back, his shoulders rising up against the pain of it before relaxing into MJ's touch.

"You're fucking tight, and not in the fun, spanky way." MJ kept working him hard, not giving him a fucking inch.

Rising up on his tiptoes, he fought the tingling and spasms. "Yeah. I shoulda stopped, but I just thought we were so close. Damn, I want home."

"I hear you. Shit, we're going to have to find a bunch of those ginger pills, otherwise that bastard's going to puke all over the boat."

"God, we can't have that. Man, he's got the touchiest stomach ever. Maybe I shouldn't have drugged his tea that second morning..." But fuck, Neil had just needled and poked and MJ was gonna kill him if he didn't shut up, so he'd done it out of the kindness of his heart.

"Maybe. Maybe he's allergic to stuff. I don't know. We'll let him sleep a bit." MJ started on his neck, the tingles going to his toes.

"Uhn." His knees buckled a little. "I need to sit if you're gonna keep that up."

"Then sit." Ah, romance. That was his MJ.

He staggered right over to the bed and plopped down. "I got junk food."

"Chocolate?" MJ dragged his gimme cap and T-shirt right off, hands landing on him.

"Yep. Three kinds. I even got those dark chocolate things with the liquor." All he could do then was hum as MJ touched him. Those scarred hands knew every inch of him and played him like a fine instrument.

"Oh, I'm so letting you live." MJ's chuckle went a long way to easing little pockets of grr inside him.

"Well, that's good. You'd never make it without killing them without me, and God knows jail wouldn't suit you..." He was rambling, and MJ paid him back with a pinch. "Ow!"

"Shut up, Sunshine. I'm busy." MJ settled behind him, thighs spread out alongside his.

"I'm happy. Go for it." One by one his muscles let go, easing until he figured he'd just ooze right off the bed.

MJ's mouth started working alongside those fingers, lips on his head, tongue teasing the stubble. "Need to shave you, Sunshine."

"Mm-hmm. All scratchy." Not that it mattered when MJ was touching him that way. All that kissing and massaging.

"Uh-huh. You smell good. How the fuck can you smell good after being in that car all day?" MJ nuzzled his ear, teeth grazing his earlobe.

"Because you like Sonny smell." Chuckling, Sonny rubbed up against MJ, moaning, happy as a pig in shit. His whole body felt like a too-tight coil that was unwinding.

"I do." MJ's hands wrapped around him, cupped his balls and started rolling them, nice and easy.

"Mmmnuh." That was the best he could do with his toes curling and his cock going completely hard from only half-mast and ... yeah. Good. Apparently MJ agreed, lips on his shoulder, those smart fucking hands working his cock and balls. MJ could make a man appreciate a good hand job.

"Love the way you touch me, Precious." There. Words. Together in a sentence. See him? He could talk. Woo.

"Mm-hmm." MJ got into a rhythm—pumping with one hand, rolling with the other, thumbs working like nothing going.

"I ... MJ. Honey. I can't..." Wow. He was just gonna go off. He really was. He hadn't even felt like it when they started. Now? Damn. Damn.

"It's okay. Come on. Let it go." MJ dragged one fingernail over the tip of his prick, just hard enough to sting. His eyes squeezed shut and his head fell forward and Sonny just came all over, grunting loud and hard. His whole body shook, his muscles like Jell-o. Damn, sometimes a man just needed a fucking amazing orgasm to relax him.

He got eased down on the mattress, MJ pressed up close against his back, warm and solid as a rock.

"Oh, Precious, that hit the spot." All melty, he just lay there and listened to his heartbeat, letting MJ love on him.

"It did. You were going to have a psychotic break with reality."

"I was close." Sonny snorted. "Bastard has nerve, horking in my car." Damn, MJ felt right pressed up against him. His. Home, whether they were on the water or not.

"Yeah. We'll have to pray he's not seasick." MJ's chuckles tickled the back of his neck.

"No shit. I really think it's that shit I slipped him. He must be allergic, like you said. He was fine the first day." Hell, the only problem had been that whole MJ killing Neil thing. Sonny had just needed Neil to shut up for a day.

"Poor bastard." MJ sounded positively gleeful.

"You're an ass, you know?" There was no rancor in him, though. Not when he was feeling So. Damned. Good. "So. Should we bathe? Fuck? Eat chocolate?"

"Mmm. Chocolate. Then fucking. Then a bath with a little bit more fucking. Then possibly a nap."

"Okay." Yeah. He could do that. "The chocolate is in the baggie by the door." If he was lucky, he'd get to watch MJ walk back and forth. That ass ... Oh. Oh, hell yes. MJ was hard and feeling good, pretty ass swaying back and forth, balls drawn up tight. "You're a sight for sore eyes, Precious. I swear, you'd rev a dead man up." And he wasn't dead. No, sir.

"So long as you're revving, the rest can go fuck themselves." MJ bent, spread wide. Oh, little show-off.

Sonny moaned. "Pretty." He propped up on his elbows to get a better view. "Oh, I got me a fried pie. Can you bring that? I was craving."

"I can." MJ hummed, gathering the goodies and a couple of Cokes. "You found some good stuff."

"Anything for you, Boomer." Lord, he must be feeling better if he was ready for what that would get him.

"Oh, now. You're doing so good. Don't make me hurt you."

He hooted. "You want to, admit it. You've been good, though, Precious. I have to say." MJ hadn't exploded once today.

"I'm practicing my patience. I have probably earned a blow job." MJ sashayed back, hands full of goodies.

"You have. Feed me, and I'll lick you clean." And then some. God, he loved MJ-flavored treats. A lot.

MJ crawled right up, opened the wrapper on his fried pie, and fed him a bite. Mmm. Fruity-flavored terrorist.

Sonny licked at MJ's scarred fingers, the taste of salt mingling with cherry and sugar glaze. "Mmm. That's happy making."

"Open a Ding Dong and we'll talk happy." He got another bite.

"You don't have to tell me twice." Hoo, yeah. Ding Dong heaven was achieved in seconds, and he pushed a bite against MJ's lips, watching with fascination as it disappeared.

"Mmnh." There were two things Sonny'd found to make MJ make that noise—sex and chocolate. Not even blowing shit up made his Precious sound like that.

"You look decadent, man. Like I could eat you up." They shared a kiss that tasted like Black Forest cake, all chocolate and cherry and cream. Oh, that was something else. MJ groaned, tongue fucking his lips, those hungry, happy little sounds tickling his lips. Fuck, yes. Sonny nipped at MJ's tongue, that sweet lower lip. Sonny rubbed some, letting his hard cock stroke MJ's thigh.

MJ's cock kissed his belly, wet-tipped and hot, reminding him that he was one-up in the orgasm department. He'd promised MJ's favorite reward. A blow job. Grinning, Sonny broke the kiss and pushed MJ down, needing to taste more than chocolate. He could take his time, really give it to Precious good.

"You look like the cat that got the cream, Sunshine." MJ spread a little, ass moving on the bed, sliding.

"I am. I got you. Can't ask for more." He could take, though. Sonny put his mouth to MJ's skin, sliding down that flat belly. He could smell that heat. Made his mouth water.

"I'd kill for your mouth, man." MJ stretched right on out for him, all that ink dark and spiky against the tan.

He loved how that tat gave him something to trace with his tongue. "Can't wait to put my ink on you, Precious."

Oh, now. He did like how MJ's cock throbbed, liquid dripping on that skin to tempt him. "I want you to do it. Want to wear your mark."

"God, yeah." He licked down to the base before coming back to catch that drop. Salty, bitter-good, and Sonny savored it for a bit before going back for more. MJ made these amazing fucking noises for him, all husky and rich as that cock slipped over his tongue. Reaching up, he stroked the base with his thumb as he sucked MJ in, lips making a tight seal. Rubbing his mouth up and down, tongue moving on the underside of MJ's cock, Sonny sucked. Hard.

It didn't take a second for MJ to start moving for him, thrusting up toward him as those hands fisted in the sheets. Yeah, just like that, Precious. Give it up.

Harder and harder he sucked, just really wanting to give what MJ so freely gave him. Pleasure. Pure fucking pleasure. MJ started babbling, love words and filthy words pouring out before that sweet, heavy cock jerked and filled his mouth.

Sonny took it all in, licking MJ clean before shimmying up the sturdy body to let MJ feed him another bite of pie. "Damn, Precious."

"Uh. Uh-huh." Man, dizzy and dazed was a fucking fine look on MJ.

"Want more chocolate?" He was horny as hell, but he could wait. Watching MJ eat was foreplay.

"Okay." MJ opened up, just licking the cream and chocolate off his fingers. Sensual, addicted little fuck. He fed MJ bite after bite, taking kisses, licking cream off MJ's chin. Among other places.

He heard the bathroom door open and close, then the little bedroom door shut. MJ didn't say a word, just fed him another pie, painting his lips with cherry and lapping at them. Sonny didn't mention it either. No sense ruining the mood. He licked at MJ's fingers, his chin. Damn. Yeah. "Good stuff."

"Uh-huh. We need to buy stock in these pie things. They make your lips soft."

"Do they? You sure that's not the kissing and sucking?" Grinning, he kissed MJ again, addicted to the touching.

"Kissing. Sucking. Blowing. Cherries. Sugar. Whatever." MJ looked more relaxed than he had in days.

"It's all good, huh?" They stretched out, randomly nuzzling and touching, just slow and easy and happy. Sonny felt like he might could go on tomorrow.

"You know it." MJ's hands were everywhere, just feeling him up.

"You're getting right naughty, Precious? You looking for another go 'round?" He could do one more. Then a nap. Then maybe more.

"One more. Then we lock them in and sleep hard." This time was building slow and sweet, MJ just loving on him.

"Uh-huh. Okay. Want." Sonny licked at MJ's lips, let his teeth drag over them. He loved the way they went swollen and hot for him, kinda like MJ's prick.

"Uh-huh." MJ slid over the top of him, rocking them together. "Mine."

"Yours. Right ... oh, right there." Good. So good, the way they fit. "Mine, Precious. You're mine, too."

"Uh-huh." One hand slid down his back and squeezed his ass. "Right there."

Their hips rocked together, their pricks lining up. Sonny grinned wildly, humping like a bad puppy. "Fuck, you feel good."

"You know it." MJ laughed, kissing him hard enough their teeth clicked together.

They rolled again, Sonny grabbing MJ's hips to rub them together like two sticks to make fire. They got the box springs to creaking, the mattress rocking as MJ went to town. Hell, yes. Soon. All he could do was rock and roll, biting down on MJ's throat. He needed that taste, too. Yeah. Just to push him along. MJ grunted and slammed into him, spunk spraying against his belly. Oh, hell, yes. Just like that.

"Precious!" Sonny shot like crazy, his eyes rolling, his hips jerking madly.

Oh. Okay. Better.

"Yeah." MJ looked fine, relaxed and right. About fucking time.

Sonny grinned down and sorta flopped, listening to MJ's breath whoosh out. "Time for napping? Or are you hungry?"

"Napping is good. Then pancakes." MJ's cock jiggled against him as MJ chuckled. "And bacon."

"Oh, bacon. You do know the way to my heart." MJ had stolen that ages ago, but he didn't have to be that obvious all the time.

"Yes. Pig fat, beer, and the occasional shoot-out and you're happy."

"Well, if you add 'car chase' and 'drug MJ so we can fly' to that, you've got it in one." That ought to get him at least a smack, even if MJ was all boneless.

He got a groan and the briefest pinch—he must've been better than he thought. "Asshole."

"That would be me. Your turn next time." His stubble scraped MJ's chin as he nuzzled. "This is good. Next time make me stop sooner, 'kay?"

"Uh-huh. Next time we'll drop the passengers off a cliff first." MJ stretched and hummed like all was right with the world. "Would that be littering, you think?"

"Only if they splattered when they hit. Maybe if we threw them in water." Sad thing was? MJ wasn't joking...

MJ shoved the candy papers off the bed, wrapping around him with a little snuffling groan. Sonny nodded, settling in, not caring one bit that they'd stick together later. For now, he'd just take what he had and be a happy man. They'd deal with the puking wonder and the genius later.

Maybe.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Neil thought he might find a slow, painful way of killing whoever it was that had drugged him. Something that required a great deal of vomit and bleeding from the intestines and perhaps inflammation of the ear canals.

Still, he was alive, and had a private room with Paddy, and his insides were no longer fighting to be on the outside.

All was well.

Poor Paddy. He hadn't slept until Neil had, and he still slumbered on, his thoughts occasionally rumbly and protective. Neil pushed up on one elbow and wondered if there was a toothbrush or toothpaste anywhere near.

He got up, padding to the door. They weren't locked in, and the two out there were sleeping like babies, so he went in search of something minty.

Ah. There, on the counter in the powder room. Neil decided against using the big guy's toothbrush, but he brushed well with his finger before going back to Paddy and slipping into bed, nuzzling right up.

Paddy moaned, tugging him close and petting his spine. Concern and care flooded him, Paddy fretting over him, protecting him even as Paddy slept.

"Shh. I'm much better, love." He stroked Paddy's back in turn, fingers singling out each bump. "In fact, I need you to wake up now..."

"Mmm." Paddy smiled for him, snuggled right up against him, eyelashes fluttering.

"Hello, love. Are you feeling better rested?" He kissed Paddy's lips, feeling almost ridiculously pleased with life. He assumed it was because their captors were feeling that way.

"Yes. You're better? You feel better." Paddy stroked his temples, smoothed his hair.

"I am. Much." He took a kiss, happy that no one was watching in a rearview mirror. "You?"

"I was worried. I'm better now." Paddy didn't want back in the car, didn't want to leave this bed. Wanted to hold him.

"I can tell." Paddy's thoughts had slowed almost completely, making him smile at the gentle rhythm of the mental wanders. Paddy nodded, tongue just barely tracing his lips. "Mmm. So, there's food out there if you'd like, but otherwise I think snuggling is in order." Pressing hard against Paddy's body, Neil took another kiss, then another.

Paddy wasn't hungry. Paddy *needed* and was fighting the urge to just beg him for more—more kisses, more touches, just more. Oh, there was no way he was going to make Paddy beg. Neil swarmed on top of Paddy's sturdy body, legs straddling Paddy's hips so he could rock and kiss at the same time. Oh. Oh, better. Good. Now. Neil. Love. Paddy's joy just bubbled over, bouncing against him.

That was exactly what he needed. Neil rolled his hips, letting them really go together, letting his tongue push into Paddy's mouth for a long taste. Heatneedyesnow was what he got, and Neil moaned, jerking and panting. Paddy's hand curled around his ass and squeezed, pulling them tight together. Oh, yes. Just right there. Goodness.

"Paddy. Love." Sometimes you had to say things out loud. Sometimes you could only use voice to go by. Gracious, it felt good when his cock rubbed into the hollow of Paddy's hip.

"Yeah. I want." Paddy's heels dug into the mattress, hips pushing up against him and giving him more friction, more skin.

"Oh." Oh, yes. His cock ached, leaking hot droplets on Paddy's skin. They could go slow in a minute. Right now they both needed fast. Paddy's chin bumped Neil's shoulder as he nodded. With him. Paddy was right there with him. He pulled Paddy so close they could have shared skin and humped, both of them gasping for breath. When it got too big Neil let it out, grunting as he came hard, Paddy's name on his lips.

Paddy watched him with huge, fascinated eyes that found him beautiful. Honestly beautiful. Him. He reached for Paddy's cock, wanting to make Paddy feel just as good, knowing that Paddy was the beautiful one. And his. All his.

"Neil." Paddy's eyes rolled, hips jerking and pushing that velvety shaft right over his palm.

"Yes, Paddy. Yes, love." Now. It had to be now. It was all just too much.

"Uh-huh. Now." Wet heat splashed over his wrist, Paddy's face a study in pleasure. Neil watched, soaking in every detail. So lovely. Utterly perfect. Paddy gave him everything without holding back. What more could a man ask?

"Better." Paddy laughed, lips on his jaw, searching for his mouth. "Much better."

"Indeed." Stretching out for a more thorough exploration, Neil stroked Paddy's hip. "So what now, love?"

