

# FAITH



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## JET MYKLES

# HEAVEN SENT 4: FAITH

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Jet Mykles

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## Dedication

*This one is for all of the readers who've written in expressing love for the boys. As their creator, I can safely say that they love you all back and are very happy to have entertained you! Bless you all.*

## Chapter One

“Damn straight,” Darien crowed.

No one heard him. The roar of the crowd was deafening after the final beat of “Careless Surprise,” bringing the concert to a resounding close. Heart racing and blood pumping, Darien stood. The front half of the stadium crowd was brightly lit in blinding white and gold, allowing a sea of screaming faces to become one giant, roiling mass. Screaming in adoration, just for Heaven Sent. He fucking *loved* that! Grinning like an idiot, he bounded around the drum kit and followed the long burgundy skirt of Hell’s jacket as the little keyboardist descended from their shared platform to the lower main stage. He caught up with Hell just at the bottom step and slung an arm around his shoulders.

Hell grinned up at him, hooking an arm around Darien’s waist. His lavender hair was wet and clinging to flushed, rounded cheeks. The two of them went toward the front of the stage to meet their bandmates, neither terribly worried about the fact that they were sweating like dogs since they were *both* sweating like dogs. They reached Johnnie, who stood in his tight, shiny green T-shirt and ripped white jeans with his waist-length brown hair draping his shoulders and back like a cloak as he waved toward the crowd at the rear of the arena. Dark sunglasses shielding his eyes, Brent returned from stage right without his

guitar, his sleeveless black button-down hanging open as he chucked a guitar pick into the screaming mass, then lifted his hand to wave. Luc approached from the other side of the stage, shirtless, torso gleaming with sweat, and loose hair hanging in deep crimson tendrils to his shoulders.

Darien lifted his arm from around Hell. He took the drumsticks he still carried and tossed them into the crowd, hoping, as always, that he didn't bonk someone's head with them or put an eye out. Standing straight, he waved with both hands to the crowd at large, loving the tidal wave of admiration and excitement evident in the crowd's roar.

Man, he loved this! It never got old. Lots of crap about being a rockstar really bit the big one, but being up on stage made up for all of it. That's where it all came together -- in front of an audience who were *into* you, who knew your music and loved it, who stood and sang and danced for two hours straight because your music kept them so pumped they didn't mind that their feet hurt and their throats went hoarse.

After a few minutes of waving, Luc led the way off stage, followed by Johnnie, then Darien, with Hell and Brent bringing up the rear. They passed from garish, overbearing light into the relative darkness. A girl named Stacey waited just offstage with towels for each of them. Darien took one and used it to mop at the back of his neck. His loose tank top had absorbed all the moisture it could somewhere in the first hour, so it was now soaked. The relaxed jeans that he preferred to wear while performing hadn't fared much better, and he could practically feel his socks squishing in his boots.

Ellen, their manager's main assistant, met them in the hall and directed the band to a side area not far off the stage, where a few excited teenagers awaited them. The kids were flushed and sweaty and looked exhausted. One of the girls was seated in a folding chair, her arm around her middle, clearly in pain.

Johnnie walked right up and dropped to kneel before her. "Hey there, sweetheart. You okay?"

Her big brown eyes got even bigger as the singer took her hands into his and smiled at her. Johnnie was very good at this. Even though he wasn't feeling particularly well that night, he always had an eye out for the fans. This small girl had been in one of the front row seats and had been crushed toward the beginning of the show. Johnnie had watched her being carted off and had asked about her during the encore.

The girl -- who couldn't be more than sixteen, if that -- nodded, a delighted smile erasing the pain from her face.

Assured that she was okay, Darien turned to one of the boys standing beside her and stuck out his hand. "Heya. Darien Hughes."

The boy took his hand with a smile to match the girl's. "Oh, man, do I ever know that!"

Darien laughed and set about doing his job. He chatted as he signed first a T-shirt, then a program, then a ticket stub. He stood for a bunch of pictures. This part of being a rockstar was pretty cool, too. Just the knowledge that meeting him and carrying away a souvenir of the occasion could make these kids happy was a tremendous rush.

All this for rock and roll!

After maybe ten minutes, Ellen led the band away and farther into the backstage area. A few members of the press were lurking in the hallways, but security kept them at bay as the band entered the private room. If Heaven Sent had learned one thing in the years they'd been touring, it was that you didn't do interviews at certain times. Right after a show was one of them. When the adrenaline was up, they tended to say stupid things. Darien didn't have a clue if it was true for all bands, but it was certainly true for them. So, this time right after coming off stage was limited to band, immediate assistants, and personal company for the night.

He pulled off his tank as he passed into the quiet room, tossing it and the towel on an empty chair. A guy named Ron offered another towel and a bottle of water. Darien shook his head at the former but took the latter, eagerly twisting off the cap.



With a loud sigh, Johnnie flopped face first onto an overstuffed couch. Loose, long brown hair fell in wet hanks, obscuring his face and half the back of his shimmering shirt. Moaning, he folded his arms underneath his head, letting one leg drop over the side of the couch. "I feel like shit." Johnnie had been complaining of a sore throat for the past two days and had been dosed to the gills on cough suppressants and throat medications for the last two performances. Wasn't the first time where it'd happened and wouldn't be the last.

His husband, Tyler, knelt on the floor beside his head, blond hair gleaming in the room's soft white lighting. "How's your throat?" Loving hands came up to brush hair away from the singer's face. Heedless of the sweat and Johnnie's grumbling, Tyler leaned in to kiss Johnnie's forehead and offered up the cup of tea that he held in his other hand.

Darien frowned, turning from the loving scene.

Just in time to hear Hell shriek, then spin with the clear intention of slugging Brent in the gut. Water flew from his drenched hair, wetter than before. For all that he looked like a cherub, Hell was a spitting cat if you got his dander up, and his current target -- frequent target -- was his lover. Laughing, Brent scuttled back out of reach, cradling the half-empty bottle of ice water in one hand and holding out the other to fend off the angry imp. He caught Hell's next punch and somehow managed to twist things around so Hell fell against him. The skirt of Hell's burgundy jacket swirled around his lover's long legs, and the open sides of Brent's black shirt half embraced Hell as Brent wrapped his arms around him. The imp snarled. Brent leaned into an open-mouthed kiss. Predictably, Hell melted. Geez, they'd been together officially nearly a year and they still acted like it was brand new.

Upending water into his mouth, Darien crossed the room to an empty chair.

Luc sat in the chair beside it, cell phone propped between ear and shoulder as he leaned down to unlace his boots. "Where are you now?" he asked.

Darien sighed, sitting back to nurse his water. No doubt in his mind that Luc was talking to Reese.

Darien wondered where he was, then heard Luc's: "So I'll meet you at the hotel then. We're leaving in a few minutes. Shouldn't be more than a half-hour. Did you bring the painting?"

Darien sank deeper into the chair, looking around, determinedly *not* listening to Luc anymore. Reese was his friend, yes. A good friend. So was Tyler. And Hell had become as much of a brother to him as Johnnie, Luc, and Brent. But it rankled sometimes. More often, as time wore on. They were *all* in relationships. All of his best friends happily shackled up with other men. With each other! What the fuck was it with his life that *all* of his friends were gay? Okay, not really all of them. He had friends outside of the band, but his really *good* friends were these guys, and they were all gay. Because Johnnie and Luc could claim bisexuality all they wanted -- and it once had been true -- but they were true-blue monogamous rump rangers now. "True blue?" Wasn't that a reference to bluebloods or something? Were there gay bluebloods?

"Hey."

He looked up, distracted from his mind's ramblings as Nicole sat on the arm of his chair. *There* was his date! "Hey." He grinned, switching the bottle from one hand to the other so he could slip an arm around her waist. Curvy, soft, and plush. A *girl*! "You made it."

"I said I'd be here. Thanks for the ticket. The show was great!" She brushed hair from his face. "You okay?"

Caught by the sweet gesture, unavoidably comparing it to Tyler's caress of Johnnie, Darien's heart swelled. He tilted his head into her caress. "Yeah, I'm good."

"You looked a bit lost."

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tyler haul Johnnie to his feet. The tall singer stood, grumbling, and immediately slung an arm around the blond's shoulders as they headed toward the door. There were no sounds from the corner behind Darien where Hell and Brent were, which meant they were probably still kissing. Luc stood, now in bare feet, and crossed

to the other side of the room. Still on the phone, his voice was just a low murmur, words indistinguishable, but the loving intent behind them made obvious by the devilish grin on his face.

Darien sighed, pulling Nicole closer so he could nuzzle her side. She smelled good. At least her sweater did. Some light, flowery perfume. Or was that her laundry detergent? Didn't matter. Guys didn't smell like that. "Just feeling a little down."