"Can we make love?" Such a simple request, but heartfelt. "I just want to keep touching you, have you touch me."

"Of course we can, sweet." He would love that. "Now, you'll have to go and ask for the lube..."

He got a look, one copper eyebrow arching quite impressively. "We can improvise. We're smart."

"You're a genius." Laughing, he tickled Paddy's ribs, pleased as he could be to play. When Paddy squirmed he knew he'd hit pay dirt, and Neil really dug in. Paddy's laughter rang out, filled with that honest joy he'd become fascinated by, addicted to.

They rolled across the bed for long minutes, Neil taking full advantage of Paddy's ticklish nature before finally calming them both. "Oh, we needed that."

"Yes." Paddy nodded, stubbled cheek abrading his nipple, just enough to make him tingle. His skin drew up, his nipple tightening with a sudden, hard intensity. Stretching, Neil rumbled a little, letting Paddy feel through his thoughts how good that was. Paddy smiled, scraping again and again before the soft touch of Paddy's tongue soothed him, made his cock fill.

"Again, love." He'd take that touch over and over. It was addiction personified. Sometimes he feared how he needed it.

"Uh-huh." From rough to silk-smooth, sharp to gentle, Paddy woke every nerve in his nipple. Then, after a pleasurably torturous tug, Paddy switched nipples. His back arched, his hands opening and closing on the sheets. Neil groaned, wanting to touch back, but caught in the endless loop of pleasure Paddy put out for him, loving on him. Of

course, from the sounds Paddy was making, he was doing very well. Paddy hummed and murmured against his skin, nothing but desire and comfort leaking through to him.

When he finally got his hands to work he put one to combing through Paddy's hair, the other to stroking Paddy's nape. So sensitive there. The rambling trail of thoughts shattered again, Paddy's focus and need sudden and complete and his.

"Mm-hmm. You see, don't you, Paddy? Yes." He humped, hardly able to think, amazed at the heat his body was generating.

"In me. Neil." He wasn't sure if that was a request or a statement of fact. Paddy wasn't sure, either.

"Get my fingers wet, then, love." Two of them trailed over Paddy's lips, teasing. Neil couldn't tease long, but he could just enough to see Paddy's skin flush that delicious color. Then Paddy's mouth sucked his fingers in, the image of Paddy sucking his cock, pink lips swollen and hot around his prick, sudden and sharp in his mind.

His prick leaped at the idea, his blood pounding in his veins. Later. They could do that later, after they'd had a nice hot shower. Now he wanted Paddy, all the way, inside. His fingers left Paddy's mouth with a pop, Paddy nodding furiously. "Inside. I need you. I need to feel."

"All right love." He wasted no more time getting his fingers down where they could slip right into Paddy's body, going deep with a single push. Moving them in and out, he opened Paddy up, getting his lover good and ready.

Paddy's body held him close, the muscles rippling against his fingers as they moved together. Oh, yes. Paddy was eager for it, shifting and sliding, bearing down toward his touch.

"Get my prick wet, Paddy. I can't wait much longer." And he couldn't let go, couldn't move away or stop watching long enough to slick himself up.

Paddy licked his own hand, reached down and slicked him up with a few swift, sure strokes. "It's enough. It is. Now, Neil."

"Anything." His fingers pulled free and he moved into position easily, his cock pushing into Paddy's tight-tight heat. All the way. Until he thought he might die happy.

Paddy pushed up on his elbows, their mouths coming together as Paddy bore down, hips rocking him inside that amazing heat. Yes. Oh, sweet man. Neil gritted his teeth, rocking, moving his hips to get more and more of Paddy's warmth. How he needed this, needed Paddy.

Paddy nodded, wrapping around him, legs and arms pulling him in deeper. That tight hole didn't want to let him go, either, Paddy clinging to his cock, drawing him back in. They just moved, and it got to where Neil cared not a whit what sort of noise they made. Let those bastards hear them. He groaned, humping harder, his prick feeling like it could drive nails. Paddy had forgotten everything but him, the focus almost enough to drown him, to fascinate him. It wasn't quiet, like he would have thought it would be. No, it was just overwhelming Neil, Neil, Neil. It was enough to make his balls draw up so tight they hurt, and he clenched his hands on Paddy's hips, yanking hard.

The pure pleasure from Paddy's orgasm hit him a millisecond before his own did, both of the sensations slamming together inside him. Neil cried out, the sound echoing through the room, his own climax going on and on as he bucked and shook. Oh good heavens, yes.

"Love." Paddy tugged him close, held him so tight he had to work to breathe. *Not sick. No more being sick. His Neil. No more drugs.*

"I'm fine, sweet. Just fine. I promise. And with any luck, they won't need to drug us. We'll be very good until we figure this out." He could be very good. Mostly. Probably.

"Okay. Good." Paddy nodded, cuddling in. "Should we sleep? Try to figure out what next?" Escape?

"We need to bide our time for an opening." Neil put his arms around Paddy, kissing and stroking, soothing them both. "We'll know."

"Okay. Okay." Paddy nodded, sighed a little. "My mom's gonna be worried if I don't call her soon. It's been a long time."

"Well, we'll have to ask your friend." He didn't think they would let Paddy call. He was supposed to be dead.

"Boomer? I don't think he's my friend anymore. I think something happened to him."

Something, indeed. Something horrific that even Neil did not want to tease the edges of unless he was angry and needing a weapon. "He didn't kill you, did he? I imagine you can reason with him."

"No. I don't think he did. You'd tell me if I was dead, right?" Paddy winked, the joke just barely pulled off with that quiet worry underneath it.

"I would. I am not in the habit of making love with zombies." Kissing Paddy hard, Neil held on tight, the closeness making him happy deep inside. "I need to rest a bit more, love. I swear, they were trying to bump me off."

"Yeah. I'm pooped. Maybe they'll let us stay a couple of days, huh?"

He doubted it, but perhaps. Those two in there were...

Busy.

Again.

Good Lord.

"Oh, if we leave before next Thursday I shall be amazed." He could hear Sonny in his head. Sonny intended to keep at MJ until neither of them could walk.

"Mmhnn." Already asleep again, Paddy just nodded, hands still petting him, even in dreams.

They would sleep. MJ and Sonny would shag. And when it came time to rejoin the battle, he might have an idea or two.

He hoped.

Chapter Twenty Nine

MJ spent an hour and a half in the shower, soaping and scrubbing and masturbating and not thinking and just ... yeah. He was feeling a little penned in, with the closed doors and the closed windows and the fucking hostages and all. Not a ton, just a little, but he needed some time in the shower while Sonny fed their guests and dealt with them and...

It was fucking quiet out there.

He turned off the water, grabbed a towel, and peered out the door. "Sonny?"

"What's up, Precious?" Sonny wandered into his line of sight, scratching a little, an unlit cigarette dangling from the hand not on his balls.

"Just quiet out here. You kill them?" He reached out, grabbed the cigarette. Those things were bad for you.

"Nope. They're fed and back in the cage." Sonny raised a brow. "You taking up the habit?"

"Nope." He tossed the nasty little thing into the trash can. "Tall, pale, and British decide to stop puking?"

"Looks like. He just has some nasty-ass reactions to drugs." That speculative look he knew too damned well came into Sonny's eyes. "I wonder what he'd do on something hallucinogenic."

"Could be interesting. Could be extremely messy. Let's wait until we're on the boat." Then they could just throw the man overboard if he started puking.

"Okay." Shrugging, Sonny wandered back out into the hotel room and out of his sight. Dammit. He growled and

followed, not worrying about his jeans that were probably soaking up water off the bathroom floor.

The pack of cigarettes dangled now, Sonny teasing him with it. "I have more, Precious. Never you worry."

"They're bad for you." He judged the distance. He could go for the Marlboros or Sonny's balls.

Smokes.

Balls.

Smokes.

Oh, what the hell. He wanted Sonny's balls.

He tackled low, taking Sonny down with a thud.

Sonny oofed, and the pack of smokes went flying as Sonny grabbed him, holding on while they skidded. That worked nicely. He leaned in, lips open over that bulge in Sonny's jeans, breathing out. Groaning, Sonny wiggled to get his lips in a different spot. Pushy asshole, always topping from below.

He pinched that tight ass, good and hard, which just made Sonny buck harder. Dammit.

Sonny grinned wildly. "Gonna eat me up, Precious? I might like that." Yeah, that cock was hard as anything.

"You love it." He blew again, lips pressing just enough to make Sonny shift. Might like it. Bastard.

"Uh-huh. More." One of Sonny's hands left his shoulder and opened the top button of those tight jeans, fingers brushing his mouth.

"You didn't get enough last night?" Fuck knew he didn't. He didn't get anywhere near enough to scratch his itches. He licked at Sonny's fingertips, biting a little.

"We have days and days to make up for." Oh, man, when Sonny grabbed his own crotch like that, hand circling to get some good friction and rubbing the back against MJ's mouth? It really ramped him up.

"Mm-hmm." His mouth fastened on Sonny's hand while he started trying to get to that fine prick. It couldn't be good for the man's balls, wearing jeans that tight. Not that he wanted Sonny to stop, mind.

That zipper finally let go, and Sonny pulled that sweet cock out, rubbing it on MJ's lips. "This what you want, Precious?"

The temptation to say, 'No, you asshole, I tackled you for the exercise' was huge and nearly irresistible, so he went ahead and did it. Then he pushed up and sucked the cock in question right in. The sound Sonny made was gratifying, and had him keeping the rest of his smart-assed thoughts to himself. Hell, he lost them altogether when Sonny grabbed his head and started fucking his face like there was no tomorrow.

They rolled so they were on their sides, Sonny's cock buried in his throat, his fingers tearing at those jeans so he could get at Sonny's hole.

"God. MJ. Fuck. Yeah." Sonny helped, wiggling so he could slide the denim off Sonny's hipbones and down those thighs. Sonny kicked the damned things off and lifted one leg and there. Oh, yeah.

He slipped his fingers in his mouth on the next slide down, slicking them up before he pushed two right into that tight ass.

"Fuck!" That whole big body twisted, bucking, pushing Sonny's cock deeper into his mouth. Sonny was cussing, grunting, sawing back and forth. Hell, yes. He swallowed hard, quirked his fingers to peg Sonny's gland, rub the little nub good and hard. That had Sonny thrashing harder, hands opening and closing in MJ's hair, and Sonny started begging. "Precious. Fucking A. Need. God. Please."

That's what he needed. He added another finger and buried his nose in Sonny's pubes. Come on. Give it up. Mine.

Sonny shouted, coming hard for him. Like a ton of bricks. Spunk filled his mouth, Sonny's cock jerking over and over. He pushed Sonny, stroking and sucking all the way through the aftershocks, easing up when things got too sensitive. When he looked back, Sonny was laid out on the floor, arms flung out, chest heaving. It was a fucking amazing look for Sonny, all flushed and sweaty and melty.

MJ chuckled, licked the line of dark hair under Sonny's navel. "Better?"

"Huh? Better than what? Ice cream? Fried pie? You win." Sonny grinned down at him, cheeks and forehead still damp.

"Better than Twinkies?" He knew what Sonny craved.

"Well ... for that you'd have to fuck me." Asshole. Beautiful, grinning asshole.

Oh, he so needed to bite Sunshine for that shit-eating grin. Mmm. Warm. Salty. Sonny-flavored. He pushed Sonny's thighs open, finding another spot on one inner thigh.

"Mmm." Sonny's rumble came deep and happy. "You're hungry, Precious. Am I better than Ding Dongs?"

He thought about it a second. "Yeah. Yeah, you are."

Now that was surprising. He spread Sonny out, biting one more time.

"Harder." Man, Sonny was all about him. That was enough to make him forget the itchy and hotel room and everything but the feel of Sonny's skin and the taste of Sonny's sweat.

"Pushy." He bit good and hard, leaving a mark the man would feel along the seam of his jeans all day long.

"Just needing." He could see that, the way Sonny's cock was trying to twitch back to life. That and the way Sonny shifted, restless as fuck. MJ nodded, thumbs spreading Sonny's ass so he could taste there. He knew something about needing.

"MJ! God, yeah. Gonna fuck me, Precious? Inside..." Sonny was babbling now, which he just fucking loved. That man's voice, all deep and scratchy, just did it for him.

He was, but first he was going to make his own personal Sunshine beg for it, lick until Sonny was wet and ready and fucking needing him. Thighs opening wide, Sonny planted those feet and pushed against his mouth, grunting and rubbing. That skin was so hot it all but burned, and Sonny's hole seemed to grasp at his tongue, pulling. Fuck him raw, that was. Uhn. Way better than jacking off in the shower and worrying if that fucking Brit had tasered Sonny. He pushed deeper, hand dropping down to tug his prick just a little.

"Mine. That's mine, you son-of-a-bitch. Gimme." Those hands tugged at his scalp hard enough to make his eyes water, Sonny trying to get him to move up, to put his cock to good use.

"Greedy." He scooted right up, settled himself between Sonny's thighs. "Fucking want you."

Like the best motherfucking drug ever.

MJ pushed in before Sonny could snap back with 'Then take me, Precious' and fuck, wasn't it deep that he knew that, knew what the redneck bastard would say?

"Uhn." Sonny stared at him, eyes dark and almost dazed, so damned full of need. Beautiful man. Then Sonny pushed up with those hips, really getting them moving.

"Uh-huh." He stopped worrying or thinking or anything unnecessary, because damn. Sonny. Fucking. Right now.

Those too long to be real legs wrapped around his hips and Sonny went to town, pulling him over and over again. Then Sonny yanked him down for a kiss, bruising his lips all to hell. His. Hell, yes. His Sunshine. He managed to get one hand around Sonny's cock, thumb working the tip as he pulled.

"Good. Oh, good, Precious. That's it, right there." Yeah, that was it. That was it because Sonny went wild, bucking under him, hands sliding on his back. They both started hollering, MJ's head slamming back, balls drawn up tight.

"Now. Jesus. Now." That was all the warning he got before Sonny came, hot and wet, right in his hand. That sweet hole clamped down around him, making him shout again. He shot so hard his teeth rattled, hips pounding into Sonny the whole time, muscles just screaming.

Sonny flopped under him like a rag doll. "Fuck, Precious. Better than Twinkies and cigarettes."

"Mm-hmm." Sonny mattress. Yum. He could just stay right here.

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"Stay." Looked like Sonny agreed, one big hand cupping his ass to keep him close. Sonny kissed his temple, just nuzzling all up on him.

Yeah. Way better than washing and thinking.

Even if his jeans were soaking on the bathroom floor.

Chapter Thirty

It was just not fair that Sonny had to have this stupid old car.

A newer car would have a computer system.

Electronic doors.

Locks.

A GPS system.

Something he could use.

This crappy old thing just zoomed down the road.

Maybe he could steal MJ's cell phone. The laptop stayed in the trunk after that morning in the hotel two days ago that ended with him having a black eye and Boomer doing that weird growling thing.

"Excuse me," Neil said, right on the heels of that thought. "But I have to use the toilet."

"We're almost to the boat, man. Hold it."

A boat. If they put them on a boat...

Paddy's brain started working a million miles a minute, trying to figure out a way to escape. Maybe it they wrecked the car...

Neil's hand closed over his, Neil shaking his head. Okay. Okay, he trusted Neil's instincts. The man knew shit. He held on tight, a real, honest fear settling in his belly. A boat. In the ocean. With Boomer.

This was bad.

"Shhh." Thumb rubbing over Paddy's hand, Neil leaned against him, letting him feel warmth and security and hush and it's okay.

He nodded, trying to believe that. MJ's eyes met his in the rearview mirror. "Sit tight, Rick, yeah? You've been doing so well. Don't fuck up now."

"I. I don't."

"Just don't, Rick. Breathe. Sit."

Right. Breathing. Sitting.

"That's it." Sonny's voice sounded so cheerful he wanted to whap the man over the head. "Y'all are doing good. MJ hasn't killed anyone, we're almost home ... I like it."

"I'm not home. I need to call my mom, Boomer. She'll be scared."

"No. I told you, Rick. No phone calls." Boomer turned around, stared at him. "She thinks you're dead, Rick. You have to just let it go. They all think you're dead."

"But. I." He could feel things trying to short out, trying to twist in his head. "I'm not dead."

"For all intents and purposes you are, man. You aren't real anymore. You're a fucking ghost."

No. No, he wasn't a ghost. He wasn't a ... "Why did you do this, you ... you *bastard*?"

MJ's hand shot out, grabbed his shirt faster than he could even see. "Because you are creating smart bombs, you asshole. Because the technology you created with the molten copper is being used by the Israelis, by the Palestinians, by the Chinese, to blow shit up and burn people to death!"

"Oh, fuck a duck," Sonny growled, and the car went faster.

The sound of Neil's hand hitting MJ's face was loud, ringing in his ears. Boomer didn't even react, which was almost as scary as the way those eyes held him and that mouth kept

moving. Snarling at him. Growling. Accusing. Telling him that he was hurting people.

Killing people.

Him.

Him and Bethy.

On purpose.

And it was his fault.

"Stop it! Just stop it." Neil came up out of the back seat, hands closing around MJ's throat. "He didn't know, you rotten bastard. He didn't know."

He sort of sat there, watching as MJ cuffed Neil and Neil went flying, nose gushing blood. Then Sonny jerked the wheel and the stupid big car slid onto the shoulder and—

God, it was quiet without the engine.

Then it wasn't quiet, because Sonny's voice could boom. "You, get back in your goddamned seat." Sonny yanked MJ down in the passenger seat. A white handkerchief flew back and landed on Neil. "You, shut up and mop up. You get blood on my seats and I'll make you regret it. And you..." Sonny turned to look at him. "Stop gibbering. We're going to the boat. We'll deal with the rest then. Got it?"

Sonny gave them all a vicious glare.

Boomer snarled and Sonny puffed up and growled and it was sort of like watching two dogs fight, but Boomer backed down. Sat. Stayed.

He looked at the car door. He could run now. Right now. They'd chase him and Neil could get away from him.

Neil reached out for him, grabbing his arm. "He'll shoot you, Paddy." He wasn't sure if Neil said it out loud or not, but he heard it.

"I." But what if they were right? What if he was ... What if it was ... Oh, God.

Oh, God.

He was dead already.

Paddy! Neil's voice all but rocked his head back on his neck. *I need you. You're not dead. I need you with me.*

"Not dead." His family was going to ... He didn't. He. Neil. Neil.

"Give him the pill, dammit. He's going to short out." Boomer sounded pissed.

"Shut up. Just shut up." Neil said that out loud.

Sonny growled and suddenly the big guy was in his face with a little pill and a can of Coke. "Take this, man. Okay? It won't hurt you. It will help."

"Neil?"

"He's not trying to hurt you." Those eyes ... Neil was all worried for him, hands moving on him. Soothing. "It might make you feel better, love."

Dead. He was. His mom.

"Okay." He took the pill, trying not to choke on the Coke.

"There, see? That'll do you." Sonny's voice sounded almost ... kind.

He nodded, curled into Neil, and closed his eyes. Okay. Okay, he was good.

He could cope.

He could.

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Sort of.

Chapter Thirty One

Jesus fucking Christ. When things went tits up, they went in a hurry.

Sonny pulled into the marina, carefully not looking at MJ. No sir, if he looked at Precious now one of them was gonna bubble over.

They had a knocked out kid, a sick as a dog Englishman, and a pile of tension that was making him want a fucking cigarette now and MJ had thrown his last pack out the window.

"I'll get these two in the boat," he finally said. "You get the car locked down after you go grocery us up. And you owe me a fucking pack of smokes."

"Suck my ass, redneck. I'll get you what I fucking get you."

"Look, you little terrorist fuck. If you hadn't gone apeshit back there I wouldn't have to *carry* these two to the boat. You'll fucking do what I tell you." Goddamnit. He was tired. He wanted a shot of something strong and some fucking Twinkies.

"The day I fucking do what you tell me is the day you're burying my goddamn ass at sea, fuckhead. I happen to fucking *care* about what the hell I do for a living!" Shit, MJ could growl.

"You blow shit up. That makes you a psycho, Precious." Was he up to this? No. He finally looked over at MJ, meeting those furious eyes. "God knows I love you, but right now I'm ready to kick your sorry ass."

MJ looked at him, cold as ice. "Get the fucking hostages into the goddamn boat."

Sonny sighed. Nodded. Rolled his head on his shoulders. "Yeah. Yeah, sure, Precious."

Sometimes he wondered when exactly his number would come up with MJ. He tried not to grin, because that would piss MJ off more. Oh, fuck that. He grinned hugely and leaned over to kiss that mouth hard. "Get us something yummy."

That cold look melted and MJ's lips quirked. "Cranky fucking redneck. I'll get fried pies."

"Cool. And bottled water, yeah?" He didn't say 'for the kid' because he knew MJ knew and he knew that if he let on that he knew MJ knew ... Jesus, he needed to sleep.

Sonny hauled his ass out of the driver's seat and handed over the keys before getting the kid out of the back seat, doing an over-the-shoulder carry. "Come on, English. You can walk on your own."

The kid shivered against him, hands reaching out for Neil. Christ, that was pitiful. Sonny muscled up the plank and took the big step onto the boat, teetering a little. Then he set the kid down and got English across. "Help me get him inside."

Neil blinked at him and nodded, grabbing one of Paddy's arms. That was it. Give the man something to do.

The car took off like a shot, MJ burning rubber and setting his teeth on edge. That was his goddamn car.

"He'd better not wreck that fucker." They got Paddy inside and laid out on a bunk and Sonny turned a critical eye on Neil. "Anti-nausea patch."

Neil nodded, sitting next to Paddy and putting a hand on the kid's back. "God, yes. Please?"

Shit, this whole thing was way more trouble than it was fucking worth.

Well.

Okay.

Three-quarters of a mil plus bonuses plus expenses was a lot of moonshine...

Still.

Adjusting himself, Sonny went and dug through their little cache of meds. Their medium-sized stash. Shit, they had a big honkin' chest of drugs. He came up with a patch and handed it over.

The kid was murmuring, curling around Neil. Lord. He needed a shower. Needed to get on the water. MJ'd better not fucking dawdle.

The hunt for smokes began. He thought sure he'd left some hidden away. They weren't in the galley, or in the entertainment center. Maybe the head.

He checked the cabinet, growling as he found a note saying, "Fucking cigarette companies are evil, Sunshine."

Bastard.

Dammit. Sonny went back to the stash of drugs, idly looking for something to ease the itch. Somehow, seeing Mr. Brit and the kid all curled up and snuggling just made him even more grumpy. There was all sorts of shit in there and he set to sorting it all out some. Getting the stuff he needed where he could get to it.

"Stay out of the fucking toy chest and come unload." MJ nudged his ass with one foot. "I got a carful."

"Shit." He'd been standing there almost twenty minutes, just staring. "If you were a snake you woulda bit me."

"Good thing I like you. Come on." MJ looked fucking tired, a little wild around the edges, but that smile was all for him.

"C'mere." Sonny reeled MJ in for a kiss, just needing it after all the shit that had happened. Rough, deep, and a little bloody, the kiss eased him.

MJ's hand held the back of his head, the kiss going on and on until his head was swimmy. "Okay. Better. Now, let's get going, Sunshine. I want our life back."

"Me, too." He trailed along behind MJ, shaking his head to clear it. "Lord, you bought one of everything, Precious."

"Two of some things." There were sodas and chocolate and meat and soap and all sorts of shit. Lord. MJ must be fucking hungry.

He was, too, so he wasn't gonna complain. "You got the car taken care of? Someone will house it for us?"

"Along with the Starfire and that little 'vette I got you for your birthday, yeah. They're driving down."

"Excellent." That was good news at least. Sonny hauled bags, checking on the terrible two again on the way in. Out like a light, both of them.

"We'll lock them down there and go. When they come around, we'll be at sea." MJ sounded just determined as fuck.

"Yeah. Yeah, we can do that. We'll have to make sure the kid can't get to anything and make a taser."

"Christ. He's fucking amazing, Sunshine. He could fuck our shit up."

"He could. We're gonna have to be careful." But right now the kid and the weirdo were both asleep. His belly rumbled. "Feed me, Precious."

"There are Twinkies in the bags somewhere." MJ winked at him. "Did they test the engines when they undocked her?"

"They did." Everything was go. "Did you get me smokes?" Sonny grinned, waiting for the inevitable protest.

"I got lots of lube. Lots."

"Yeah? I knew I could depend on you." Man, what they could do with that much lube boggled the mind. "Be careful, I'll be putting stuff in you that you don't think will fit."

"You think? There's all sorts of shit we haven't tried, you know?" MJ patted his hand and grinned, then turned to head up, leaving him standing with his teeth in his mouth.

Sonny flexed his hand, looking down at it. Huh. He grabbed a box of Twinkies and a Coke before wandering up, too, latching the little door to belowdecks.

MJ had started up the engines, stripped off his shirt, and started the process of backing them out. His Precious looked about a million times better, sunglasses perched on his nose.

Hell, he felt better himself, just watching the boat move out of dock and into the bay. Sonny searched out his own sunglasses and put them on. Then he moved up behind MJ and rested against that bare back. "Hey, Precious."

"Mmm. Hey, Sunshine." MJ looked up and back, smiling some. "You find the Twinkies?"

"I did. Brought them up. For later." Right now he wanted skin. Leaning back a few inches he took off his own shirt, then rubbed a little.

"Yeah?" Oh, now. That sound? Was pure happy.

"Uh-huh. I'll have to go back, though. I didn't bring you chocolate." God, it was good to be just the two of them and out in the open.

"Oh, man." MJ chuckled, nipped his jaw. "You're so fired."

"I was thinking about my hand in you." That had just ... occupied him. Taken all his attention.

"Yeah?" MJ leaned a little harder, skin hot against him. "You think it'd work?"

"I think it would. I think it would be fucking amazing." Damn. His cock hardened in a rush. The thought...

MJ nodded, heart throbbing against his chest. "It would be something ... big."

"It would." What else could he say? He sucked up a mark on MJ's shoulder, rubbing his tongue back and forth over it.

MJ groaned, slow and deep, head falling forward a little, breath coming faster. "Sunshine. I have to get us out to sea."

"Uh-huh. Good thing you steer well while distracted." MJ tasted so good that he went looking for more, licking along that strong upper arm.

"Mm-hmm. I want you to ink me, remember? Leave your mark." MJ flexed for him, hot as all hell.

"Gonna. I promise." He had ideas. Had plans. Hell, he had someone to train with. All he needed was the time.

MJ nodded, ass sort of rolling back, rubbing his cock with those tight little cheeks.

"Uhn. Tempting me, babe." Lord, that man. He loved that ass with a passion.

"Is that bad?" MJ had a shit-eating grin on his face. Lord, he was gonna tear the man up.

"Precious, we need to get out to sea. Then..." He laughed, backing off and popping that ass. "What do you want from the groceries?"

"What do you think? Chocolate is almost—almost as good as sex."

"Asshole." Grinning, he unlatched the door and slid back down the little ladder steps, making sure no one was waiting at the bottom to clock him one.

"Yeah, but I'm entertaining as all fuck." Shit, but MJ could make him laugh.

They two kidnappees were still asleep, so Sonny got Ding Dongs, Slim Jims, and tequila, along with a big old bottle of 7-Up. Then he locked Neil and Paddy back in and went to talk interesting bargains.

"So when can I do it?"

"We'd need time and for Tweedledum and Tweedledee to leave us the fuck alone." MJ grabbed a Ding Dong.

"Uh-huh." Rats. "Well, you let me know. I'm ready."

He watched MJ lick chocolate off those lips. Oh, yeah. Ready. "What are we gonna do with them?"

"I don't know, man." MJ got serious all of a sudden, that switch clicking again. "I don't like that Brit. He knows shit—personal shit—about us. We could toss him and drop Rick off somewhere remote, but that seems sorta vicious."

"Well, and your buddy? He's a little unstable. The Brit helps keep him calm..." Damn, they couldn't just keep sailing around with them.

"It's in their own best interest to fucking lay low now." MJ finished the Ding Dong, took a big swig of tequila. "It was more fun wondering when I was going to let you in me."

"It was. The whole tattoo thing was good, too." Sonny unzipped his jeans and shucked them. They were far enough out now for boxer briefs.

"Mmm. Yeah. They'll be sleeping it off for a while. They've got food." Oh, his Precious needed some one-on-one time.

Sonny scratched his belly, feeling the sun on it for the first time in too long. "What do you want, Precious? Fight? Fuck? Want me to bend you over the wheel?"

"We've already fought, asshole." MJ looked at him over the top of those sunglasses, then deliberately bent, offering him that ass. "Let's make up."

"Fuck, yes." He was over there like a shot from a canon, rubbing up against MJ, hands on those lean hips. "Want."

"All yours." MJ went up on tiptoes, just rocking away.

"Uh-huh. God, Precious. It seems like forever." That string of hotel rooms just hadn't done it. He struggled with MJ's pants.

"Yeah." MJ got them down, let him look at the lean back with all that black ink toward the bottom, that tight ass that hadn't been anybody's but his. Ever.

Just like he was MJ's, all the way through. Sonny yanked his cock out of his shorts, rubbing MJ's crack. "Hot. So hot, Precious."

"Yeah, Sunshine. I need it, yeah? Need you, now. Come on." MJ spread for him, braced himself on the console. A little spit and two fingers were inside MJ, stretching him out, letting him feel it. Sonny grunted at the tightness of it. No one had ever been as good as MJ, fucking psycho, beautiful badass.

MJ worked him, driving back against his fingers like the man was made for fucking. And Sonny was just the one to do the fucking. Yes, indeed. He couldn't hardly wait long enough to get his cock lubed with a little spit before he pulled out his fingers and pushed his prick in, wondering idly why he hadn't grabbed lube with the Ding Dongs. There had been six tubes. Of course, he had plans for those. He caught sight of his hand on MJ's hip. He'd need at least a few tubes for that.

The thought alone had him jerking up on his toes, driving so deep into MJ that he figured he might just die right there. The best fucking way to go. Sonny bit at MJ's shoulder, needing to hear MJ's sounds.

"Again." MJ went tight around him, damn near shuddering. "Fucking do it again."

"Uh-huh." Yeah. His teeth sank in as hard as his cock was thumping and damn ... just damn.

He fucking loved the way MJ groaned, bit out his name like it was a curse. Damn. Sonny just thrust harder, reached around to grab MJ's cock, sucking where he'd bitten that muscled shoulder. Goddamn. God. Damn.

It didn't take them long, not like this. Hell, MJ just grunted and jerked, heat splashing on his hand, ass rippling around his cock. That set him right off, had him coming like a ton of

Steam and Sunshine
by BA Tortuga

bricks, shooting right into MJ with everything he had. He leaned on MJ's back, panting, wrung out as an old dishrag.

MJ took his hand, lifted it up and licked it clean. "Better."

"God, yeah." Much, much better. His skin didn't feel so damned tight anymore, his shoulders not so hard. MJ nodded, nibbling on his fingers some, touching and kissing his hand. He kissed the spot he'd left on MJ's shoulder, petting that belly and sighing a little. "We'll figure it out, huh?"

"You know it. We're smart boys." MJ grinned, nodded.

"We're home. That's the big thing."

That was the important thing. Home, together, and loose and easy from a good fuck. The rest would take care of itself.

Somehow.

Chapter Thirty Two

Neil woke with a pounding head and a gnawing in his belly. The whole world was rocking, and he blinked, trying hard to get his bearings.

Boat. They were on the boat. Oh, Paddy. Poor Paddy had been through the mill. Neil turned on the tiny bunk under him and looked at the lad, stroking the red hair back from Paddy's forehead.

"Paddy? Love?"

Paddy frowned and those thoughts sort of stilled, almost hidden from him. Paddy didn't want to wake up.

Neither would he, if it was his life that had been destroyed. Well, his life had, really. Who would hire him now? Neil shook it off, patting Paddy's shoulder. "Should I see if I can find Pop-Tarts?"