"What? You? How could you possibly feel down? You're Darien Hughes, remember?" Her tone was obviously teasing as she continued to play with his hair.

He tilted his head up to get a good look at her oval face and light caramel skin. Her eyes were somewhere between brown and green, closer to the former, and rimmed with full, black lashes. Her soft black hair was currently pulled back into a tail, but he'd seen it in soft waves that fell to her shoulders. They'd met at the Grammy's ceremony where Heaven Sent had won for Best Short Form Music Video. She'd been there with a friend who was up for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. He'd started talking to Nicole at the after party, found out about her friend, found out Nicole was an actress with an occasionally recurring role on one of the new nighttime dramas. They'd talked a lot that night, which was a feat, since not many people could keep up with Darien in talking, and he'd made a habit of calling her when he was in town. Like tonight.

He let his eyes close partway, hoping interest showed in them. "I'm lonely."

She laughed, a sweet sound. "Well, we can't have that, can we?" Her eyes twinkled in clear invitation. Sweet girl rarely had trouble reading his intentions.

He stood, drawing her up to her feet. "No. We really can't." Keeping hold of her hand, he pulled her off to the side. "Come back to my hotel with me tonight?"

"You don't have a party to go to?" She stopped at his side, willingly weaving her fingers with his.

“No.” There was a party, but he wasn’t going. Neither were any of the others. Well, maybe Hell and Brent, but that was their business. This late in the tour, their manager chose carefully on the events that she requested the guys attend. There was nothing he *had* to go to tonight.

He brushed his lips over her forehead, sliding his hands down the curves of her sides. Curves. Something else guys didn’t have.

“In that case...” she said, smiling as she slid her arms around him. She didn’t seem to mind the drying sweat on his bare torso. “I’d love to.”

## Chapter Two

*One month later...*

You could have heard a pin drop. Darien expected surprise, but he wasn't entirely comfortable with the amount of shock that showed on their faces. Johnnie fell back in the stuffed chair, staring with wide eyes. From where they sat at a nearby table, both Luc and Brent held lit cigarettes aloft, forgotten. Hell froze halfway across the room, photos he was toting from the table to a box close to the main door of the suite nearly dropping from his hands. Gretchen and her assistant, Ellen, openly gaped from their seats on the couch.

Darien had arrived late to the suite where the others were signing yet more promo material. The scent of coffee, cigarettes, and Chinese food permeated the air-conditioned room, and the harsh Nevada sunlight was cut by off-white sheers.

Darien scanned the tired faces. The perpetual weariness of being on tour for over a year now was etched into their expressions. The shock only abated that a little. "What?"

Johnnie was the first to recover, holding a stack of forgotten CDs on his knee as he stared up at Darien. "You *what?*"

Darien beamed, holding up his left hand to show off the shiny new gold band on his third finger. "I got married last night."

Luc exhaled a cloud of smoke and set his cigarette on the lip of a nearby ashtray. "To who?"

Darien scowled. "Nicole, of course."

"Of course?" Johnnie again.

Darien stuck his hands on his hips, glaring around the room. He was tired, it was hot outside, and they had a gig in a few hours. He hadn't gotten much sleep the prior night thanks to a "honeymoon night" for him and Nicole, thus the reason he was late this morning. He'd hoped to get a better reaction to his news. "Okay, I knew you'd be surprised, but what gives?"

Gretchen laughed. Her red hair was pulled back into a no-nonsense bun and she wore jeans. She, too, looked worn. Her eyes darted to the others as though seeking their help. "Forgive us, Darien, but this is something of a shock."

"Well, yeah, I know." He felt his cheeks flush and dropped his gaze to the weird gold-and-green pattern on the carpet. "We kind of just *did* it. But I've been dating Nicole."

This time it was Brent. "You *have*?"

He looked up to see the genuine surprise on the guitarist's face. "Well, yeah."

"For how long?"

"About a month."

"When?" Johnnie asked.

"Come on, man, she was around during the whole New England stretch." Yes, things got crazy during a tour, but hadn't they even *noticed*?

"She's here in Vegas?"

"Of course she is. I thought I should probably tell you alone." He crossed his arms over his chest. "Humph. I'm glad I did."

Luc sighed, shaking his head as he turned sideways in his chair and leaned against the back. "Leave it to you, man, to let Las Vegas go to your head."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Luc hooked a long arm over the back of the chair. "What the fuck did you get married for?"

"I love her."

"How the hell do you know that?" Johnnie demanded.

Darien stomped across to the room to the mini bar, ignoring the whispers between Gretchen and Ellen as he passed them. "I don't want to hear it from you. You say you fell in love with Tyler on sight." He ripped open the little refrigerator and took out a Coke. "I do love her." When he turned around, they were all exchanging glances again. "Fuck you all. What?"

Johnnie and Luc were having a whole discussion just with their eyes, scowls, and small head gestures. Finally, Johnnie sighed and turned back to Darien. "Are you sure this was the right thing to do, man?"

"Yes. What? You don't like Nicole?"

"I don't really *know* Nicole."

Darien sighed, relieved. "Is *that* all? She's great, man." He smiled, perching on the back of a big green chair, sandaled feet on the seat. "We should do something so you guys can get to know her better." He set the Coke on the table beside him and reached for the stack of photos Ellen was handing to him. "Maybe we can all do dinner tonight?"

"Do *you* really know Nicole?"

Darien's relief faded at hearing Johnnie's careful question. He took the stack of photos, eyeing his friend. "What do you mean?"

“You just got married to the woman, dimwit,” Luc snarled. “Do you really *know* her at all?”

Darien slammed the photos on the table and shoved to his feet, starting for Luc. “You asshole --”

CDs scattered as Johnnie shot up between them, hands catching hold of Darien’s shoulders to stop him. “Okay, hold on.” He threw a glare over his shoulder at Luc, then turned back to Darien. “Luc asked it badly, but it’s a good question, Darien. Do you really know this woman?”

He met Johnnie’s concerned gaze rather than Luc’s annoyed one. “Did you know Tyler?”

“By the time I married him, yes.”

Okay, Johnnie had him there. Darien shrugged off Johnnie’s hands and stepped back, trying without success to turn what he knew looked like a sulk into a scowl. “Fuck you guys. I thought you’d be happy for me.”

“Darien...”

“You’re supposed to be my *friends*.” How was it possible to feel lonely in a room full of people you loved? “You’re all just pissed because she’s not a guy.”

Johnnie grabbed his arm. “What?”

He stared at the wall rather than look at anyone in the room. “It’s obvious, isn’t it? I’m the odd man out. The only one who chose not to be with another guy.”

Johnnie tugged, hauling Darien around to face him. “Is that what you think?”

Darien briefly glanced at his friend’s face, then let his gaze skitter away on seeing the anger. “Isn’t it true?”

“It’s absolutely *not* true.” Johnnie shook him by the shoulders. “There’s no one in this room who wants you to be with a guy if that’s not what you want.”



Darien heard the words. He just didn't believe them. Okay, maybe he was putting words in their mouths, but he just knew they'd all be tickled if he chose to be with a guy. "Yeah, well, it's *not* what I want. I married Nicole. If you're really my friends, deal with it." He shook out of Johnnie's hold and turned toward the door.

Johnnie caught him, arms surrounding his shoulders from behind. "Don't leave, man."

He refused to wipe at the tears none of them could see because he was facing away from them. "Let me go, ass wipe."

Hell appeared in front of him, ruining his chance at getting away without them knowing he was crying. "We *are* your friends, Darien," Hell said, violet eyes locked on his. The imp was so very cute. So small with all that glossy lavender hair. Almost feminine. No wonder Brent was in love with him.

"If you tell us this is what you want, we're happy for you, man," Johnnie said. Trouble was, it *sounded* like he was trying to convince himself. Or the others.

"It's what I want," was all he could think to say, staring helplessly into Hell's eyes.

The imp smiled, a sunny expression that did a lot to banish the empty feeling in Darien's chest. "Then this is a cause for celebration." Hell stepped aside. "*Liebling*, call room service."

Johnnie turned Darien around as Hell crossed the room toward Brent. Brent gave Darien a troubled look but smoothed it away as he reached for the phone.

Luc stood and came over just as Johnnie released Darien. "Sorry, man." He tossed his head, scattering loose auburn hair from his face. "You just shocked me, y'know?"

Darien dredged up a smile and punched Luc's flat belly playfully.

"And we know he doesn't handle shock well," Johnnie quipped as he walked away.

Luc rolled his eyes as he turned. "And fuck you, too, asshole."

"Bite me." Johnnie flopped back into his chair, bending over to gather scattered CDs.

Luc picked up a new stack of photos from the table before Gretchen and Ellen. “Whip it out.”