Oh. Paddy liked Pop-Tarts. And was hungry. And dizzy. And the world was moving.

Moving.

Why did the world move?

"We're on the boat, love. Will you be all right if I go look for food?" He didn't want to leave Paddy alone and scared, but the cabin was tiny.

Paddy nodded, eyes opening and staring at him, thoughts going back to flat and still.

"Brilliant. Let me find us some food." He kissed Paddy's mouth before going over to rummage, his legs shaky as could be.

Goodness. Did the fools eat any food whatsoever?

Chocolate and cola and cakes and dried beef and liquor.
Crisps and ... Oh. Pop-Tarts.

Excellent.

The Pop-Tarts would serve well. He got a cola as well, and some bottled water, taking back his offerings and sliding down next to Paddy on the floor. "Love?"

"Yeah?" Paddy sat so still it was unnerving.

"Look. They have those fake pastries you so enjoy." He showed Paddy the Pop-Tarts, hopeful that he would get a spark.

"Pop-Tarts." Paddy blinked at them, sighed. "I like those."

"You do." Gracious, he didn't like this at all. "Here, let me open them for you, hmm?" The blankness rasped at him, worried at him like a dog with a bone. Even worse was the threat hiding beneath it. He stroked Paddy's cheek, looking into those flat eyes. "Come on, sweet. Eat for me."

"Is it strawberry?" Paddy leaned into his touch.

"It is. You like them best, don't you?" His thumb traced Paddy's lips, feeling how soft they were.

"Uh-huh." Paddy kissed him, lips brushing his thumb. "I'm sorry, Neil. I'm sorry that I got you kidnapped."

"Oh, love, I was meant to be protecting you." He kissed Paddy's chin. "You didn't do anything wrong. Not a bit of it." Those emotions rippled again, trying to break through the flat-daze of the drugs. Neil talked sternly to his aching head, trying to make his brain work so he could help coax Paddy out. "Besides, I would never not have met you."

Paddy leaned into him, plucking off a bite of Pop-Tart, nibbling. Excellent. Neil held him, nuzzling that bright head,

letting his thoughts wander toward how they might get out of this pear-shaped mess. Really, where had it all gone so bad?

"Why is it pear-shaped?"

"Well, it's based off the perfect circle, I imagine. When things go wrong, it's more ... pear-shaped."

Paddy laughed, the sound delighted, amused, echoing in his head like the ringing of bells. That made him happy, deep inside. Just that sound. Paddy laughing meant Paddy was coming back to him. He kissed Paddy again, tasting strawberry jam and crumbs.

Neil.

He heard that, loud and clear.

Neil and love.

Paddy settled in his lap, cuddling close.

"Yes. Love you so." He wasn't sure if he said it aloud, but he meant it. He was Paddy's, no matter what.

"Are they telling the truth, Neil? Was I killing people? Am I dead?"

He wanted badly to prevaricate. Instead, he spread his hands. "Some of the applications you created were used for weapons, yes."

"And you knew that? Why? Why were you there, Neil? Who do you work for?" Such dangerous questions.

"Oh, your Bethy never told me that. I found out on my own. At first, I was told I was there to study your mental fitness, but then I learned I was to protect you. Some job I did."

"Protect me from Boomer? You didn't know about Boomer."

"Darling, he's loud enough I should have heard him coming. Did you know he fears small spaces? And yet he lives on a boat." MJ was a quandary.

"He does? The small spaces, I mean, not the boat. They both seem to like the boat."

"He does. Something about his days right after college..." They could use that. They could.

"When he was dead." No. No, when Paula was dead. The thought hit him hard and low, something powerful and dark there. Neil shut down, knowing there was no way Paddy knew that. No way. So he had to be careful with the broadcasting.

Paddy pressed closer, cuddling into him, almost pressing into him.

He wrapped his arms around the sturdy form, kissing the side of Paddy's neck, opening himself back up just enough to reassure Paddy, let him know Neil was still there.

"What do we do next?" Paddy was petting him, stroking his belly.

"Well, we need to be good for a bit. It will not only relax them, it will keep us from getting drugged." Neil chuckled.

"That plays hell with my ability to think..."

"Yeah. It makes everything numb and nasty and ... wrong." Paddy stopped, took a bite of Pop-Tart. "Are they going to throw us into the ocean?"

"No." He thought a moment. "They might put us off on an island with a pistol and a bottle of rum."

"Aruba is nice, I hear..."

"Barbados." Neil imagined them on a beach, soaking up the sun, drinking little umbrella drinks. Then he sent that image to Paddy.

"Oh." Paddy smiled, leaned right into him. Someone quite liked that.

"Mmm. Can you smell the coconut oil, love? I think you could use some color." They both could. Some time in the sun, away from psychopaths and moonshine runners.

"Do you like to swim? I like the water. I like the sunshine and looking for shells, too." Paddy was waking up, the gentle thoughts beginning to swirl.

"I like to swim, yes. And I like to watch the birds and the children." He liked the idea of a sun-freckled Paddy, too, all loose and warm and smiling.

"Do I look like that? Honestly?" Paddy's nose touched his, so gentle, so careful.

"You do when you're happy." He smiled, rubbing noses back and forth. The touches eased him, made him happy.

"Good." Paddy nodded, wrapped right up close. It was, honestly. It was quite good.

Chapter Thirty Three

Sonny watched MJ sleep.

The guy was twitching and muttering about someone named Paula. Sonny figured that had to be bad, because you know, MJ didn't swing that way. So he figured a judicious application of oral fixation was called for.

Their guests were settled. He'd checked about twenty minutes before, and they were sleeping the sleep of a drug cocktail hangover. Sonny had left them, going back on deck and settling in beside his restless lover.

He started with MJ's chin, licking at the stubble there. Even that was bright blond, the sun making MJ light up like a fucking Christmas tree.

MJ frowned, hands reaching for him, wrapping around his shoulders as those intense blue eyes popped open. "Oh. Hey. Jesus. I was having a nightmare."

"Yeah. You were flopping like a landed fish." He licked down that strong, brown throat. "So sexy, that floppy thing."

Mmm. He hadn't heard that lazy chuckle in way too long. "You just haven't had regular enough sex."

"True enough. With weird and British, it's been kinda hard." Sonny tried for pathetic. "Love on me?"

MJ looked at him a half-second, then he got a wicked grin and MJ rolled them over, all that pretty skin landing on him with a thump. "I can manage that, Sunshine. I so can."

Then MJ's mouth landed on his, hard enough their teeth clicked. Sonny moaned, his arms coming up to wrap around MJ's back, his legs opening to let that hard body settle

between them. Oh, goddamn, that felt good. Right. Definitely better than twitchy, asleep MJ.

MJ did his dead-level best to make them both breathless, that kiss hot enough to set a fire in Sonny's belly. Fuck, yeah. Sun. Salt. Skin. He was a fucking fan. His hands clenched on that sweet body, pulling MJ down and down, humping up to meet him. Yeah. He needed more. Much more. So much more that he bit MJ's shoulder, a move guaranteed to bring out the beast.

"Fuck!" MJ's head tossed, those eyes glaring down at him. "Be good, Sunshine, or I won't let you have what you want."

MJ's fingers scraped all the way down his belly, making his skin sting. He shivered, his cock rising so hard under his loose sweats that it hurt. Damn. Sonny chuckled, licking where he'd bitten. "Uh-huh. You're gonna say no."

"I might. You never know. I could get scared."

"Oh, sure. You, scared of little old me?" He let his fingers drift down to MJ's ass, slipping between those hard cheeks.

"Terrified." MJ groaned a little, ass rolling up and pushing into his hands. Horny bastard.

"I can tell." Sonny set to nibbling some, working across collarbones and pecs.

"Uh-huh. What?" MJ started rubbing, cock hard as stone against his thigh.

Playtime was over, it looked like. Time to get serious. "Help me get these off, Precious," he said, lifting his ass, struggling to get bare. The man had some smart hands, shifting south to strip him bare, hands dragging along his legs as that mouth brushed against the tip of his cock.

"Yeah, Precious. There. Just like that." His whole crotch was aching, his balls drawing up and his cock throbbing.

"Demanding redneck." MJ's mouth kept moving, lips wrapping around his balls and sucking them into that amazing goddamn mouth.

"Pushy Californian." Not that he was gonna complain. No, sir. MJ knew his body now, knew what made him crazy. That whole mouth on his most sensitive skin thing? Oh, yeah.

MJ nodded, tongue pushing his nuts around, sliding the skin around them. Jesus. He. Uhn. Yeah.

Sonny lost his words somewhere in there, so he had to go by touch. He cupped MJ's cheeks in his hands, feeling them hollow out when MJ sucked his cock back in. He wanted to see MJ's eyes, wanted to stare right into them while MJ sucked him.

MJ gave it to him, too, staring at him like he was fucking amazing, like he was the hottest fucking thing MJ'd ever seen. MJ was it for him. Period. The hottest thing in his whole world. Brighter than the fucking sun, and shouldn't that go on the back of a romance novel or a box of prunes?

Like MJ heard that, two fingers pushed against his hole, threatening to push in, to spread him wide. Sonny arched right up, offering. Daring. Come on, Precious, and take it. Just like that.

Those fingers slid in, slow enough that the burn felt good, steady enough that it just fucking kept coming.

"MJ." Just that. MJ's name. God Almighty, it felt good. Hot and tight and almost too much, but Sonny took it, panting and grunting, pushing his ass back on those fingers.

Between the finger-fucking and the sucking, MJ erased all sorts of shit from his mind and left nothing but pure, raw need. Then those fingers curled and pegged his gland and the world went all sideways.

His whole body bucked and sawed back and forth, and he found his voice again, just in time to beg. "MJ. Goddamn. Please. Fucking need you."

MJ's mouth popped off his cock, making him complain for, oh, the three seconds it took MJ to slick up and push in. He pulled MJ to him and took a kiss that bruised him right up, pushing his lips back against his teeth. Wasn't anything in the world this couldn't fix. Not anything.

They fucked like there was no tomorrow, like the fucking world was ending and they were right there at the edge looking to jump. Fucking worked for him. Sonny clawed at MJ's back, bit at that sexy lower lip, and finally he just howled, his head falling back as he pumped hot come between their bellies. His body clamped down on MJ like it wanted the man to stay right there. Right there.

"Sonny." MJ lost the rhythm, just slamming into him like nothing going, skin flushed around that black ink.

Sonny held him, pushed him, growled at him, and finally got the stubbornest man alive to come.

MJ slumped down, using him as a bona fide redneck mattress. "Better."

"Much." He wanted to bask a little before the hard questions started. He really did.

MJ nodded, both of them floating and breathing.
Yeah. Basking.

He stroked MJ's back, feeling the sweat running there. God, he loved to just lie on the deck of that damned boat and wrap around MJ and let the sun love them.

"We're going to have to figure things out, Sunshine. We can't just leave them down there."

"I know. And we can't toss them to the sharks, either." He knew MJ would suggest that, as well as just blowing up the boat and getting them a bigger one.

"We could find them a tiny little island and maroon them, or give them a chunk of cash and drop them off..."

"Well, what do we do when your client comes to bite us on the ass?" He pinched said ass, just wanting to cop a feel.

"Run." MJ sounded relatively serious. "That or kidnap them. We're getting good at that."

"Hey, I only kidnap people I like or old school friends of yours." He grinned, wondering if MJ would get het up over where that put the Englishman.

"Don't make me beat you, Sonny. So far I'm in a good mood." MJ gave him a look that let him know that MJ was following along.

"Well, we can't keep them forever. You're right. So make with the plan." He grinned, kissing MJ's chin.

"I thought you were the brains and I was the brawn..."

"I'm the getaway driver." They could just stay like this forever. He wouldn't mind at all.

"You're pretty fucking good at that." MJ nuzzled his chest, teasing him. "I wonder how you'd do with a hybrid."

"You are so not funny." A hybrid. Jesus. Why not a wind up car or a rubber band driven slingshot?

"They're good for the environment, you know. Fossil fuels are terrible." Little shit.

"Do you want me to smack you, Precious? I will." He put his hand flat on MJ's ass, threatening a little.

"Promises, promises." Man, MJ didn't sound near worried enough.

"You say the word and I'll pop you so good..." That was almost laughable, him spanking MJ. The man would try to kick his ass into the middle of next week.

"Somehow, I think that's not what you want to do with my ass and your hand, Sunshine." Sonny had to give it to MJ; the man could distract him without even trying.

"Huh?" That little wiggle had him all interested again. "What do we do about them?"

"We need to get some answers, I think. Who the Brit works for, what he knows about us. Rick will be easy. He's got family. He'll stay quiet."

"Okay. You're awfully twitchy about blond and English. You think he's got a jacket on you or something?" MJ didn't usually fly off the handle like he had on Neil.

"He knew our names, Sonny. Hell, you're the only person alive that I've told my name, and that includes Rick." MJ started to do that tic thing.

"Shhh." He kissed all over MJ's face, making the man laugh like the loon he was. "We'll figure it out. We can always use Paddy to get what we want from the Brit. He seems attached."

"Yeah." MJ sighed, met his eyes all of the sudden. "I don't like this shit, man. I blow shit up—buildings, roads, boats. Not this."

"I know. It's that tiny bit of moral fiber..."

"You are going to end up as chum, redneck." It was a *really* little speck, really. Not even a whole fiber.

"Yeah yeah. Trolling for sharks with my ass? You like it too much." Sonny arched and rolled a little.

"Do I?" MJ grinned down, bit his bottom lip good and hard. "There's lots of you I intend to keep."

"Like what? Gonna show me?" He loved to provoke his psycho. He really did. It made MJ so alive. So fucking hot.

Those eyes were like fucking lasers and MJ bit him again, hard enough to sting. "I do all the fucking time."

"Uh-huh. I count on it." He took a kiss that rocked them both, had them both groaning and rubbing like mad fools.

"Fucking need this." MJ rolled them so they landed on their sides. "Need you. Asshole."

"Good. That way I won't become fish bait." He grinned wildly, shoving his mouth against MJ's again, tongue pushing deep to taste.

MJ's hand was on the back of his neck, holding him close. Tugging him right in.

"Always need you, Precious. Always." He needed so badly. He needed to have MJ touch him and forget that they had shit hanging over their head like a fiery sword. Or an exploding still.

He got it, too. MJ bit and sucked, licked and growled and rubbed against him like a fucking wild thing. Sonny liked it.

A lot.

MJ was his favorite drug. He rolled, wrapping around MJ and biting at that amazing mouth, licking the red spots he left behind. MJ's lips slid over, soft against his jaw. "Going to let you in, Sonny. Just you. Deep."

"All the way? Everything I got?"

"Everything." Those teeth sank into his earlobe, stinging like all fuck.

Grunting, Sonny rolled his hips up and up, thinking of his cock sliding deep, or his fucking hand. All the way above the wrist.

"Yeah. Fuck, yes." MJ was panting like they'd run a mile, saying filthy words and making promises.

"I want to feel you around my hand, Precious. Feel how hot you are." He knew how hot it was, had felt it around him when he thrust his cock in.

"Yes. Yes, Sunshine." MJ groaned, their bellies slapping together as they moved.

"Yeah. Come on, you beautiful son of a bitch. Come on." He held MJ closer, bit harder, begging with his whole body. Heat sprayed up along his belly, MJ's fingers dragging along his spine.

"Sweet. Jesus, sweet." Sonny bucked, his cock throbbing as he came.

"Mm-hmm." MJ slumped, panting against him. "Better. Much fucking better."

"God, yes." He grinned, nuzzling the join of MJ's neck and shoulder. "We can float just a little longer."

"Yeah, Sunshine. We just need to sit and have a chat with our guests, then we'll figure shit out."

"Okay." Sonny thought about it. "But I think you should be unarmed..."

"You don't trust me?"

"I think that Englishman brings out the worst in you, Precious." The snarly, sexy, fucking hot psycho.

"I think you're probably right." MJ nodded, forehead on his shoulder. "Then you have to be."

"I will. No problem. You know I can handle a weapon, huh?" He grinned, thinking of that silly rifle and MJ's knife and, and...

MJ nodded, eyes burning into him sorta. "I know. I trust you."