“Oh, baby.”

“Must I call Reese and Tyler to let them know you two are flirting again?” Hell asked, taking a seat at the table beside Brent. He uncapped a Sharpie. “Oh! I think the two of them should get together. They’d make a *lovely* couple, don’t you think?”

Johnnie and Luc both gaped in astonished outrage.

Darien burst out laughing.

## Chapter Three

*Seven months later...*

*"This isn't working."*

Darien sighed, picking up some finger-sized fruit tart thing from a pretty platter and sticking it in his mouth. Nicole's words continued to echo in his brain.

*"It's not that I don't love you. I do. Just...not like that."*

*"Not like that."* And what the hell was that supposed to mean, anyway? He picked up a pair of tongs to poke around in a fruit arrangement. She loved him, but not enough to be his wife. Not enough to share a life with him. Then how the hell did she love him?

Viciously, he popped a grape with the end of the tongs, then sighed, putting them down. Abusing innocent fruit didn't help. He actually wasn't mad. Not at her. It'd been three days now and he'd thought a lot about it, talked with friends, and he saw her point; they hadn't really been man and wife. For the first two months of their marriage, he'd been on the road and she'd been working in New York. After that, they'd taken three months to travel. Now *that* had been fun! But when they got back, the subject of where they were going to live hit home. Nicole had been kind of freaked to learn that he didn't really have a house.

Not anymore. Not since he let the lease go on his condo in San Diego before the last tour. He didn't see much need in a place. Most of the stuff he kept for posterity was in storage. His drum kits were in the safe hands of the Heaven Sent road crew. His mail was all delivered care of Tyler at the Weiss Strande Hotel on the west coast. They'd looked for a house, and that's where the arguments started. That's when they began to realize that they weren't all that compatible. She wanted a showplace, and he wanted someplace he could relax. She wanted someplace to entertain, and he decided if he was going to do this, it'd be his retreat to get away. They clearly had different goals in mind. Well, according to Nicole, *she* had goals, he just *was*, and she wasn't sure she could deal with that until death do them part.

He wasn't quite sure what that meant either.

*"We need to end this before we hurt each other."* And that was the upshot of it all. Divorce. He was going to be alone again. A seven-month marriage. How very rockstar of him.

He picked up a bite-sized cake with mint-green icing and stuck it in his mouth. A glance up showed there was still no one in the food room with him except for two guys chatting at the other end of the table and the two waiters who waited to refill the platters as necessary. Not four steps away was a big open arch leading into the main area of the banquet hall. The murmur of the crowd was only slightly drowned out by the music playing through the speakers. For the moment, he was alone and therefore excused from talking about it. But the guys knew. Johnnie was the first he'd told, and it wasn't long before they all knew. Gretchen was working on the official press release but had agreed that it was okay to talk about it that night. There weren't that many members of the press in attendance, and those who were could be trusted not to break the news. He just hoped they'd all give him a break tonight. *That* was the last thing he wanted to talk about.

Which didn't stop him from thinking about it.

Sipping his champagne, he picked up another fruit tart. *Should mingle some, though.* Darien rounded the table and headed for the arch. He knew his job at these parties, and it

wasn't sulking over the food that was almost too pretty to eat. He was Darien Hughes of Heaven Sent, damn it, and this promo party was for a charity show they'd be doing two weeks from now. What was the charity again? He wasn't sure, but it was named after a cow or something. He remembered that it was a good cause. Feeding children around the world or something. Whatever it was, he was glad to be talking about doing a gig. It'd been five months since the end of the tour, and he was already itching to go back into the studio, even more so after Nicole's request for divorce. Nothing better than music to help him get back on track.

Tossing aside the gray mood that threatened to settle on him, he paused at the top of the five steps that led down into the sparse gathering below. Johnnie held court over to the right, seated on the edge of a sofa with a group of admirers ringed around him. His long brown hair flowed like water over the shoulders of the vivid green shirt that made his similarly colored eyes sparkle. Light gold streaks in his hair and a dark tan were evidence of tropic vacationing during the Heaven Sent hiatus. Over at the bar, Luc and Reese stood among a gaily laughing group of which they were the center of attention. Luc, he knew, would be of special interest tonight since he was currently working on a movie. It wasn't a starring role, but it was a large enough part that it took several months of his time. He was on a break for a few weeks before heading back up to Canada to resume filming. Turning to the left, Darien spotted Hell close to an open balcony door. Hell had less of a crowd around him than Johnnie or Luc, and the balcony beyond looked to be practically empty. Ten to one, Brent was just outside that door, having a smoke. Hell and Brent had spent most of their time during the hiatus traveling and enjoying each other's company. Lots of time with each other's families, as Darien had heard it.

They'd all had lives with their loved ones while he was playacting at having one. They were still together and he was breaking up. "Yeah," he muttered under his breath, bringing his champagne up for another sip, "we *need* to get back into the studio."

Maybe he'd go talk to Brent. After all, Brent was a master at avoiding being social.

Decision made, he swallowed the last of his fruit tart and started down the short stairs, licking his fingers.

“Darien!”

He faced front, smile instantly in place for the woman who stepped up in front of him. “Hey, ’Chelle.” Reaching the bottom of the steps, he transferred his champagne glass into the hand that was sticky from the fruit tart and raised the other arm to hug the heavily made-up blonde who approached him.

She brought up a hand to hold his cheek, angling his face up for brief but warm kiss. She was just a little taller than he was. “Johnnie told me,” she murmured, thumbing lipstick from his mouth with one long-nailed thumb. “How are you, sweetie?”

He kept his smile and hugged her waist tighter for a second before letting his hand slide down to just above the swell of her ass. *Mmm, backless dress. Soft skin. Smells good. Very nice.* “I’m fine, thanks.”

Michelle shook her head, keeping her arm about his neck. “She’s crazy to let you go.”

He laughed over the pull in his heart. “She said I was too crazy to be with.”

“Oh, honey, we all know you’re crazy.” She laughed. “But there’s nothing wrong with your kind of crazy.” Her laugh melted into a sensuous purr as she traced his chin with the tip of the nail on her index finger. Her blue eyes were shadowed by the heavy mascara she wore, and she tilted her head so she looked at him through the lace of those lashes. “You know I’d be happy to console you, right?”

He searched her face, waiting. Waiting for the surge of lust that should rise. Waiting for that inner voice to goad him on, make him take her off to a secluded corner. After all, he was free now, wasn’t he? Nicole had said so. And Michelle was safe enough. She was a former-model-turned-singer and something of an old friend. He’d slept with her before, no strings attached, just fun. But the spark wasn’t there. There wasn’t even much interest in his

dick, which really pissed him off. No way his dick should be passing up on a fine woman like Michelle!

He reached up to smooth the backs of his fingers over her cheek. “Thanks. The offer’s tempting, but I’ll have to pass.”

She studied him a moment, then nodded. She kissed him lightly. “You know how to find me if you change your mind.”

“I do.”

She trailed her fingers down his back as she stepped away. At the end, she grabbed his hand. “Come talk with me?” she asked, tilting her head to the side so that some of that loose blonde hair caressed her shoulder.

He smiled and shook his head, squeezing her hand. “Maybe later.”

She let go of his hand. “Okay.” And walked away.

*Moron*, he labeled himself, watching the sway of her hips. He should be all over that. Instead, he turned back toward the balcony doors.

He passed by Hell with a wave. The angel-faced keyboardist sat on the wide back of a leather couch, the skirt of his long dove-gray jacket fluttering onto the couch’s seat behind him. His arms were braced to either side of him, and he even kicked his booted feet slightly, lending to the illusion that he was a kid rather than a full-grown man. Darien was sure he recognized a few of the men standing with Hell, but wasn’t interested enough to try and recall names. He just smiled the smile he used as a mask and stepped into the cool night air.

As predicted, Brent stood outside at the railing, looking over the hillside below, and thankfully, he was alone.

Darien stepped up next to him, turning to brace his elbows and back on the railing so he could watch the partygoers. Gretchen or one of her assistants would likely descend on them soon, requesting that they talk to someone. “Hey.”

Brent glanced at him. “Hey.” Darien kind of missed the dark sunglasses that Brent used to always wear. Hell had mostly broken him of the habit. He still wore them around big crowds and usually onstage, but in smaller gatherings he left them behind.

A few quiet moments passed. Darien felt like he should say something, but he was at a loss as to what. At least Brent would understand his silence.

“You doing okay?” Brent asked finally.

Darien shrugged, eyeing Brent’s jacket. It was nice. Faintly shiny navy. If he thought about it, he could probably come up with the designer, but he couldn’t be bothered. “Yeah. Just...not into it tonight.”

Brent nodded. “Welcome to my world.”

Darien chuckled. Not quite. Brent preferred to drift off to the sidelines when they weren’t performing onstage. People thought it was just his mystique. They didn’t know that crowds scared him. But Brent handled it with class. Usually. Darien would never be able to pull it off. Of course, he *liked* talking to people. Usually. Tonight just kind of sucked.

His gaze drifted over the colorful clothing of the partygoers, eventually landing on Hell, who he could just see inside the doorway. Damn, he was cute. Almost like a girl. In fact, one could easily think he was a flat-chested girl. Brent got a kick out of assuring people that Hell was, in fact, all male.

*I could do guys*, Darien told himself, considering Hell seriously. Heck, everyone else in the band screwed guys; why *not* him? Maybe that was the trick to a relationship and he’d just let that pass him by all these years? Then an inward sigh. *Nah*. Yeah, Hell was cute, but Darien wasn’t especially into the cute pixie look on girls. He could admire it, but didn’t really want to take it to bed. So Hell wouldn’t be his type.

He turned to his side, facing Brent. “So, what do you think of Luc’s news?”

Brent cocked an eyebrow. “The second movie deal?”

“Yeah. Ha, you knew, didn’t you?”



“Yeah.”

Figured. Luc and Brent told each other everything. They even used to be lovers, back before Hell and Reese. *Maybe someone like Luc...?* Nah. He put up with Luc because the man was like a brother, but a romantic relationship with someone who bulled through life like that would drive him nuts. He wasn't Reese. *Someone like Reese?* Nah. They got along well enough as friends, but he and Reese were too much alike in many ways. “You think it'll hurt the band?”

“How?”

“Luc might decide to be a big-time actor.”

“Not a chance.” Brent put out his cigarette in a standing ashtray on his other side. He stood straight, brushing a hand down the front of his black silk shirt. “He'll do fine, but the band means too much to him.”

Darien wondered. The band meant everything to Brent, always had. Darien felt the same way. They were rockstars, sure, but they were musicians first. But Luc and Johnnie were different. Oh, they were totally into the band, but they were also a lot more into the “rockstar” part of it than Brent and Darien were. Both Luc and Johnnie liked to be seen, liked to be admired. They took great pains to look the way they did and act a certain way. They read the trades and knew how Heaven Sent was perceived across the globe. Darien wasn't so sure that, if either were given the chance at a solo gig, they wouldn't take it. He'd gotten the impression that Hell was very similar.

*Okay, that's depressing.* “If you say so.”

Brent patted his shoulder. “Don't worry about it. Luc made a deal to do the next one sometime next year. Meantime, we'll go back into the studio and make some music.”

“Yeah.” Darien grinned. Boy, did that sound good. “Hey, I was thinking, you know...”

For a little while, he lost himself in talking music with Brent.

Engrossed in their conversation, he almost missed Hell approaching from the doorway. “Darien.”

Darien looked around to see Hell standing beside them with a much taller man at his side. It took a second for Darien to recognize who it was, due to the shadows from the lights behind the man. It was a radical effect, actually, putting pretty much his entire face in shadow except for the gleam of moonlight on the small square lenses of his glasses. The soft lighting from behind him gave a golden cast to his hair, while the moonlight made silvery shadows of his face. It was like a comic book for a moment. *Awesome!*

Gold glittered on Hell’s elegant hands as he indicated the taller man. “Darien, you remember my friend Christopher Faith?”

The man turned as he extended his hand; the light finally caught his face, illuminating the smiling curve of his wide mouth. “Darien.”

Darien nodded, taking the hand, still a bit dazzled by the initial visual. “Sure, sure. I remember. How are you, man?” Sure he remembered Chris. An old friend of Hell’s.

Chris retrieved his hand, and those hazel eyes remained fixed on Darien’s face. Studying him? “I’m well, thank you.” That accent was so cool. Darien wanted an accent!

Now here was a man who was good-looking in an entirely different way than most of the men Darien knew. Darien was used to flashy looks, like Johnnie or Hell or any number of the other musicians and actors that he counted among his friends, but he could also appreciate the sedate look. Even though it was a trick of the light, that initial shadowed face intrigued Darien, made him wonder what was behind that crisp, cultured voice. Chris wore a thin charcoal sweater with a high neck. His straight, light brown hair was clipped short on the sides and only slightly longer at the top, the fringe halting maybe an inch or so above the classy glasses with thin wire frames that did nothing to hide the hazel eyes. Dark, arched brows slanted into the bridge of a straight, patrician nose that pointed to a wide mouth. He was classically good-looking without an in-your-face-ness about it.

Hell glanced toward the doorway, then back at Darien, violet eyes nearly black in the dim lighting. "I know you didn't want to talk about your situation here, but since we'd discussed your need to find a lawyer for your divorce?" Hell held his hand out, palm up, toward Chris. "Chris is a lawyer. He's handled divorce cases before."

"I assisted on two," Chris clarified, frowning slightly down at Hell. Then those eyes turned back to regard Darien. "One was somewhat high profile, however."

Hell rolled his eyes, flapping his hand. "Chris enjoys downplaying his abilities. He's a fine lawyer, and you can trust him."

The "D" word poked at Darien's heart. He ignored it as best he could, seeing the sincere concern in Hell's eyes. He turned to regard the tall man again. Wow, he had broad shoulders, didn't he? "Aren't you English?"

Chris smiled, pursing out his lips a little, making them look fuller. Hey, that was a nice smile! "I was born in England, yes. But I studied law here. My practice is in New York."

Darien's eyebrows lifted with surprise. "You go to court and all?" With that voice? Oh, man, the juries didn't have a chance.

Chris laughed. A nice laugh, too. Low and soft. "I don't tend to do so, no. I'm more of a contracts lawyer."

"But he *has* handled divorces," Hell clarified.

Chris shrugged, sipping his wine.

Darien studied him. He wouldn't bring it up now, but he knew Hell had intended for Chris to be his manager when he'd threatened to leave the band when he and Brent were having troubles right before the last Heaven Sent tour. Brent was a tad sensitive about it, although he didn't hold it against Chris. But Hell trusted him. Darien had no reason not to do so as well.

"I don't think my...divorce --" He was proud for only barely tripping over the word. "- will be that flashy. Nicole just wants to get it over with."

Hell's I-told-you-so look up at Chris told Darien that they'd discussed this already.

Chris, however, stayed focused on Darien. He slowly brought his glass to his lips and sipped. "She doesn't want anything from you?"

"We weren't married all that long."

"Regardless, given that you are a celebrity, you should have some legal authority review the agreement."

"I was just going to let Gretchen have one of the Heaven Sent lawyers look it over."

Chris tilted his head. A few strands of straight hair fell toward his eyes, brushing the top rim of his glasses. "It wouldn't hurt to have someone look it over for you personally."

Oddly, a shiver of delight crept up the back of Darien's neck at the sound of the last word. What the fuck?

Ignoring the shiver, he gave the offer serious thought. Chris looked like an upstanding guy. If he was Hell's good friend, he had to be worth it. He nodded. "Okay." He held out his hand toward Chris. "I'm game if you are."

Chris took his hand in a warm grasp. "I'll do my best to look after your interests."

## Chapter Four

“How the hell do you work this thing?” Darien demanded, glaring at the jumbled mess of metal pieces and wires.

“It’s a brain teaser. If I told you, it would defeat the purpose.”

Darien transferred his glare from the “executive puzzle” -- or so Chris had called it -- sitting on the desk before him to the calm lawyer seated across from him, laying out an arrangement of papers.

Chris wasn’t even looking at him, his attention solely focused on the laptop screen to his left and the neatly spread papers on the blotter. Waning afternoon sunlight streamed through the blinds on the windows behind him, setting off the gold highlights in his hair. He twiddled a fountain pen between two fingers as he turned to read one of the legal-sized sheets before him. A lefty, which Darien thought was too fascinating, even though it wasn’t anything Chris could help. A gold band surrounded the base of the little finger on that hand. Darien sat up a little straighter to see if he could make out the design.

“Before I forget --” Chris reached for a small note-sized slip of paper off to the side of his desk and held it out to Darien. “-- here’s a few websites that cover what we were discussing the other night.”

Darien blinked, taking the paper. “The other night?”

Chris tilted his head slightly to one side. “The copyrights?”

“Oh! At the party.” He scanned the list of eight web addresses. “Hey, cool, thanks.”

“Quite all right. So...” Chris sat forward, elbows on the desk as he picked up a short stack of papers in front of him. With his sleeves rolled up, the dusting of light brown hair on his arms gleamed in the sunlight that shone over his shoulder. Geez, did all of his hair shine like that? “You’ve listed your place of residence as the Weiss Strande Hotel?”