"Yeah." He touched MJ's cheek. "And I trust you with my life. Just not the Brit's." He grinned. Neil made MJ crazy.

MJ chuckled, the sound damn near a snort. "We're having a moment, redneck, don't screw it up."

"Oh, right. How about this?" He took a kiss, deep and slow and almost lazy, but that underlying emotional shit? Heavy.

"Mmm ... that works. Do it again."

"Yeah. Love it." Sonny kissed MJ again and again, wondering if his body could even contemplate three.

MJ grinned, nibbled his bottom lip lazily, just basking. Basking. Like lizards. Sonny figured he could handle that for right now. They could go question the mad scientist and the Brit later. Sooner or later they'd have to stop putting it off.

But not now.

Chapter Thirty Four

Boomer was blowing foam into the end of a gun and then dragging a fuzzy thing through it. It was sort of fascinating, really. In that, gee-you've-got-a-lot-of-guns way.

Paddy sat in the shade of the little cabin, Neil standing close by, staring out into the water. Sonny was sort of pacing, looking at Boomer over and over, the sun shining on the man's bald head.

"You're going to get sunburned on your head." He sunburned a lot; he knew. Well, except not on his head, because he had hair and shit.

"Honey, it's been years since I burned." Well, maybe that was true. Sonny had that ... crinkly look.

"Oh. Are you going to let us go?"

Boomer arched an eyebrow, looked over. "Eventually, yeah. I need to know who you both work for."

"I work for Bethy at M3 Research. You know that." This whole 'where do you work' thing was getting old.

Neil said nothing, just standing there and staring. And staring. It was kinda scary.

"I need to know who your sidekick works for, Rick. I need to know what he knows about us." Boomer's eyes were sorta scary, really. Sort of inhuman.

"We don't know anything about you."

Well, they did, but they didn't. Know. They more knew in that whole Neil-reading-minds way, which he really didn't think Boomer would like.

"Leave him alone. Haven't you done enough?" Oh, now Neil spoke. Like all cold and British.

"No one forced him to design weapons. He wasn't there under lock and key." Man, MJ could do icy-cold too.

Neil turned those funny colored eyes on Boomer, staring right through him. "You were in the program. You know what they keep from you."

"Are you working for him?"

MJ's stare pierced Neil; it looked sort of painful really. Paddy tilted his head, trying to figure out who 'he' was supposed to be. Boomer knew Neil didn't work for him.

"No. His boss, Bethy, was told to hire me. At least so far as I know. I was supposed to protect him." Neil's face twisted, his shoulders hunching up.

"So how did she know about us?" MJ's head tilted. "Rick, was she part of the program?"

"The program? You mean school?" Paddy shook his head. No. No, Bethy had been at M3 way longer than him.

"I mean the program, Rick. Jesus, open your eyes, man. You think everyone went to college and got a Ph.D. before they were twenty?"

"Well, no..." Of course not. They were smart. Really smart.

Sonny turned at the end of one pace and glared at them all impartially. "Are we getting anywhere, Precious?"

"I could shoot Rick in the leg and see if it helps."

He would be more worried if the gun wasn't in about a thousand little pieces.

"You could. But maybe you need to start asking better questions." Oh, snarly. He didn't think he would take on Boomer that way.

"Better questions? Fine. How do you know the personal information about us, you smarmy little fuckhead?" MJ started putting the gun back together, not even having to look at the pieces.

"Endearments will get you nothing." Now, Neil was smiling, looking at MJ like he was some kind of weird bug.

"No, but I can make your little lover scream like nothing you have ever heard." MJ's eyes went dead, icy, and Paddy scrambled to his feet as MJ stood. "I won't enjoy it, but I have no intentions of allowing my employers to figure out that none of the bodies in the explosion were yours. Give me the information I need, Neil, or I will make you extremely sorry."

Oh.

Oh, God.

Oh, that would.

Oh.

"Stop. Leave Paddy alone, for God's sake." Neil moved faster than Paddy would have thought he could. Especially on a boat. Neil was in front of him in no time flat, protecting him. "There is no file on you, Manning. You or Robert Junior there, either."

"You have exactly fifteen seconds to explain yourself or I'll make him pay. Fifteen. Fourteen."

Paddy turned, looking for the hatch, for something. He needed a weapon.

"Thirteen. Twelve."

"Precious. Stop." Okay, Sonny sounded like the voice of reason now. That was kind of scary, but Sonny moved between MJ and Neil. It was like watching a bizarre game of checkers. He kept expecting one of them to shout, "King me!"

"He knows your *name*, Sonny."

"Yeah, and if you kill him, we'll never know what we want to." Sonny turned on Neil. "He's gonna kill you, man, unless you tell him. I might help."

"He reads minds, okay? No killing him. Neither one of you!" Paddy grabbed Neil, pulling him away from those two, away from the guns.

Sonny and MJ stared at him like he'd grown two heads. Neil just chuckled and pulled him close, lips against his temple.

"He's lost it." MJ tilted his head, looked over at him. "Did Sonny drug you again?"

"Has he?" Neil smiled against his skin before looking up at Boomer. "Tell me, how much do you miss Jerome?"

Sonny tilted his head. "Who's Jerome?"

"I haven't the foggiest fucking id..." MJ went still, eyes fastened on Neil like lasers, and Paddy could feel the danger in the air like the ozone right before the lightning hit.

"Yes, you were what? Six? And he was a lovely little hound mix. Now tell me that would be in your jacket, sweetcheeks."

MJ lunged for Neil, one hand reaching for Neil's throat, fingers squeezing. "How did you know that?"

"MJ! He can't tell you if you strangle him!" Sonny was there in a flash, pulling them apart.

MJ swung around, hitting Sonny in the jaw with a solid pop.

Okay.

Okay.

Paddy grabbed Neil's wrist and tugged. Down. Down. Neil said MJ was scared of closed spaces. They were better off in the belly of the boat.

He heard a tussle, Sonny grunting and MJ shouting, but all he cared about was Neil and safe and yes. Down.

"Good job, sweet. That's very good," Neil said when they hit the lower deck.

"Oh, God. Okay. Okay. He's going to kill you. He's crazy. I can't. He has guns and things and he hates you and I AM ON A BOAT!" The words just kept coming, Paddy stamping and screaming and waving his hands while his blood pounded in his ears so loud he couldn't even hear himself.

"Stop. Stop, Paddy. Just stop." He thought Neil was gonna slap him. Neil kissed him instead, cutting off his air and his thoughts.

Paddy swayed a little, the world gone cotton-white and still. Neil.

His Neil.

"I've got you." Neil said it against his mouth, or maybe never said it out loud at all, just passing it right into his head.

Sorry. He was. He just couldn't. Neil's fingers brushed that spot on the back of his neck and the panicworryshame shattered again.

Oh.

Neil.

"Love." Neil, right there, warm and alive and good and not with MJ, who had lost it.

Yes. Love. Paddy clung to Neil, both of them breathing together, in sync. Easier. This was easier.

"Yes, much easier. Much." Neil kissed his forehead, stroking his back. "They won't hurt me. They need me."

"Why?" Neil had the prettiest eyes...

"I'm not sure ... but I know it." Neil knew shit. He was good that way. He also had a glorious mouth.

"Okay." They could lock the door. Hide down here. Together.

"No. No, I need to talk to them. I could do it alone, if you want to stay here." Neil was worried for him. He could hear it loud and clear.

"No. No, they'll hurt you." Boomer was crazy. Really.

"He wants to, but under all that he's really quite smart." He noticed Neil didn't say sane.

"He's the smartest man I ever met." At least Boomer had been, before he died.

"Shhh. I know. He's not your friend like he was once. But he could not kill you. I think we['re making] progress." He could hear Neil's smile, feel it on his skin.

"What happened to him, Neil? Do you know?"

"He had a rather nasty life changing experience. Someone close to him died rather gruesomely." Wow. That was sad. Neil even sounded sympathetic, and that was hard to do when someone tried to kill you all the time.

"Well, what do we do now?" How did they get out of this without getting dead?

"I'm not sure. I'll think of something, hmm?" Neil wanted him to rest now. To stop worrying and save his strength.

"Yeah." He didn't want to be worthless. Pointless. He wanted to be strong.

"You are far from worthless, love. Kiss me some more." Okay. Yeah, okay, he could so do that.

Paddy reached up, held onto Neil and kissed the man with all he was. Love. No hurting his Neil.

Love. Neil loved him, too. So much.

He thought maybe—maybe—they'd figure things out. Without dying.

He was really hoping for that not dying part.

Chapter Thirty Five

"A fucking mind reader? What the fuck is that supposed to mean? What the hell is going on here?" He paced and growled, bare feet slapping on the deck. Mind reading. He didn't fucking believe it.

He didn't.

Except. Hell, he hadn't thought of Jerome in ten years, not until the day they were on the road and he saw an ugly little mutt that looked just like...

No.

MJ shook his head. "It isn't possible, Goddamnit. It isn't. Fuck. What the hell is going on here?"

"I don't know, Precious. But it makes as much sense as anything."

Lord save him from people from the Deep South. Sonny believed in hoodoo or whatever. For fuck's sake. MJ headed back toward the bow of the boat, trying to make up a plan. He could just shoot them both. No. That was shitty karma. Fuck, he believed the little son of a bitch when Paddy said he hadn't known. Shit. He could just shoot Neil. Neil had to have known.

Had to.

Sonny followed him, staring and silent, bald head shining in the sun. Damn, but that man still looked good, even when he wasn't in the mood to be distracted.

Okay. Okay. Think.

No looking at Sonny.

Think.

Someone hired Neil to protect Paddy.

Someone hired him to kill Rick.

Someone...

Wait.

Wait.

He stood at the hatch, growling down. "Who the fuck do you work for?"

He'd be goddamned if he was getting fucked.

"Me?" That smug British voice floated up. "Why the Foundation, of course. I told you. Bethy hired me."

Fucking liar.

He didn't know a Bethy, but he knew when he was being dry-fucked. It wouldn't be the first time in recent memory.

"I am not a liar! Well, at least not in this instance." That pale face appeared in his line of sight. "I swear to you, it was your Foundation. Or at least that was what they told Bethy."

"My Foundation?" He was confused. Did Neil mean the Program? Harry? What?

"Yes. The Program. It's the Foundation of something something now."

Sheer horror filled him, flashes of Paula in that container, the way she bloated, the way Greg looked when that bastard put a bullet in her brain, then left him trapped. Trapped. Fuck. He. Fuck. Murderers. Motherfucking bastards.

"MJ. Jesus, what is it?" Sonny was right there, hands on his shoulders, shaking him. Or maybe he was shaking anyway. Sunshine sure did look scared.

"I." He stepped away, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. What the fuck to do.

"No. Don't you shut me out, Precious. We're partners. You and me. A team. You tell me." Sonny always put like five more syllables in shit when he was upset. "Tell" came out "Tey-all".

His mouth sort of opened and closed, the thoughts swirling in his head faster than he could talk. So many fucking years. So many fucking sins. Paula rotting in that goddamned box. Rotting right there and he couldn't get out and they fucking set him up. "He works for them, Sonny. For those bastards. Did they find me? Did you know I was coming, you *bastard*? All these fucking years I've stayed under their radar and now ... Did you fucking set me up? I'll tear you apart, I swear to God!"

"Shit." Sonny disappeared when his fist went through the door, but just about the time he got his hand worked free and was about to go down there and drag that fucking Neil out by the hair, Sonny was back. With a syringe. "You want me to drug you, Precious? You don't calm down, I so will."

"Don't you fucking dare." He didn't want to fight with Sonny, goddamnit.

"Then fucking calm down and tell me what's going on!" Those dark eyes just burned into his. "You think I like it that *he* knows and I got no clue?"

"I don't know!" MJ held Sonny's glare, let it give him somewhere to stand. "I don't know, but we have to figure it out because if that motherfucker knows I'm alive..."

Then he was deeply, deeply fucked.

"Who? If who knows you're alive? Goddamnit, MJ! You talk about me and Woody. If you have some ex-boyfriend with a death wish with your name on it..."

"Boyfriend?" MJ stopped, blinked, considering barfing up a lung. "God, no."

"So what? An old boss? An evil scientist?" Sonny waved his arms. "Boo."

"Boo." He swayed a little, hand reaching for Sonny. "Lock them downstairs."

They so needed to talk.

"Okay." Sonny went down with the little syringe still in his hands. He and Neil exchanged a few murmured words, then the little hatch closed and Sonny was back. "You want a beer?"

"Yeah." He nodded, stepping close to Sonny, hand sliding around the man's waist. "Yeah. I'm ... Yeah, Sonny."

"I got you." The questions stopped, the fighting went away, and Sonny just pulled him right up against that solid fucking brick house of a body and wrapped around him. Giving him what he needed.

He pushed up and pulled down, bringing their lips together, breathing in Sonny-flavored air. Oh. Better. Sonny kissed him hard enough to bruise, hands on the back of his head, fingers sinking into his hair. That made things a whole lot better.

The kiss went on and on, bruising and burning deep down. When they settled, staring at each other, both of them panting and holding on, MJ felt like he might make it. "Hey."

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"Hey. We making out or talking? Because we could get more comfy." He got a grin, Sonny's chest rising and falling fast.

"Both, and yeah. Comfy." His own smile just pushed out of him. Okay. See him. See him cope.

"Come on." They sat on one of the benches, the cushion soft beneath them, the sun shining down on them.

Okay. Yeah. Better.

MJ leaned over, rested his cheek against Sonny's shoulder. "When I was a kid, I got recruited into this thing. They called it the Program..."

Chapter Thirty Six

Sonny sat with MJ leaning against him, one arm around the man's waist. Goddamn. He thought Precious was fucked up, but now he was amazed at how sane the guy really was. After all that...

Government and training and shooting and ... Jesus.

He kissed MJ's neck. "But you're with me now," he said, when MJ was quiet. "So we'll figure it out."

"Yeah." MJ nodded. "Yeah, we will. I'm not losing this now."

"Good." That was what counted. Sonny wasn't much on dwelling. He tilted MJ's face up for a kiss, taking that mouth with everything he had.

It took a second for MJ to catch up, but when that crazy son of a bitch did? Goddamn. MJ kissed him back so hard his goddamn toes curled. They got busy pretty damned fast, hands sliding on bare chests and bellies, pulling at the loose pants they wore on the boat. Sonny needed all of MJ, needed to show him that he was real and okay and that even mind readers meant nothing when they had this.

MJ's hand was hard as fuck against his neck, keeping him close, keeping him right fucking there. Sonny pushed MJ down on his back, pushing between those pretty legs, cock rubbing on MJ's like there was no tomorrow.

"Fuck me. Want to feel you." Demanding son of a bitch.

"Yeah? Want me in you, Precious? How much do you want?"

"I want everything." MJ met his eyes, serious as a heart attack. Jesus.

"We've got plenty of lube, right?" Six tubes, he'd counted. He could think of one thing that would let MJ know he was Sonny's. Twenty-four seven, three sixty-five.

"I bought out the Food Lion."

"Oh. Well, then we're good to go." He grinned, giving another kiss, a reward. "Tell me where to get it, and we'll go to town."

"It's in the box under our bed." They had a sweet little set up, their cabin all windows.

"Well, let's go there." Pulling MJ up, he dragged them both to their little cabin, not wanting to lose momentum. He pushed MJ down on the bed and kissed the man hard enough that his ears rang.

MJ moaned, sucking on his tongue, legs spread wide, just giving it up to him. He touched MJ there, his hand sliding down over cock, balls, slipping back to stroke the skin behind, pressing from the outside.

"Yours." MJ's eyes were on him like white on rice, never wavering even a bit.

"So mine." Damn, look at that man. Flushed, wanting, fucking desperate. Sonny moved away for half a second, finding the tubes of lube.

He grabbed one, worked it open. He could smell MJ, smell the way Precious needed him.

"Gonna feel you, Precious. Need you." His slick fingers slid right back behind MJ's balls, pushing against that sweet hole.

MJ bore down, taking two of his fingers in without so much as a flinch. "Yeah. I know about needing."