Distracted, Darien had to shake his head a little to get his thoughts back on track. “As much as anyplace, yeah.”

“You don’t own a home?”

Realizing he was staring at Chris’s arm for no good reason, Darien resumed his attention on the brain teaser. “Not anymore.”

“Not even an apartment?”

“Nope.”

“You did at one time?”

Darien nodded, letting go of one of the oddly shaped metal pieces and picking up another. “For a while, before the last tour, I had a condo in San Diego. I let the lease go.”

“Why?”

“Seemed a waste to pay for it when I wasn’t using it.”

Chris’s pause made Darien look up. The man was scowling, confused. “You could have purchased it outright. Or rented it out in your absence.”

“Yeah.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I didn’t really like it.”

“Why’d you rent it?”

Darien shoved the puzzle away and folded his arms on the edge of the desk. “Well, I liked it fine when I started the lease.” He pulled a pen out of the cup beside him and uncapped it, trying to figure out if the color was black or a really dark blue. “A friend of mine, Alec Taylor, mentioned the complex on the beach and that some others of our friends were renting there. So I got one. Seemed like a good idea at the time. I never really moved in.”

“Alec Taylor from Urban Dogs?”

“Yeah.”

Chris shoved a little notepad his way. “You never moved in?”

Darien smiled a thanks at Chris, then started to doodle on the notepad. “Nah. Once I started needing to get furniture and stuff, I lost interest.” Blue ink and a very fancy design on the grip of the pen.

“You could have hired someone to shop for you.”

Darien glanced up to see Chris’s amusement. “Yeah, I know. Luc’s done that, and Johnnie did it for one of his places.” He shrugged, doodling out lopsided, interconnected squares. “Didn’t seem worth it. I don’t have that much stuff really.”

“Do you have items in storage?”

“Items,” not “stuff.” Darien smiled, loving the primness of Chris’s vocabulary. “I’ve got stuff at my parents’ place and some stuff in storage, yeah.”

Chris made a note on the yellow legal sheet to his far left. “I’m going to give you the name of a real estate agent I know. He may have some ideas for you.”

Darien paused, watching Chris write. “Thanks.” *I think*. “Uh, could you just email it to me? That’s easier.”

Without looking up, Chris nodded. “I’ll need your address.”

“Here.” Darien turned to a clean sheet of the little notepad and started writing.

Chris tapped his pen on the papers before him. “Why have you listed the Weiss as your place of residence?”

“Tyler offered to keep track of my mail and let me know if anything important comes.” Tyler, like just about everyone else, had been concerned when he found out that Darien was, essentially, homeless. Ha! Last he checked, he was at least a millionaire and he was homeless. No one thought that was as amusing as he did.

Chris shook his head, accepting the slip of paper with Darien’s personal email address and setting it aside. “All right.” He made another note on the notepad beside him and flipped over a paper. “You are aware that Nicole has asked for a settlement?”

Darien nodded, resuming his drawing with triangles now. “Yeah. I agreed to help her out for a while.”

“She needs the money?”

“Sorta. She lost her job because she went off with me. I said I’d help her out until she got settled on another show.”

“That could take quite a while. She’s an actress?”

“Yeah.”

“This is open-ended.”

Pen poised over the triangles, Darien looked up, clued in by Chris’s tone that this was more important than he’d thought. “So?”

“Phrased as it is, you could end up supporting her for the rest of her life.”

He blinked, staring at Chris. “Well...I hadn’t thought about it.”

Chris raised an eyebrow. “Do you think your future wife would approve of your supporting your former?”

“Hmmm. Good point.” He let the “future wife” part go.



Chris sighed softly and made another note. "Let's put a finite date on this. If the split is as amicable as you claim -- and I've no reason now to believe that it's not -- she should be amenable to, say, three years?"

"Five."

Chris gave him a look.

"What? I'm generous."

"To a fault."

Darien shrugged. "The marriage thing was my idea, and I kind of talked her into bailing out of her job when she probably shouldn't have. Now she's got a bad rep. I feel guilty."

"Hmmm. All right, five."

Darien grinned. "Good thing I've got you to look out for me."

Chris paused, pen hovering over the notepad. He tilted his head only enough to roll his eyes up to look at Darien. Chris studied him for a moment before carefully setting the pen down. Calmly, he folded his hands and looked at Darien. "If you don't mind my asking, why did you get married?"

Darien opened his mouth to give all the reasons he'd given before, but stopped. "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

Chris didn't laugh it off with him. "Why?"

Darien started filling in some of the triangles. "All my friends were paired up. Seemed like it was time to settle down."

Darien glanced up to see Chris with his head tilted and his eyebrow up to nearly his hairline.

"I know, I know. Bonehead reason. Sue me. Wait, you're a lawyer. I take that back." He grinned.

Chris opened his mouth to say something, but something over Darien's shoulder distracted him.

Darien turned in his chair just as the man in the open doorway knocked on the frame. He was a good-looking blond, probably in his early twenties. He smiled. "Am I interrupting?"

Darien glanced at Chris just in time to see a scowl wipe from his features, replaced by a patient smile as he stood. "Not if it's quick."

Darien stood as the blond entered. He was about Darien's height, a little shorter, and his hair was actually a few different shades of yellow. Some of it looked fake, but not in a bad way. He was all flirty blue eyes, with a big smile, wearing a tight blue T-shirt and equally tight white jeans. He and Chris met at the side of Chris's desk and exchanged a brief kiss.

Kiss? Darien blinked. Did he know Chris was gay? That was a lover's kiss, right? Had to be. Wasn't just a friend thing. Well, no, guys don't do that sort of thing. Well, guys who weren't into guys. *Dayum.*

"Darien," Chris said, holding out a hand, "this is Nathan Thomas."

The blond extended a hand in Darien's direction, beaming. "His boyfriend."

*Oh?* Darien took the hand, pretty sure he kept his surprise under wraps. "Nice to meet you."

At least Nathan didn't seem to notice. "It is an *extreme* pleasure to meet you." He gave a good squeeze to Darien's hand, bringing the other hand to grip his wrist. "I am a big fan."

Darien put on the smile he used when meeting press and fans. "Really? Hey, thanks." Images started swirling in his head of Chris and this guy kissing, touching, fucking. He couldn't have said why he was so taken with this new piece of information about Hell's friend, but he was.

"My apologies, Darien," said Chris, standing beside his desk with a frown for the blond. "I'm quite sure Nathan's timely arrival has something to do with your presence."

Nathan grimaced up at him.

Darien laughed. "Hey, that's okay. I don't mind."

Nathan stuck his tongue out at Chris, and Darien nearly choked at the immediate pictures that put into his mind of just what portions of Chris's body that tongue had touched.

*What the hell?*

Nathan turned back to face Darien, swinging a backpack off his shoulder onto the seat Darien had just occupied. "I'm sorry. Chris told me I couldn't come. But when he said that he'd be meeting with you, I simply *had* to see if I could meet you."

Darien frowned, glancing at Chris. "Haven't you met Hell yet?"

"No. Not yet."

"We haven't been together long," Chris explained, crossing his arms and leaning his hip against the edge of the desk. "So, Nathan, do what you've come to do, and let us get back to work."

"Spoilsport."

Darien laughed. Inspiration hit him. "Hey, why don't we go to dinner?"

He couldn't have made Nathan happier, judging by the bounce and clap together of hands.

Chris, however, frowned. "It's only five o'clock."

"That's okay. We're done here, aren't we?"

"No."

Darien pouted. "Then can't we do that tomorrow?"

"We don't have an appointment set for tomorrow."

"We could. I'm free; are you?"

Chris's jaw dropped a little, his eyes none too happy. *Oops, may have gone too far.* He knew his attitude came off as flip, especially when he didn't want to do something, and

reading legal papers and answering questions about the divorce was something he didn't want to do. Even if being with Chris made it a bit tolerable.

"Or any time this week...?"

Chris narrowed his eyes.

Nathan sidled up to Chris, sliding a hand up his chest. *"Please, Chris."*

Darien wondered at the frown that threatened his own face as he battled it. *Weird.*

Chris reached up to take hold of Nathan's hand, grimacing slightly at the smaller man. He looked up at Darien. "You don't mind?"

"Heck no."

Chris sighed. "All right." He turned back to the desk. "Let's set up a time for tomorrow."

Nathan beamed. "Wonderful! Thank you."

They settled for a little steakhouse in the lobby of the building where Chris's office was located. It was the kind of restaurant that Darien loved to find in New York City. Kind of hidden and off the wall, but the food promised to be delicious.

Nathan held his menu but didn't read it. He barely waited for the host to leave with their drink order before leaning toward Darien. "I have to ask. It must be so exciting being a rockstar! You've been all *over* the world."

Darien smiled, skimming over the entrée list. *Steak, yeah. Hmm, which kind?* "Yeah, I guess so."

"You guess so? You guys have even toured Russia."

"Well, yeah." He smiled, dividing his time between glancing at Nathan and the menu. "We did shows in Moscow, Leningrad, and Samara, but we didn't get to see much of the cities."

They paused while the waiter came with the wine Chris had ordered when they sat down. Chris did the classy thing, smelling the cork and tasting before nodding his acceptance. Darien had never mastered that. Luc had tried to teach him once, claiming the chicks loved it, but Darien preferred other methods to impress the ladies. After the waiter left, Nathan folded his menu, unread, and laid it on the table.

“You didn’t get to see any of Russia? Why not?”

“That’s kind of the way it is.” Oh, yeah, prime rib sounds good. Darien set his menu down and picked up his glass. “When we’re on tour, there’s so much to do and so much security that usually we see the venue and our hotel. Sometimes they’ll take us somewhere on a press thing or for a photo shoot, but that’s it. Oh, hey, this is good!”

Chris nodded his agreement as they both sipped the dark red -- Darien turned the bottle toward him -- cabernet.

Nathan glanced between them, then picked up his own glass. “Still, you’ve *been* there. I’ve never been out of the country.”

Darien smiled at Chris. The gold rims of his glasses shone in the dim light from the small candle lamp set in the middle of the table. “You’ve probably really seen more of the world than I have.” Did Chris realize he was stroking the lip of his wineglass with two fingers? Well, if he didn’t, Darien did.

Chris glanced up from where he was staring into the light, fingers halting. “I’m not so sure of that.”

“Hey, born in England, live in the States. I know you’ve been to Germany. You probably get to *do* more than I get to do when I go anywhere.” Darien sat back as a waiter brought a bread basket. “Where else have you been?”

Chris shrugged, setting down his glass to reach for a slice of the hot bread. “Italy, France, Greece...”

“Oh, man.” Darien sat forward. “I did get to see some of Athens when we were there. That place rocks! All the old together with the new. And the people were so cool.”

Chris smiled, just a small curling of the corners of his mouth, but it was a beautiful thing. “Did you visit the Parthenon?”

“Pile of old rocks.” Nathan sniffed. “But the nightlife is incredible, I hear.”

Darien watched, but Chris didn’t react to Nathan’s snipe. “I don’t know, I thought the Parthenon was pretty awesome. We wanted to play in this theater attached to it that’s actually one of the ancient theaters, but they ended up not letting us do it.” Darien shrugged.

The waiter returned to take their order. Darien was bemused when Chris ordered for both himself and Nathan. *What’s the deal with them?* Was Nathan just a boy toy? He certainly looked it. He was in his early twenties at most, while Chris had to be, what, mid-thirties? Chris didn’t seem the type to want a just a pretty face, but what other explanation was there? Darien didn’t get the sense that they were head-over-heels. He’d been around too many lovey-dovey couples -- male ones at that -- in the past two years not to recognize the emotions, and that’s exactly what was lacking between these two. *I could be wrong.* Inwardly, he shrugged.

Once the waiter left, Nathan leaned into him again. “So can you tell me what’s in store for Heaven Sent? Or is that hush-hush?”

“No hush-hush. I’m due at the Weiss West in May, actually. We’re all meeting up after Luc finishes his movie thing, and we’re going to start putting together ideas for the next album.”

Nathan’s eyes went big. “Really? How does that work?”

Darien glanced at Chris, who seemed interested as well. Seeing no objection, Darien went ahead and explained the process, answering any and all of Nathan’s continual questions.

Darien liked to believe that he was honest with himself. He tried to be, at least. It helped to take things in stride when he just took his own thoughts at face value and dealt with them. So that night, long after leaving Chris and Nathan's company, he wasn't all that freaked to figure out that he was attracted to one Christopher Faith. Surprised, yes, but not freaked.

He laughed about it as he flipped through the late-night shows. It wasn't odd for him to think that a man was attractive. He thought a lot of guys were attractive. It helped with the Heaven Sent bisexual rumor thing that he didn't mind flirting. Flirting was harmless and fun, even with guys. But he was drawn to Chris, a new experience. He loved to look at him, certainly, but there was more to it than that. That afternoon in Chris's office and later at dinner had been fun because Chris was there, because he liked talking to Chris. Had liked talking to him at the party the previous week, as well. If Chris were a woman, Darien would have already started coming on hard. Heck, if it weren't for the fact that Chris already had a boyfriend, Darien might make a move anyway.

Wasn't *that* amazing?!

Next afternoon, Darien showed up at Chris's office, as scheduled. He waved and said hello to the nice receptionist and walked on past her. He walked down the darkened hall, past a few other offices with busily working people, until he got to Chris's open door.

Chris looked up at his knock.

*Oh, yeah, you've got it bad*, he chided himself as his heart skipped a beat. The man sat there in one of those crisp pin-striped dress shirts. No tie, a few buttons undone at his collar, but the cuffs were fastened. His fancy watch gleamed just a tad more gold than the highlights of his hair.

"Darien," he greeted, standing.

“Hey.” Darien sauntered in. Was it wishful thinking that Chris was checking him out? Appreciating the care he’d taken to make his blond hair shine, maybe admiring the fit of his tight blue T-shirt? Had he dressed to impress this morning? Well, maybe a little. Chris may have been taken, but it didn’t mean he couldn’t look, right?

“Before we begin,” Chris said, sitting again. He paused, considering Darien closely. “I want to thank you.”

Darien sat and purposefully shoved aside the infernal puzzle that had distracted him the day before. “For what?”

Chris removed his glasses. Darien watched his face, fascinated by his first glimpse of it without the glasses, as Chris used a small rag to clean the lenses. He looked less...imposing without them. “For humoring Nathan last night.”

“Oh. That? That wasn’t a problem at all. I had fun.”

Chris studied him for a moment. How cool. His eyes were usually hazel, but in the right lighting -- like now -- they looked brown. Then he smiled that small little smile and put his glasses back on. “Good. I’m glad. Nathan can be a little...much at times.”

Darien chuckled. “So can I. I’m sure you’ve noticed.”

Chris’s smile took on the look of a smirk.

“Go ahead. I know. I’m a chatterbox.”

Chris laughed, making Darien’s heart swell. He vowed to do anything he could to cause that laugh often.

Chris slid a neat stack of papers from the corner of the desk to the spot before him. “Yes, well, thank you just the same.”

“How long have you two been dating?”

Chris looked up, startled. “Nearly five months.”

“Exclusively?”



A blink and a pause, but the answer that came was: “Yes.”

*Not sure, huh?* Perhaps Nathan wasn’t so much.

Darien wanted to ask. All night, both at dinner and through to this morning, curiosity had burned in him. He wanted to know how serious they were. He wanted to know if they were as close to breaking up as he thought from last night. But how sad was that? He wanted them to break up because he was attracted to Chris? No, he wanted them to break up because Nathan really didn’t treat Chris right. He’d been dismissive and inattentive all night. Every conversation that had actually involved Chris has been started by Darien, not Nathan. That had to mean they were on the outs, right?

“What?”

Darien startled, blinking up at Chris. “What?”

“You’re staring at me.”

*Smooth move, Ex-Lax.* “Am I?”

“Yes. What is it?”

Darien felt his eyes get big. He bit his lips together. What the hell could he say? Certainly not what he was thinking. But he so wanted to *know*! “I was just wondering...”

“Yes?”

“Are you...I mean, are you guys...?”

Chris sat back in his plush chair, folding his hands across his belly. “Yes?”

Darien sat forward, gripping the edge of the desk. “You’re the top, right?”

The look of incredulity didn’t belong on Chris’s face, but there it was. Eyes wide, mouth agape. He even flushed a little.

“I m-mean...” Darien stammered, afraid he’d gone too far. Him and his big mouth. Was that really better than what he’d been thinking? Yeah, he’d wondered, but even he knew that was pushing the bounds of politeness. “I mean, Brent and Hell have my way of thinking

on this one all messed up, and it's just... I mean, I'm pretty *sure* you're the top, but you never know, right? I just --" He broke off, feeling his face heat as he looked down at his lap. *Oh, great, Einstein. He's gonna throw you out of here.*

Laughter filled the office. Deep, joyous, surprised laughter. Darien looked up to see Chris's head thrown back against his seat, his hands spread over his flat belly as though to hold it in. His eyes were closed and his mouth wide open as he laughed. After a moment, his head came forward, teary eyes opening behind his glasses, but one look at Darien and he cracked up again.

Darien grinned, loving this. "It's not *that* funny."

Which only made Chris laugh louder. He fell forward over his desk, forearms braced on the top, head hung between his shoulders.