"You do?" Grinning, he stroked that flat belly with his other hand, feeling muscles quiver for him. Muscles quivered for him in other places, too. Made him moan like a dying man.

"I do." MJ stared at him like he was fucking magic. "Going to wear your ink. Going to let you in deep."

"You know it. Fucking love you, Precious." He put three fingers in, moving them in and out, making MJ feel him so good. God, that was hot and tight, but so ready for him. So ready.

"Yeah. Love." One of those muscled legs bent, spread MJ wide. Goddamn, look at that.

He stroked that fine belly, soft and easy like, relaxing MJ even more. The man's cock never flagged, even when he put four fingers in, and damn, he had to touch it. Just pulling. That got him a moan, a deep, low sound that sort of vibrated between them. MJ squeezed his fingers, rolling up toward his touch, fucking his palm.

"Jesus. So fucking pretty, MJ. I can feel you, man." He was working his fingers in and out, slipping in the lube, letting go of MJ's cock to squirt more on. He was gonna need it to get his thumb inside.

"I hope so. Can feel you, deep inside." So deep. So right.

"Yeah. Yeah." God. He pushed and pulled back and pushed in, his thumb sliding past the impossibly stretched hole, so tight that he didn't think it would go. Then whoosh. He was in.

"Sonny." The word was shocked, stunned, hands opening and closing on his arms.

"Mine." He figured it was worth saying again, even if it did take all the breath he had left. Christ on a crutch. His whole hand was inside MJ. He had the man in the fucking palm of his hand.

"Yours." MJ's hand reached down, stroked the ink on that flat belly, stroked where his hand was.

"Oh, God." All he could think was that MJ would wear him on his skin soon, just like MJ's body held his hand now. He almost lost it, but Jesus, he had to stay steady. Not hurt. MJ's eyes closed and he stretched, so careful, so easy. Those muscles around his hand just fluttered like crazy. Sonny opened and closed his fingers, watching MJ's muscles quiver. Watching the flush that spread up.

"Full of you." MJ's lips were parted, tongue flicking out to wet them.

"Got all of me. Every bit." His hips started to move, his cock against MJ's leg. He was gonna explode like one of MJ's pipe bombs.

MJ nodded, one hand actually reaching for his prick.

"Yeah." Okay, yeah. Circle of pleasure and all that. Sonny moved just right, and they were flying. His hands were both busy, his cock in MJ's grip and that was just too fucking good. And not enough. MJ kept whispering his name, over and over, the sound like some weird-assed prayer.

"Love. Fuck." He was on a roll himself, just grunting and cussing and all sorts of stuff, telling MJ everything.

Everything.

They were fucking insane, the two of them. They found a rhythm, found a way to move, to touch. Sonny fought to keep his eyes open, fought to keep staring right down at MJ, those hot eyes making him crazy.

"I need. Fuck. Sunshine. Please."

"I know. I know." They couldn't keep ratcheting up. There was no way they could fly higher than this. Groaning, he let his hand twist just the tiniest bit, let himself fill MJ just the tiniest bit deeper. MJ's cry sorta filled the whole room, spunk spraying, spreading over MJ's belly.

"Oh, fuck..." Sonny just ... he lost it, coming so hard he thought he might black out. He kept himself upright, kept his hand still, but everything else shorted out.

MJ was limp, quiet, the only real motion those eyes, watching him, staring at him.

Sonny panted, holding himself up on his shaking left arm. Staring right back. "Just this, Precious. This is the important stuff."

He got a nod. "Just. Just this."

"The rest we can figure out." He squirted more lube around his wrist, needing it to work free.

"Uh-huh." MJ squeezed him. "Going to feel you for days."

"Good. Want you to remember that whenever you start to freak out. Got it?"

"I don't freak out." MJ's eyes rolled when he moved his hand.

"Uh-huh. Okay, hold still, Precious." He had to move. Had to, even if he didn't want to. He started to slowly pull out.

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MJ groaned, going stiff, panting low as he stretched that tiny ring.

"Shhh. Breathe, babe. Just breathe." He petted that flat belly, fingers working in circles.

"Breathing..." MJ's toes curled, muscles relaxing as he took a deep breath.

He worked free, both of them sighing as his hand slid out. Sonny let himself flop down on the bed, knowing they both needed a bath, but just too tired to move right away. MJ scooted closer, just enough. Just right there.

Chapter Thirty Seven

Neil was rather ... stunned.

The storm of emotion from abovedecks would have been bad enough, heaped on top of MJ's private movie reel of his youth. But what else had happened after. Gracious. That was something he wished he could have blocked out.

He was trying valiantly to hide his ... his what? His utter amazement? His rather fascinated revulsion, from Paddy.

He wasn't sure how well. But still.

Of course, Paddy was still wandering about in quite a state, thoughts flittering from one bit to another without the slightest hesitation. Neil thought it was quite possible he could turn into a slaving beast and Paddy might simply stare a moment and then move on.

"Paddy? Love? Would you mind helping me make some tea?" That ought to distract them both.

"Tea? Is there tea? Is hot tea made with the same tea as iced tea because I've seen Sonny drink iced tea but not the other and..." Paddy blinked, tilted his head. "You lost your magic bag with all the tea things."

Paddy looked at him a moment, then turned toward the little sink and cupboard, muttering under his breath about water and cups and fault and tea and China. Bless his heart. Thank God the racket above had ended. Now he could concentrate on Paddy. He went and put his head on Paddy's shoulder, his arms circling the sturdy waist below.

Paddy stilled a moment, those thoughts on him, on love and need and things that Paddy didn't have words for. Yes.

Kissing just under Paddy's ear, Neil hummed. "Tea, and those funny biscuits and more Pop-Tarts."

He got a chuckle—low and deep and so sweet. "More Pop-Tarts."

"Yes. There's more in the box." That was what he needed to hear. He could handle anything if Paddy would only laugh for him.

"What happens after we leave here, Neil? Will you go home?"

"Well, I'm afraid I'm something of a vagabond. I had hoped I might hitch myself to you and go." He wanted that badly. More than he wanted to admit, though he couldn't hide it from Paddy. Not when they were this close.

"Oh." The word would have worried him, had he not felt this crushing wave of relief, of agreement.

Of a pure pleasure.

"Yes, oh. I'm in this for good or ill, love. With you."

"Okay. Okay. That's good. Good." Paddy relaxed, slumping in his arms. "I didn't even know I was worried until now."

"Well, now you needn't worry on that." He hugged tightly, just smiling against Paddy's skin. "Everything else, yes. That, no."

That earned him another laugh, full-throated and honest, Paddy tickled, deep down.

"Come here, love." He turned Paddy gently, easing his lover around to take a gentle kiss. Oh, much better. Paddy was *there*, with him, engaged.

"I didn't know that I was hurting people, Neil. I was just playing. I was. I just wanted to make things."

"I know that, sweet. I knew it the minute I met you." He pulled back to look into bright green eyes. Staring. He needed Paddy to know he meant it. "You didn't deserve this."

"No?" Paddy held on tight. "I would have stopped. Did everybody else know? Am I stupid?"

"No, love. Ninety percent of your co-workers had no idea. Your Bethy knew what you were about, I'm afraid." Paddy needed the truth.

"But why..." Paddy's voice trailed off, mind clicking along, putting this and that and this together with a maddening speed. No, his Paddy wasn't stupid, not even a bit. Once the connections started, Paddy could stun him. His eyes actually crossed at the flood of ideas and little hot bursts of anger. This whole situation had him on overload. The constant flow of MJ's thoughts didn't help.

Of course, when everything stopped—Paddy's fingers framing his face, Paddy's lips on his, Paddy's mind insisting that Neil feel and focus—he couldn't decide whether to moan or just allow his brains to leak out of his ears. Blinking, he smiled a bit, hugging Paddy again. "You are amazing, sweet."

"Oh, good. That worked." Paddy shifting until those legs could wrap around his waist. "You looked like you were going to explode. That would be bad."

"Yes indeed." This time he was the one to laugh. "I was contemplating dribbly brains. Not a pleasant thought."

"No. No dribbling. There's nothing fun about dribbling."

"No." He squeezed again, listening to the thump of Paddy's heart. What a sweet sound.

Love. Love. Love. That's what Paddy's heart said. To him.

They rested together, and thank God the two up above were drifting off. The noise was going down, the endless thump of thoughts easing.

"We'll be okay. I promise." Paddy held him, fingers sliding down his spine. Such an odd mixture of lost and strong in one mind.

"We will. I think I need to talk to MJ again, though." He had a ghost of a plan. If he was very lucky, it might work.

A rush of worry opened between them again. "Don't let him hurt you."

"I won't. I'm going to give him what he wants." He grinned, hands sliding up and down Paddy's back.

"What? What does he want?"

"He wants to know if he was set up and by whom. I have no idea if he was, but I know who he should talk to."

"Oh. Okay." Paddy wasn't even curious, not really. It was actually quite odd, the way Paddy avoided.

"I can tell him and hopefully he'll set up a meet..." He let it trail off, knowing Paddy would hear the rest of his thoughts.

It didn't take Paddy even a second to catch on, agree. Yes. A meeting where they had to go to shore.

Land.

A chance to run.

Yes, he thought. A chance to get away.

And to start over.

Chapter Thirty Eight

Paddy spent all afternoon—evening—whatever, digging through the boxes down in the bottom of the boat. MJ had interesting storage.

Detonators.

Ammo.

Clothes.

A box of science-fiction novels.

Ah. A tool box.

Paddy found a screwdriver and a pair of needle-nosed pliers and tugged a chair over to climb up to unscrew a light bulb from the dangling fixture.

Neil had just been watching him up until now, between pacing and cussing MJ for not talking to him. Now, Neil looked over at him, eyebrows climbing. "What're you up to, love?"

"Making a bomb." Well, trying to. He hadn't made one in a very long time and he really only had half of the things he needed. MJ had to have his stash separated.

"A bomb. We are still on the boat, love. Blowing it up might be detrimental to our health."

"Oh." Yeah, that could be problematic. Still, he'd really like to see if he could do it. Maybe a little one. Just enough to scare MJ.

"What if..." Neil came over and ran a hand up and down his leg. "What if you built it, and then waited until we could run to set it off. As a distraction."

Ooh.

That sounded fun.

Paddy nodded, climbing down. If he was going to do that, he needed something sturdier than a light bulb.

Bombs going off in his pockets would be...

Bad.

Really, really bad.

"The only thing I want going off in your pocket is me." Oh, hey. Wow.

Paddy let himself have a minute of just pure, indulgent fantasy involving him and Neil and a beach.

Neil's eyes widened, the dark ring around the outside of the iris really standing out. "Oh. Yes."

He looked over, nodded. He wanted that. He wanted to be naked and happy, sucking Neil off, having Neil's hands on him.

Neil leaned in and kissed him, hard enough to sting. Desperate. Needy.

Oh. He blinked up, caught in it, heart pounding for a minute before he wrapped his arms around Neil and kissed back with all he was.

They stumbled over the chair and missed the little bunk by a mile, sinking right down on the planks instead, hands and mouths moving. God. Neil was thinking right back at him. Umbrella drinks and coconut oil and bare skin. Yes. Yes. He wanted Neil pushing inside him, he wanted sunshine and laughter and Neil.

Neil yanked at his T-shirt, just scrabbling at him, practically shouting his name without ever moving out of the kiss. His name. Over and over.

Everything sort of swayed, his head full of Neil, swelling with that voice, with Neil's need. Holding him up, Neil kissed him again, mouth open so he could push in and taste. Salt. Sea. Neil. More. He could feel it all pushing at him, Neil's body and mind. Both of them, together. Happy. Home. Needing. Paddy groaned into the kiss, eyes seeing nothing but Neil. Nothing.

They toppled over, stretching out so they could touch and kiss and all that stuff without having to stay upright. Neil seemed pretty intent on touching him everywhere. Fortunately, he was all about touching. Tasting was good, too. Pushing in deep. Paddy was easy.

"Mm-hmm. Tasting." Neil murmured it against his skin, licking along his collarbone, lips and tongue tickling and not tickling at all. He shivered with it, with Neil's voice and with more of those shared thoughts.

"Taste..." Neil started working his T-shirt off, his nipples drawing up tight, trying to get Neil's attention.

"Everywhere." Neil bent and licked his nipples, tongue working first one, then the other before those lips closed around one and started sucking.

Neil. Neil.

He wasn't sure if he was talking, but it didn't matter. All that mattered was the electricity that just slid down his spine. Working down, Neil pushed at his sweats, mouth on his belly, hot as a brand. Heat he knew, in all of its scientific applications. This? This was pure feel.

"Need you." Everything in him felt like it was stretching, reaching for Neil's mouth.

"Love. I ... oh." That hot mouth closed right around the tip of his cock, lips sealing around the head. Paddy groaned, heels slamming down, hips bucking up without him even being able to breathe. Neil loved him so good, licking and sucking and just making him crazy. Everything he needed was right there, Neil filling up his mind. Everything went white and bright, Paddy holding on tight and just taking everything Neil would give him.

When Neil cupped his balls he lost it, that hot mouth taking him all the way down, just really taking everything he had right back. Paddy's whole world was Neil, just for a minute, just long enough to heal things that had felt so hurt.

Neil smiled at him when he came back up for air, leaning in to kiss him, holding on for long moments. Just holding him.

"I." He blinked a little, head all goofy and loose on his neck. "You need?"

"I'm fine, love. Brilliant, actually." Neil sounded happy and dazed and right there with him.

"Brilliant." Paddy nodded, gathering Neil in close. Yeah. Yeah, he was feeling...

"Good. We should rest now. Then you can start on your bomb." Neil's long eyelashes tickled his cheek as Neil snuggled in, heavy against him.

Yeah. He could make something loud and bright, something that wouldn't hurt anything.

Something distracting.

Something...

Neil's voice drew him down into dreams, tempting him away from his plans.

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Plans. Well, at least they had one now. Kinda. It was enough.

Chapter Thirty Nine

He let Sonny have his piece, his knives. Hell, MJ let Sonny give him a Xanax.

Then he sat down and let Sonny bring Neil and Rick up.
See him.

See him be firm but calm.

Cool.

Collected.

Smooth.

Not even a little homicidal.

Go him.

Rick looked different. Calmer, too. Neil just smiled, that fucking little ... Zen. He wouldn't even let that little shit get to him, with those funky eyes dancing and the smug. Cool.
Collected.

Sonny stood behind him, hands on his shoulders, fingers massaging. MJ let that touch ease him, down to the bone.
"We have to find a common ground between us. I need to know who set me up."

Calm.

Easy.

Not freaked out.

Neil nodded, meeting his eyes. "I can tell you who you need to meet with, I believe. That ought to be a start. You can understand that we want this resolved, as well. Yes?"

"I know, and as soon as I find out what I need, we'll do that." Man, he really needed one of those memory eraser

drugs that were in all the spy novels. That would come in incredibly handy.

"Then what do you want from me? I shall try to give it." Reaching out, Neil took Rick's hands, playing with Rick's fingers.

"I need to know who this person is I need to speak with. I need to know who was setting who up. I need to know what's going on." His control started to get a little frayed.

Sonny gripped his shoulders hard a minute, then let go a little, and his muscles unclenched. "He just needs to know what you know."

"Very well." Neil pursed his lips a moment. "Bethy hired me. I told you that. She explained to me that I was working for a Foundation of some sort, not the government. But she truly believes that. So I think you need to start with whoever hired you. She knew him as Greg."

No. No, Greg wasn't ... He'd been funneling jobs through the same fuckhead for years. And Harry knew—knew just what to say to make sure he took the fucking job. Knew what to offer. Knew how to make sure that he was at the right place at the right time. Goddamnit.

Goddamnit.

He knew he couldn't trust Harry. Hell, he'd never even seen the man in person. He needed the man behind...

"Who manages you, man? Who calls your shots?"

"That's really not important. My contact is not your problem." Neil seemed pretty damned sure, but Hell, how did he know?

"Why should I believe you?" He needed to think. Neil'd said he'd give up information, but the son of a bitch hadn't given him anything.