"Chris?" came a voice from the doorway.

Darien looked over his shoulder to see Chris's assistant, Max, who usually sat in the next office.

Max glanced at Darien with a curious smile.

Darien shrugged.

"You okay, Chris?" Max asked.

"I'm fine," Chris panted, waving a hand at the man. "I'm fine."

Darien screwed his lips to the side, waiting for the laughter to die down.

Chris took off his glasses and wiped at the tears streaming down his cheeks. A beautiful flush marked his face and neck, and when he looked up, his eyes shone like Darien had never seen them before.

Darien nudged the box of tissues from the edge of the desk closer to Chris.

Chris took a few and dabbed at his eyes. Peeks at Darien threatened to start him laughing again, but he held it in. He sighed, still chuckling.

Darien waited to speak until Chris was mostly calm. “Well, are you going to answer my question?”

One look and Chris was off laughing again.

## Chapter Five

When Darien was playing his drums, nothing else existed. The world and all its problems got pounded into the background by the beat of the bass drum at his feet, and the crunch of the snares kept it at bay. He was barely aware of his own body. Even when he was just practicing, really just keeping in shape, he lost himself so wholly that he rarely acknowledged the presence of another.

Which was why he didn't know Chris was there until he passed a final drum roll over the toms and happened to glance up to see the man in the doorway.

He didn't stumble over his moves often, but the sight of Chris leaning in the doorway separating the practice room from the smaller sitting room threw him off. Glasses perched on that long, straight nose, short hair gleaming in the diffused overhead light, a slight smile on wide, generous lips. No button-down today. He wore a pale yellow polo shirt that fit snugly over broad shoulders and chest, looser over the waist that tapered into faded jeans. Jeans. Chris was wearing jeans. And black lace-up boots. For nearly two months Darien had seen Chris at least once a week, often more, and he'd yet to see Chris in anything more casual than Dockers, and that only once. He liked it.

"Hey, Chris," he greeted, sitting back on his stool.

“Hello.” Chris nodded his head, smile widening. “That was wonderful.”

Darien blinked, reaching up to scrape a lock of hair from his eyes. It wasn’t dripping or anything, but it was definitely wet. Now that he’d stopped playing, he was aware of the sweat that beaded his brow and plastered his loose tank top to his chest and shoulders. He probably looked awful. “What?”

“What you were just playing.”

Darien looked down at the snare drum before him, then back up at Chris. He laughed. “That? Oh, that was nothing.” He twirled one of the sticks in his fingers. “Just keeping in shape.”

“Well, it sounded good to me.”

Darien chuckled. “Cool. That’s what they pay me for, right?”

“Right.”

He kept twirling the stick, checking Chris out while trying not to be too obvious about it. *Does he work out?* He had to do something to keep his arms looking like that. Who’d’ve thought he had such nice muscles underneath those prim button-downs? “Uh, what’re you doing here?” This practice studio at the Weiss East was on the second floor, near a staircase that led down to the wings right beside the main stage of the White Tiger, the hotel’s nightclub. You needed security clearance to get anywhere near it, and Darien was aware that he was the only musician currently in residence, so he hadn’t expected to see another soul while he was practicing.

Chris smiled and pushed from the doorway, then bent to pick up the briefcase sitting by his feet. “I have something for you.”

Darien’s mind reeled at the sensual possibilities of that. Surely Chris didn’t mean...?

Chris straightened and patted the briefcase. “I have your divorce papers.”

Darien blinked, tamping down the lust that had surged along with his rabid imagination. “Oh.”

“I stopped by the front desk when you didn’t answer your room phone. When they eventually believed I was your lawyer, they gave me a passcard to get into the studio.” He lowered the briefcase to his side, reaching up with his free hand to push his glasses up further on his nose. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Oh, no, I don’t mind.” Darien carefully set his sticks on the snare, glancing down at his torn jeans and tank top. Yeah, he looked like shit. Oh, well, no help for it. He stood, glancing up.

And caught Chris staring. It was fleeting and Chris turned away almost immediately, but he couldn’t have imagined the heat in that stare, could he? Yeah, he probably could. Since he’d discovered this attraction for Chris, he’d convinced himself that he’d caught the man checking him out a lot. If he was right, was that so wrong or so bad? Darien knew he wasn’t a bad-looking guy. There were thousands of screaming fans who thought he was the living end. It wasn’t out of the question for one gay lawyer to find him attractive, even if said lawyer was currently in a relationship. Right?

“You didn’t have to bring them here.” Darien rounded the drum kit and jumped off the riser. If the rest of the guys had been in town, their equipment would fill it, but since he was the only one around at the moment, all the rest of the practice gear was tucked safely away in one of the storage rooms.

“I don’t mind. I was in town.” Chris looked around the empty room, but there was nowhere to sit except the stool behind the drums and a few folding chairs leaning against the wall in one corner.

Darien pointed to the room behind Chris as he approached. “Let’s go in there.”

Chris nodded, turned, and bumped into Darien. Since Darien was shorter, he had an excellent view of the surprise that came over Chris’s face at their touch. Not a bad sort of surprise. A sharp inhalation and a momentary freeze, followed by a brief fluttering of those green-brown eyes behind those thin lenses of glass.

“Sorry,” Darien muttered with a smile, bending his head to lead the way into the main studio. Okay, that was a *definite* sign of attraction there. Too bad he was all skanky and sweaty. Maybe Chris liked that.

Self-conscious despite the favorable reaction from Chris, he walked into the sitting room. It was painted a calming blue, with big windows in one wall overlooking the street below and the buildings opposite.

He led Chris to a couch and chairs set around a small coffee table. “Sorry if I stink,” he said, figuring he’d just acknowledge it.

“Oh, no, you’re fine.” Was Chris’s voice lower? Was that a flush across the back of that long, fine neck? Chris watched his hands as he set the briefcase on the table and opened it. Yeah, he was a little flushed.

“I’m gonna go towel down.” Darien indicated the door to a small bathroom. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Oh. All right.”

Darien closed himself in the little washroom that contained a narrow shower at the far end, a toilet, and a counter with two sinks. He grabbed one of the fluffy white towels Tyler’s staff kept handy and turned to the big mirror over the sinks.

*Shit!* Yeah, he looked awful. Well, no. He didn’t look any worse than he usually did after playing solid for an hour and a half in a room with the air-conditioning turned on low, but he was all sweaty and his hair was lank and sticking to his skull and neck. He glanced at the shower, but figured that would take too long. Even if it was quick, he didn’t want to make Chris wait forever. So instead he tore off his tank top and used one of the white washcloths to wipe his chest, neck, and armpits. He wet his hands and combed them through his hair, figuring the wet look was better than the sweat look. Almost done, he grabbed up the tank top and paused before putting it on. He studied himself in the mirror. He actually had a pretty nice chest. He was shorter and a little stockier than, say, Luc or Johnnie, but he

had more muscle than either of them. It came from playing drums and the fact that he liked lifting weights on occasion. He wasn't bulky, but he was toned. He had a nice summer tan, which made the sparse mat of gold hair across his chest almost glitter. He'd always thought was a great effect. *Would Chris?*

Grinning, knowing he was flirting where he probably shouldn't, he left the tank on the counter and returned to the next room.

The reaction was gratifying. His shirtlessness obviously caught Chris off guard because when he looked up he froze. And stared. Hazel eyes locked on Darien's pecs and didn't look like they could be dragged away.

*Yeah, he likes.* "Sorry," Darien said, not meaning it at all. "The tank's soaked."

Chris shook his head. Eyes darted away but returned to check Darien out. "No, no, I don't mind." Yeah, his voice had definitely gone down an octave. He cleared his throat and bent over the papers laid out on the coffee table. "Everything seems to be in order."

"Cool." Darien went right past the couch to a mini-fridge in the corner. "Want something to drink? There's beer, water, Coke, and juice."

"No, thank you."

Darien snagged a Corona and brought it back to the couch with him, opening it as he went. He paused before sitting to take that first drink. He was, of course, posing. Making sure Chris got a good look. Wicked of him, yes, but he was enjoying this.

Besides, Chris seemed to like the view. At least if that furtive look as Darien sat was any indication.

*Careful, you're gonna get hard.* He could feel it stirring in his pants. 'Course, would that be a bad thing? *Yes! He's got a boyfriend, asshole. Cool it.* He set the Corona down on the table and slid the stack of papers in front of him. "So, what have we got here?"