"Well, I cannot know everything, naturally. But I know my source." Neil spread his hands, the one holding Rick's bouncing a little. "Most of the people working with Paddy had no idea."

"Most?" He could get the boss lady out, find out what she knew. Sonny didn't like dealing with the girls, though. He had that weird scared-of-crying-girls thing.

"Well, I occasionally got a twinge, but honestly, had they known, do you think Paddy and I would have been there for you to find?"

"How come you didn't know I was coming?" Because if the boss-lady knew, Neil should have known, right?

"I told you! I never heard you coming. Not a peep from anyone ... and as loud as you are. Christ." That face screwed up like Neil had sucked something sour.

"You were fucking him. You got distracted and fucking missed me." What was the son of a bitch supposed to do if he *had* heard them coming?

"I was supposed to call Bethy. She'd call Greg, your handler."

Greg wasn't his handler. That was...

Sonny leaned down, whispered a little. "You're going in circles."

"You have a suggestion?" He leaned his head back, met Sonny's eyes. "Because this is driving me crazy."

"Well, I tell you what, Precious. He seems awful intent on your source. That either means you should meet with him, or it's a set up. Either way you get the guy responsible."

MJ thought about that, nodded. They'd take Neil and Rick with them, and if anything went wrong, he'd pop them both, take Sonny, and run.

"Oh, I think not. We'll go, but there will be no popping." Neil crossed his arms over his chest, glaring.

That blind rage caught him again and he stared over. *Get out of my head, you son of a bitch, or I will make you bleed.*

Those eyes went wide, and Neil pressed one hand to the side of his head, looking pained. "No killing us. We're cooperating."

Okay, then. That worked. "Good. I'm not interested in killing you."

Random death was shitty karma.

Paddy started to flutter, eyes huge. "Don't hurt him. Don't, okay."

"Oh, for fuck's sake." Now it was Sonny getting all growly. "Stop with the blinky shit, okay? Everyone is going to get along, stay in their corners, and work together, okay? Y'all behave," Sonny said, pointing to Rick and Neil. "And you chill out."

Oh. That stinging little bite to his shoulder helped.

"I'm chilled." He grinned, shook his head. Sonny didn't suffer fools; Rick'd better get his shit together.

"Yeah. You're a stud." Sonny pinched his ass, probably just for good measure. "You, Mr. Brit, need to sit down and write down everything you know. Little Red can help you. I am

going to make some real food. Precious, no shooting, stabbing, or exploding."

"Not even a little kaboom?" Asshole.

"Not unless it's someone farting."

Hell, even Rick laughed a little at that.

"Bitch." MJ leaned back, looked over at Neil. "You make good money reading minds?"

"I have in the past, yes. I confess, I'm not sure how well I shall do in the future."

"Yeah, it sucks to get bent over and dry fucked." He knew. Fortunately, he planned ahead.

Sonny snorted, the sound loud as all hell. "I thought you liked it."

"Watch it, redneck, or we'll try it a few times and see if you get used to it."

Rick was making these great, odd noises.

"Uh-huh. You try it and I'll clean your plow." He did love that man's laugh, all low and rough and hot.

"Promises, promises." Man, they hadn't had a good brawl in days. He turned, trusting Sonny to watch his back as he stole a kiss. Sonny watched his back and felt it up, too, kissing him hard and deep, needy as anything. Yeah. That was the ticket. He ignored the groan from the Brit and the little peep from Rick. This was their motherfucking boat. They could make out if they wanted.

"Looks like we scared 'em off," Sonny said, when they came up for air. Sure enough, Rick and Neil had disappeared belowdecks again.

"Good for us. It's our high level of studliness. They can't bear it."

"There you go." Grinning, Sonny pulled him closer, cupping his ass. "Whatever will we do with ourselves?"

"Mmm. Fuck like bunnies?" He was so helpful.

"We could do that." His meth lab man was up for anything.

"Oh, good." He muscled Sonny back a little, hands sliding up that fine fucking body. "I need to contact Harry. Meet him."

"Okay. We need a land line, then." Yeah, they wouldn't want to give up their boat, their position.

"Yeah. You'll drop me off, let me make the call, and set shit up. Then I'll get you once it's done."

"Oh, fuck that. I'm gonna have your back, Precious." Sonny kissed him good and hard, taking all of his air. "No more splitting up."

MJ sorta blinked, gasping for air a second before nodding. Okay. Okay. Damn. He pushed into another kiss, tongue fucking Sonny's lips. Sonny held him there, pushing hard against him, like the proverbial immovable object. Shit, that man could make him melt. Good thing he was on MJ's side.

MJ crawled right up his own personal redneck, humping one hard thigh, fingers pushing against the stubble on Sonny's scalp. Bastard needed to shave.

"Mmm. Yeah. Man, you need to shave me." Looked like maybe Sonny was the one reading his mind now. That didn't bother him near as much.

"Hell, yes." He got off on that, straddling those fine hips, rubbing and shaving and baring that skin.

"Oh, damn, Precious." Okay, so maybe he was rubbing and humping now. And Sonny was lifting him so their cocks slid together.

"Later. Later. This now." Fuck, he loved this, loved fucking under the sun.

"Uh-huh." Sonny freed one hand, reaching down to slip it into MJ's baggy pants, grasping his cock and stroking.

"You are a strong bastard." His eyes rolled back in his head, balls tight as anything. "You bring out the beast, Precious." That hand just pulled and pushed and made him crazy. Sonny knew every sensitive spot, every fucking place on his body that would ping.

MJ leaned forward, bit the join of neck and shoulder, growling low as he shot.

"Uhn." Shaking, Sonny humped up against him, hips moving fast in that redneck's gotta-come rhythm. And damned if Sonny didn't come for him, right in those too-tight jeans.

They both slumped to the deck, kissing and holding on as they rode it through.

"Goddamn, MJ. Need to get you all worked up more often, huh?" Sonny grinned, dark eyes dancing for him, lips looking swollen as all fuck.

"You like it, huh?" He licked Sonny's bottom lip, catching it between his teeth and tugging a little.

"I like all the parts." Those hands were working him again, sliding down to his ass, then up his back, massaging along either side of his spine.

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"Yeah." He met those dark eyes, jonesing on the look there. "Gonna figure this shit out, dump our excess baggage, and get the hell out on the water."

"Sounds like a plan, Precious. Sounds like a hell of a plan."

MJ nodded. A hell of a plan or a fucking disaster looking for a place to happen.

Either way, it wouldn't be boring.

Chapter Forty

Tomorrow morning, they'd hit land in the Bahamas. He and MJ had agreed on the Bahamas, finally. He'd wanted Florida, so they could hit land and run if they had to. MJ had wanted someplace that wouldn't foul the nest if things went bad.

They were still arguing, naturally.

Neil and Paddy had been mostly hiding, but now they were out on deck, watching him and MJ like they were watching a tennis match. Lord.

"No. We gotta make the call from one side of the island and meet somewhere else."

"We're going to call and watch. They'll come to where we called from anyway."

"Well, no shit. But goddamnit, I won't have you getting caught. You hear me?" He got up in MJ's face, ignoring the audience.

"I don't *intend* to get caught, asshole!" MJ thumped against him, their chests slapping.

"Yeah, well, you didn't last time, either, did you?" Jesus Christ, this was the most stubborn man on earth. After him.

"If your fuckbuddy hadn't screwed me, I wouldn't have!"

"He wasn't my fuckbuddy anymore! That's your job!" His teeth snapped together on the end of that one, inches from MJ's nose.

Those blue eyes flashed, the look going from pissed to satisfied, just like that. "You bet your ass it is."

"Then you know it's also your job to stay alive."

"I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to fucking die. Bastard."

"Good." He took a kiss, hard and deep, good and hot. Yeah. Goddamn.

MJ groaned, tongue fucking his lips, hands on his shoulders.

"They're going it again." That was the little shit.

Sonny turned on Paddy, growling, his hands clenching. "If you weren't here we'd be banging like bunnies. I tell you, it's tempting to toss you overboard."

"I bet he'd float." MJ's hands cupped his ass, squeezing good and hard.

"Mmm." He went up on tiptoe, baring his teeth at Neil, who looked vaguely amused and kind of horrified.

"What I don't get is why they don't fuck more often. You'd think they'd want to get it all in now." Those hands slid around his belly.

"I think they're afraid we might see."

"I think you two have an unnatural preoccupation with fucking," Neil said, sneering. "What do you plan to do with us while you meet?"

"We're going to strip you, tie you to poles, and put signs that say 'Fresh Meat' around your necks." MJ sounded plumb tickled.

"Oh, now, that's a good one." Sonny approved. Damn.

Neil didn't. He just stared. "Yes, well, we're not the catch of the day."

MJ started working his balls, nice and easy. "No, not quite fresh, but you're not on ice. Yet."

Sonny rocked, humming a little as his cock drew up hard and his belly went tight.

"Neither are you. But Greg is still looking for you, Manning, and if you're not careful, you'll end up in a box with a bullet in your brain."

He felt the growl a half second before MJ fucking polevaulted around him, launching himself at the Brit like a fucking missile. Shit.

The Brit dodged, but not for long, and Sonny took two long steps so he could pry the clenched hands off Neil's throat. "Stop it, Precious."

MJ was tight as a board against him, muscles quivering. "Son of a bitch."

"Me? Oh, I think not. You're the hired killer." Neil was rubbing his throat, but standing his fucking ground. You had to admire the sheer stupidity of that.

"You stay out of my goddamned mind, you lousy prick, or I will rip your brains out of your nose with a hook." Man, that was a good threat.

"Graphic and pithy, babe." Gotta love it. MJ seemed calm enough to let go of him, though. Seemed levelheaded.

Which just proved that looks were deceiving.

MJ lunged forward and head-butted Neil in the gut. Neil's hands came down with a dull thud on MJ's neck and MJ grabbed both arms and sent Neil flying over his inked back and across the deck.

Things would have been fine then, if the little redheaded shit hadn't cold-cocked MJ in the temple with the butt end of a screwdriver. "You leave him alone!"

MJ blinked at him and swayed, then hit the deck himself.

Sonny roared, popping Paddy right in the nose, sending him skittering back to land on his ass. Then he checked MJ, making sure nothing important was broken.

MJ's eyes were rolling, but they came to rights, staring at him. "Little shit hit me."

"With a tool. I thought you cleaned out belowdecks." He helped MJ sit up, watching Paddy and the Brit, who were kinda in the same position they were.

"I thought I did, too."

Man, he was going to have to dump the hostages or buy a bigger boat.

One with a bigger hold. Someplace dark and wet and echoing and fucking empty. As soon as he knew MJ was okay, he padded over to the other two, reaching down to pull his gun out of his ankle holster.

"Empty your pockets."

"I'm tired of him hurting Neil." Man, the kid's balls finally dropped. Too bad the timing sucked.

"Uh-huh, and he's tired of the bastard raping his mind. You might be happy to mind meld or whatever, but we're not. Empty. Your. Pockets." The kid held his eyes long enough for him to cock the pistol, then the pockets got emptied. Man, the little fuck could scavenge.

"Jesus. Were we that fucking careless? Now back up." He waited until both Neil and Paddy slid back toward the rail before confiscating all the shit.

MJ was getting to his feet, stumbling a little, temple swelling up already.

"Goddamn." He was gonna kill the little shit himself. No one hurt his MJ. No one.

"I'm good. Need some fucking ice." MJ looked over at Paddy. "You try it again, he'll kill you. It was a good shot."

"Too good. Get your asses down belowdecks." He'd had it. He needed to look at MJ's head. Good thing it was like a rock.

Paddy's mouth opened, but the Brit grabbed the kid's hand and they ran like a pair of scared jackrabbits.

"You gonna live?" he asked, turning to take MJ's cheeks in his hands, tilting MJ's head this way and that.

"I think so. Watch the lump." MJ's eyes were a little wild, but the man was right there with him.

"I'm watching. It's growing. Almost as good as the one I gave you one time..."

"Yours always hurt worse." MJ leaned into his touch, just like that.

"Yeah? Good to know. These days I only hurt because I care." He grinned, touching his nose to the end of MJ's.

"Ah. Tough love." MJ licked his lips, eyes serious as hell. "One way or another, Sunshine, we dump the cargo."

"Yeah. It's gonna weigh us like an anchor. We'll have to watch that kidnapping thing." MJ was the only one he wanted to keep, hold on tight and just run with him.

"Yeah. We need to watch that whole working for scary fucks thing, too. I'm getting old."

"No shit. Hell, we're semi-retired anyway. I can probably get us a few side jobs that are less terrifying." He dropped his hands to massage MJ's shoulders.

"Yeah? Going to teach me how to make booze?" It said a shit-load, how MJ let him rub, rested against him.

"Mm-hmm. Teach you how and then get you drunk on it." That would be something to behold, he'd bet. God, they needed this fucking over. Now.

"Sounds perfect. We haven't been drunk in weeks."

"Nope. And you'll amuse the fuck out of me." It felt good to hold on and love on MJ a little. No humping or hitting. Just leaning and feeling.

"Yep. You'll laugh and forget to take pictures and I'll flirt and hump you into the deck."

"Fuck, yes, Precious. My own personal hump toy." He grinned when MJ pinched his ass. "What?"

"Hump toy? Redneck."

"I have never denied that..." He loved it when MJ got that snap back, that hot little rumble.

"Like you could. You probably dream about Nascar."

"No, I dream about fucking your ass." He did. Even after he'd done it all night. That whole only him thing just did it for him.

"Mmm. You have fucking hot dreams." MJ turned to nuzzle his throat, lips and teeth hot on his skin.

"I do. You're inspiring." He squeezed MJ's shoulders, then slid his hands down to cup that fine ass.

MJ snorted, teeth sliding on his skin, biting down. "Yeah, yeah."

"You are. You inspire all sorts of shit. Poetry." He let his hand push around to trace MJ's ink. "Art."

"Mmm. You still gonna ink me?" He could fucking hear the need in MJ's voice.

"I am. Gonna mark you good. We should do that when we're on dry land, too." Assuming shit didn't go horribly wrong.

"Yes. Swells make for shitty tattoos."

"Not to mention I'd have to use a razor and India ink or something..." Which, well, ew.

"No. That sounds less than cool, Sunshine." Yeah, MJ was all protective of his skin and shit. Even if he did sun worship.

"Not my idea of a good time, no. And I want one of those chair-table things so I can fuck you after."

MJ's eyes went hot-hot, those hands squeezing him tight. "Oh, hell, yes."

"Uh-huh. God, can you just see it, Precious? Your skin still tingling, all that adrenaline?"

"Fuck." MJ growled, nodding to him. "I can see."

He pushed, and he and MJ hit the deck, kissing like crazy. They could only just feel for so long. Hello. MJ was right there with him, pushing into the kiss so hard his lip split. Sonny grunted and pushed again and they sprawled, sliding along the deck and slapping together with the greatest fucking noise ever. He pushed down, rumbling at how good it felt.

MJ's nails scraped down his side, marking him, pushing him hard.

"Come on, Precious. Gimme." He could take it, and MJ needed to take it *out* on someone. Hell, Sonny fucking loved it.

MJ's teeth scraped down his jaw, then rubbed against his throat, hard enough to burn. His hips bucked, pushing down to get more friction, and Sonny licked across MJ's shoulder before finding a place to bite right back. God, the man tasted good. He got a grunt and another sharp nip for his troubles, MJ's cock dragging on his skin. Sonny rolled them again so they were on their sides, face to face, and reached for MJ's cock. It slapped against his palm, hot, wet at the tip, and so ready for him that he hummed at the feel of it.

"Want." Yeah, like he didn't fucking know that. MJ was all about wanting.

"I tell you what, Precious. It's your turn." He pushed over on his back, spreading his arms and legs. Letting MJ pick his spot. MJ groaned, hands slipping under his ass, tugging him up as MJ bent to put that hot mouth on him.

"Christ." His whole body shuddered like he'd touched a live wire. MJ's mouth felt hot and wet and made him shout, the filthiest, nastiest things he could think of. MJ licked and nuzzled, never lighting on any one place for long—his nuts were licked, then the tip of his cock, his hole.

Sonny just thrashed, his feet drumming on the deck, his hips spanking air. He needed so bad, needed MJ to suck him, fuck him, whatever. Just have him. MJ spent a minute slicking him up, fucking him with that wicked tongue. Then that buff body covered his, that heavy cock pushing against his hole, just like that. Fuck, yes. Sonny spread wide, asking for more, his hands tugging at MJ's hips. "Come on, Precious. In. In."

"Fuck, yes." MJ grinned down at him. "Fucking love you, you goddamned redneck."

Then MJ pushed in, filled him right up.

"Umph." His legs came right up to wrap around MJ's hips, his hands sliding up MJ's arms. "You too, terrorist asshole."

"Not a fucking terrorist, you hillbilly." That smile was fucking insane.

"Uh-huh. Not a bit." Oh, fuck, yes. A tiny shift of his hips had MJ hitting just the right spot, making his eyes roll back in his head.

"Yeah. Right there." MJ grunted, started pounding him, over and over, just driving him like a tent peg.

He rocked with the force of it, his fingers digging like claws into MJ's upper arms. He couldn't make his words make sense. All he could do was pant and moan. His balls drew up, so tight that he knew he was going to come without a single fucking touch to his cock.

"MJ." There. The one word that made sense in his whole world. He said it and he came, stars bursting into flame behind his eyelids, his entire frame shaking with the force of it.

MJ fucked him all the way through it, pushing in and in, making it all go on until he was going to scream. When he flopped to the deck like a rag doll, all there was left was watching that beautiful, crazy asshole as MJ came, eyes just blazing down at him. Jesus, that was. Uhn. And also, fuck, yes. Not to mention all fucking his.

It was an effort, but he lifted one hand to stroke the sweaty hair off MJ's swollen face. "We need to get you some ice."

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"Yeah. It's tender." MJ rested against him, solid and hot and slick.

Sonny growled. "He hits you again, I feed him to the sharks."

"Works for me, Sunshine."

They'd been nice long enough. It was time to let go of the flotsam and get on with the inking and fucking and retirement.

All they had to do was get through the damned meet.

Chapter Forty One

They were going to make good their escape. Neil was bloody determined that they would. MJ and Sonny had set up their meet, and Neil had the feeling that the whole thing would go pear-shaped in no time. He and Paddy needed to be ready to run.

"Have you got everything ready, love?" he asked, pacing the little cabin, staring at the whole set up Paddy had created.

"Yeah. Yeah. We'll just buy clothes and stuff?" Between his gift and Paddy's ability to ferret things out, they had the bags Boomer and Sonny had taken from Paddy's apartment. They couldn't take all of it, but he had access to his ready cash; they could travel.

"Yes. We'll just buy what we need." He put an arm around Paddy, pulling his lover close. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." Paddy's brain had gone into pure work mode, from the time he'd hit Boomer, and the thoughts were dizzying, sharp, nearly inhuman.

"Good. We'll be fine." There were other thoughts, bombarding him both far and near, and they made his adrenaline soar.

"Yes. I have a little flash-bang. When I throw it, you can't look. I'll warn you." A little glass container was slid into Paddy's pocket.

"Right." Gracious, the things Paddy knew how to do. Sometimes it amazed him. Not frighten. Never that, because Paddy would never hurt him.

"I love you." Paddy looked at him, eyes almost inhuman. Almost.

He stared right into the bright green, nodding. "I love you, too, sweet. I'm ready."

Paddy nodded. Yes. Paddy was ready, pockets packed, plan in place. "I think they're coming, Neil. Don't push him today."

"I promise." Sure enough, Sonny and MJ opened the hatch, and Sonny motioned him up, face stony, thoughts calm.

Paddy's hand was on his back, Paddy's fingers shaking a little.

"We're going to have a little shore excursion, boys. Quick. Easy. Simple." Boomer didn't sound like he thought it was all that easy. Of course, it wasn't, was it? They planned on getting rid of him and Paddy. Oh, he didn't think MJ meant to kill them. No, indeed. After Paddy's episode, it was Sonny that Neil worried about.

They stepped out into the sunshine, the dense woodlands of the island surprising him. Cat Island. He could hear the name echoed in MJ and Sonny's mind both.

Well, at least he knew that much and could plan. He took a deep breath. "This is not going to go well, gentlemen. I can feel it."

To his utter surprise, MJ nodded, lips tight. "There's a bad fucking moon rising."

They actually shared a wry look. "Just be prepared to get away quickly if need be." Somehow it was important, which rather surprised him.

"Don't worry about us." That "us" was very clear, MJ's hand on Sonny's hip clearer.

"No. No, I will only worry about us." He had his own love to be concerned with.

MJ's lips quirked and they headed down to the dock, Sonny and Boomer herding them quickly, quietly. MJ's thoughts were sharper versions of Paddy's, clear and razor-edged. MJ had a plan, and it was clear that the man wanted to have this over with, no matter what happened. He thought mostly of Sonny, and of making sure they were safe and well supplied with Twinkies.

Of course, Neil knew that MJ and Sonny were both armed to the teeth and that they'd talked long and hard about arming him and Paddy. It wasn't without a bit of irony that he noted that what protection they had, Paddy had provided. Really, they seemed to think he and Paddy were dangerous. They were not the hired killers here.

Something tickled at the back of his mind, like an agonized scream that slid off his neck and down his spine. Neil grabbed Paddy's hand, hanging back.

"We're supposed to meet in a tavern—Charlie's. Harry said he'd be in the back."

MJ was worried, nostrils flaring, moving them a little faster. No. Not worried. Manning wasn't worried. Manning was scared.

Paddy's fingers squeezed his, those eyes on his face. *Neil. Neil, I don't feel good. Neil.*

Shhhh. He thought it hard, sending calming thoughts, not just to Paddy, but to MJ as well. *Calm. Must be calm.*

They made their way to a little pub, the place looking about as seedy as a place could. Seedy and empty.

"Keep them up here, Sunshine. Watch your ass."

"I've got your back." Sonny moved to stand next to him and Paddy, shoulders tense, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

The place was dark, empty barring a single man in the back of the place, his back to them, to the door.

MJ stepped forward, staying in the shadows near the wall. "Harry?"

Neil knew the minute MJ said the man's name that he was no longer with them in spirit, even if he was in body. His voice sounded shockingly loud. "He's dead."

"What?" MJ moved forward, quick as a snake. A pistol appeared in the man's hand like magic, free hand reaching out to grab the chair. "Harry?"

The thud as the man's head hit the ground was quite loud.

"Fuck. Get them back to the fucking boat. Now."

Paddy's mind was screaming, over and over and over.

Echoes hit him like a tidal wave, and Neil tried to move, tried to tell Paddy now was the time for his little trick, but all he could do was grab Sonny's arm and pull him around.

"Woody. Someone talked to Woody. He gave them you, Sonny, your alias. The one you use in Key West."

"Get them back to the boat." MJ's hands pushed through the dead man's clothes, thoughts pure ice.

Paddy shook his head. *No. No. No more boats. No more. Close your eyes. Close your eyes. Close your eyes.* Neil closed his eyes and went on his faith in Paddy. He had no other choice. They couldn't take any more.

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There was a POP and a grunt and the overwhelming smell of burning before Paddy tugged his hand, started them running. He stumbled along for a moment before remembering to open his eyes, but then he righted himself, sprinting alongside his lover, asking his worn body for as much speed as it could muster. Sonny and MJ were on their own.

With any luck, he and Paddy would never see them again.

Chapter Forty Two

Fuck him.

Fuck.

He kept his eyes closed—they were watering too fucking bad to be of any help anyway—and he headed straight for Sonny. Fucking Rick. Fucking cheap-assed piece of shit unprofessional flash bangs.

Fucking Harry.

His mind skittered away from that. He'd deal with that later. Much later.

"Sonny. Sonny. Where the fuck are you?" Stay low and keep moving. Moving. With his goddamn redneck.

"Right here." Shit, the man almost clotheslined him, but that arm caught him, muscles like iron as Sonny dragged him to the door.

"No. Out the back." He slid through the chairs, back toward the heavier darkness where he ... Shit. Which way. Where was the fucking trap?

"Come on." The damned smoke disoriented them, but he figured out quick where Sonny was going. Right for that window at the end of the bar.

Fuck, he knew he'd kept the man for a reason. He knocked over as many bottles as he could along the way, waiting for Sonny to wriggle through before tossing a match. Strong hands caught his, the air when he slid outside three times lighter, easier to breathe. Not that he had time to catch his breath, because damned if he didn't hear sirens.

"Time to go, Precious."

"Yes." They took off in a rush, staying low and fast and off the fucking main road. Shit. Shit.

"We can't go back to the boat, MJ." Sonny ducked between two close set buildings, searching his shirt. "Where's the goddamned map?"

"All our shit's on the boat, man. I'm not giving it up."

That was theirs.

Home.

Goddamnit.

"Okay, so we go back and gut the boat as much as we can, as long as it's not swarming with cops. Then we kill it." Those dark eyes were dead serious, brooking no argument.

He just growled, fury flooding him so bad it hurt. "We'll discuss it later. Right now we have to get off this little fucking island."

"Yeah. Ah-ha!" The map slid out of the thigh pocket of his pants, Sonny giving him a squeeze on the way up. "Okay, this is the least fucking obvious path back to the boat."

One long, blunt finger traced a line on the map. Sonny kissed him. Hard. "You ready to run, MJ?"

"It's time to hustle, redneck." He held those eyes.

"Something's deeply fucked."

"We'll figure it out. That Neil ... Shit. Come on." Sonny hauled ass, and he could hear shouting voices. Not close enough to get them, but close enough to get his ass moving.

They moved fast and hard, both of them stopping at the dock, trying to decide if the fucking boat was safe.

Sonny pointed him aft, slipping away fore, both of them silent as shadows. The boat looked as deserted as they'd left

it, but they couldn't be too fucking careful. Experience had taught them that.

He checked the engines, the hold, looking for anything that looked like it would explode. He found nothing but a mess of shit that Paddy and Neil had screwed with. "Clear down here."

"Clear up top." They both knew they didn't have much time. "Let's get our shit together, Precious."

"Start the engines." He started gathering things together. They could swap out on the big island and be gone in...

MJ stopped, ran for his laptop, the urge to check his funds, his information, undeniable. His fucking computer wasn't where he left it, was open and booted up on their bunk. The screen saver pictures made him ice-cold. "Go, Sonny! Now! Now! Now!"

Harry screaming, bleeding, groaning. Woody with a muzzle to his temple. Paula, bullet through the brain, neck broken, eyes open and empty.

They'd found him.

Jesus Christ.

Chapter Forty Three

They were on another boat.

Paddy watched the little man at the engine, motoring them toward somewhere big enough to have an airport or little airplanes or something.

Something not a boat.

Anything not a boat.

He was pretty sure he hated boats.

Still, they'd done it. Gotten free, which was better than that guy at that nasty little bar because, damn, heads were supposed to stay attached.

Really.

God.

"Shh." Neil squeezed his hand. Even when the little boat man had given them a weird look when they got on the boat holding hands, Neil had just given the man a haughty look, and not let go.

Paddy nodded, looked at Neil, eyes clinging to those icy eyes like Neil was his own personal life preserver.

He could do this.

He could.

They were free and they'd find a little place with a beach and good food and a real bed and a door that locked.

Of course, that hadn't stopped MJ.

"No, he has his own fish to fry, love. He wanted to let us go." Neil had said it before, and he looked so sure...

"He didn't used to be so..." Bad? Broken? Hard? "Scarred."

"No. I can see him in your thoughts." Neil smiled, that little smile he used to have a lot, back when they first met. "You had a crush."

"Maybe." His cheeks flushed and he scooted a little closer. "He was very smart."

But not Neil. Nowhere near his Neil.

"Mm-hmm. I can see why you liked him, even now." Neil's thumb rubbed over his knuckles. "He's brilliant. Broken, but brilliant."

"Yeah." Broken. Brilliant. And gone. Thank goodness. Where would they go now? What would they do? Could he call Bethy? Should he? Would he work?

No Bethy. He heard that clear as day. Bethy was compromised. That was that.

No Bethy. Okay. Paddy squeezed Neil's fingers. He'd never not worked for someone before.

We'll find you work.

Oh, yes, Neil had people who knew people. He'd find them both work. He'd stay with Paddy and they'd work.

"We're coming to shore, sirs. You know where you want to go in?" Their boat captain had the whitest teeth.

"Yes. Deadman's Cay," Neil said. They had decided on that because Long Island was not a far hop from Cat Island, and Deadman's Cay had its own airport. Plus, it avoided the government center in Clarence Town.

Deadman's Cay, though? Was the worst name in the history of names.

They pulled into a nice little dock that had a stretch of beach and some small hotels. Nothing worth taking note of if

you were looking for someone. Neil paid the boatman the other half of his money, and Paddy had a half-baked memory of something about not paying the ferryman until you were on the other side.

Of course, that led to skeleton hand thoughts, which meant falling heads, which meant freaking out and he wasn't going to do that.

Not even a little.

"Hotel or airport?"

"Hotel first. We'll check in and then leave, and that might buy us some time." Oh, fake check-in. Right.

"Good idea. Have you done this before?" He wanted to know everything about Neil.

Good thing they were going to have lots of time.

Chapter Forty Four

They'd tracked Sunshine's Bride for four days, the little schooner moving restlessly through the water, lighting in a little cove once for about twenty minutes, then a little atoll for another hour. He'd had his men search, but Manning and his so-interesting Neanderthal sidekick hadn't left anything behind but footprints.

It was fascinating. Pointless, but fascinating.

Of course, Manning always had been a fascination of his. Brilliant. Quick. Razor-sharp, but with an overweening sense of appreciation for life. He'd been waiting patiently for almost fifteen years to draw their prodigal son back into the fold and get a return on the vast investment they'd made.

Now, it was time.

Manning'd been flying solo and wasting his considerable talents for the tree-huggers of the world for altogether too long.

As soon as the Bride docked in a remote spot on Cat Island—which he could admit, suited him to the core, Manning returning to the scene of the crime, so to speak—he contacted the local authorities, or authority as it were, spoke to Phillipe and informed him that the person that had murdered the American and set the bar ablaze had kidnapped one of his employees and had returned. It was simple to arrange to have himself and four associates assist in the arrest and recovery. After all, their suspect was a very dangerous man.

Incredibly dangerous.

Jack and Ben took the boat first, the rest of the team following. The all-clear was called and he bit off a curse, heading up on deck. "I thought you had this thing under surveillance."

"We did, sir. No one exited the vessel."

"Then they're still on board. Find them."

Greg moved onto the ship. The thing was an unholy mess. It must be the Neanderthal's influence. Manning was quite psychotically neat.

"I have your father, Manning. He's quite mad now, but he screams beautifully. Your mother is next, do you understand? There's not enough cannabis in the world to keep her from hurting."

"...fucker."

His ears perked and he motioned to his operatives. There. Down in the hold.

He'd kill Manning's boy toy and then take the man back home and get to work undoing the years of damage Paula had done. Fucking cunt. Watching her die had been glorious.

Leaving Manning behind to die had been his mistake, he knew that now.

"Sir?" The operative came out the door, holding an open laptop in hand, cellular modem blinking. "There's no one down there. Only this."

He took the machine, lifting the screen. Bastard. Manning's face was on screen, blue eyes like hard jewels. "Greg."

"Manning." He shook his head. "You led me on quite a chase. I have the island surrounded, you know."

"Do I look concerned?"

"Are you enjoying your little dalliance? You know, I think I'll break his knees for you, just to pay you back for wasting my time."

Manning chuckled, a huge, tanned hand appearing on his shoulder. "You didn't think I'd let you find me that easily, did you?"

"Trace this. Find out where..."

He had just enough time to hear a low chuckle, see Manning lift a cell phone to his ear, hear dialing and then something on the boat ringing. From the edge of the lagoon, he could see a long, white yacht heading out toward open sea. Fuck him.

"Run. Run. Run!"

His feet had just hit the dock when the world exploded in a flash of light that blocked out the sound of Manning's laughter.

END

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