Chris explained the papers to him, and Darien tried not to let his focus wane. This was important. Chris had convinced him that he needed to pay attention to the particulars of his



divorce. Even though he trusted Nicole and still considered her a friend, legal matters were not something to be taken lightly. Certainly not as lightly as he'd taken the marriage ceremony in the first place. It wasn't easy, though. The legal mumbo-jumbo was a drone in his head even when delivered with Chris's sexy accented voice, and Chris's cologne was distracting. As was his warm body. Their knees and arms kept brushing as Chris reached in front of him to turn papers over. Darien was more than capable of doing that himself, but if Chris wanted to snuggle up, Darien wasn't going to stop him. It was a struggle to keep focused on the papers and not turn to look his fill at the gorgeousness beside him. Look, ha! He wanted to throw down his pen and find out if Chris was hard inside those jeans.

He still thought that was just plain weird -- for him to want a guy -- but he'd come to terms with it in the past few weeks. Besides, it was new and exciting. Sure, he'd thought about feeling up another guy before. He couldn't have spent years with Johnnie as his best friend and not at least have thought about it. But he'd never wanted to *do* it. Not really. Not to the point where it was a near compulsion, like now.

But the weight of what was in the papers before him slowly sank in as Chris talked. He was about to be divorced. His marriage was over. But then, had he ever really been married? His friends didn't seem to think so. His parents were of the same opinion. At first, his mother had been tickled pink to hear the news. Put out that she hadn't been at the ceremony itself, of course, but she'd been delighted to have a daughter-in-law. She and Nicole even got along really well. Still did, as far as he knew. But his mom had not been surprised when he'd told her about the divorce. She'd cried, but not so much because he and Nicole were splitting as because he hadn't, in her words, "found what he needed."

"I want my baby to be happy," she'd said.

"I'm happy, Mom."

"No, honey. Not completely. Not really. You need someone to take care of you."

He'd laughed. "Mom, I've got tons of people taking care of me."

“Not the way I mean, honey. No one’s taking care of your heart.”

That conversation haunted him. He tried to write it off as his mom’s romantic streak. She had one a mile wide, always had. But something about what she’d said beat in his heart, and he couldn’t shake it. *No one’s taking care of your heart*. It was enough to put a damper on the intriguing new interest in the lawyer seated beside him.

Finally Chris pointed to the last signature line, and Darien signed. He stared down at the illegible scratch that was his autograph. “So that’s it? I’m divorced?”

Chris gathered the papers before him and stacked them neatly. “Almost. I’ll need to file them with the state of Nevada, of course, but this is, effectively, it.”

*So I’m alone again*. Actually, he’d been alone since Nicole had asked for the divorce. No, really he’d been alone longer than that. God, how depressing.

With a sigh, he set down the fountain pen, then held up his left hand to stare at the gold band on his third finger. Without a word, he took it off, then held it in his right palm for a moment.

“You’ve been wearing that all this time.” It was a statement, not a question, telling him Chris had noticed.

“Yeah.”

“May I ask why?”

*Why*. Darien chewed the inside of his lower lip, wondering what to tell Chris.

“You don’t have to answer that.”

“No, it’s okay. I just...” He shrugged, turning over his hand to roll the ring across the backs of his knuckles. “We were married. You’re supposed to wear the ring, right?”

“The ring is not as important as what it symbolizes.”

Darien sighed again, leaning back on the couch, the better to slip the ring into his front pocket. “Yeah. That’s the kicker, isn’t it? It’s a symbol of love, and I didn’t really love her.” He rubbed at his eyes with one hand, then left the palm over his eyes. “Not like I should.”

“It’s more than love. Marriage is not just love.”

Darien peeked through his fingers at Chris, watching the man’s profile as he slowly arranged the papers into a neat stack. His expression told Darien that he took what he was saying very seriously.

“Many, many couples get married thinking that if they love each other, it’ll just all work out. That’s not the case. Love is important, yes, but making a marriage last takes work and commitment.”

“Were you ever married?”

Chris blinked, startled. He glanced at Darien. “No. But I’ve been in a serious relationship where love wasn’t enough.”

Darien frowned over the pull at his heart. “Nathan?”

Chris laughed, but there wasn’t much mirth in it. “Oh, no, not Nathan. Long before Nathan.” He bent to pick up the briefcase he’d set beside the table.

Darien was torn, wanting to ask two questions at once. He wanted to know who this other love was, but the more immediate question came out: “But you love Nathan, right?”

Chris turned his head. Darien couldn’t tell if he was smiling or not, and if he was, it wasn’t exactly happy. “No.”

“No?”

“Nathan and I broke up.”

It felt like a boulder bounced on Darien’s chest, taking the breath out of his lungs. “What? When?”

“Tuesday.”

The day before yesterday. “I didn’t know.”

Chris chuckled, securing the papers in his briefcase. “No. I didn’t think it important to tell you.”

Darien sat forward, laying a hand on Chris's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Chris glanced at the hand but didn't shrug it off. "Me? I'm quite all right. Thank you."

"Yeah, but you guys have been together...what, seven months now?"

"Yes. But we were never in love."

"You weren't?"

"No. We enjoyed each other for a time, but that was all."

So Darien's instincts hadn't been that far off after all. He was rarely wrong about other people's relationships. It was his own that he had troubles with. "I'm still sorry."

Chris gave him a genuine smile and reached up to pat the hand on his shoulder. "Thank you." He stood, briefcase in hand. "I should be going."

Mild panic drew Darien to his feet. "What? Why? Stick around." He hadn't quite processed the implications of what Chris had just told him or what was going on in his head. But he couldn't help thinking: *Chris is free*. "Or, better yet, go out with me."

Chris blinked, clearly caught off guard by the choice of words. "Pardon?"

"Yeah, let's go out. I'll take you to dinner."

Chris frowned. "Why?"

"Why? Because I'm a newly divorced man and I don't want to be alone tonight. Because you just broke up with your boyfriend and you shouldn't be alone." Seeing Chris start to shake his head, Darien hastened on with: "Because I want to thank you for helping me when divorce isn't your area of expertise."

"You don't have to thank me."

"Then because I want to." He gripped Chris's arm and put on his very best smile, with teeth and everything. That smile got him a lot in this world, and he gave it his best effort at that moment. "C'mon, Chris, let me take you out to dinner."

Chris stared at him, frowning slightly as he studied Darien's face. "I don't know..." But the tone wavered. The smile was having its effect.

Knowing he wasn't playing fair, Darien put on the plead. "Please? I don't want to be alone tonight, and no one else is in town."

Chris looked torn between scowling and laughing. The laugh won. "All right, then."

## Chapter Six

Johnnie would be so happy when Darien finally got around to telling him that he was attracted to a guy. He'd get razzed mercilessly, but he was used to that.

So now that he knew Chris was free, what was he going to do about it? Before today, it was just a thing that couldn't go anywhere because Chris was in a relationship. Well, now that relationship was a thing of the past. Did Darien want to go through with more? Was he ready for all that came with it? Was he seriously contemplating sex with a guy?

Darien was still mulling it over when he got out of the shower. Chris waited in the main room of Darien's suite at the Weiss while Darien made himself presentable. A glance in the mirror showed him that he needed a shave, so he gave himself a little extra time to pass a razor over his face to get rid of a day's worth of stubble.

Did he really want to fuck a guy? Usually the answer came out to "no," but tonight was different. Chris was different. He had a feeling he might not mind with Chris.

He stared at himself in the mirror as he ran a hand over his now smooth chin. He'd put on his best jeans, the ones he knew hugged his ass to emphasize its shape. He had on a dark orange button-down that someone had told him made his brown eyes look deeper and his hair look brighter. For whatever reason, his eyes looked bigger tonight, and he counted that

as a bonus. His hair was doing its thing, drying about his head and neck, and he decided not to be annoyed that it was straight as a board with no curl to it whatsoever. Shrugging, he undid two more buttons of the shirt, leaving it open halfway down his chest, and left the bathroom.

He looked good, if he did say so himself. Would Chris think so? Would Chris even think about fucking him?

*Just take it as it comes*, he told himself, grabbing his keycard from the dresser and stashing it in his back pocket as he entered the main room.

Chris was seated forward on the couch, elbows on knees and head bent over the day's *New York Times*, which was spread on the low table before him. He glanced up as Darien entered, and kind of froze.

Darien sauntered toward Chris, *aware* he was sauntering. Aware he put an extra sway in his hips. What the hell was that? He didn't do that with girls. But like the bare chest earlier that day, the move had a very cool effect. As Chris sat up, his eyes started at Darien's face, but they fell almost immediately to his groin. They paused for a brief heartbeat on their way back up to take in Darien's chest before those eyes, green at the moment, came back to his face.

Darien smiled. Oh, yeah, that was promising. "Sorry to make you wait. You ready?"

"Yes." Chris's voice was a touch raspy, and he cleared his throat as he reached for the briefcase at the corner of the table.

"You can leave that here if you want." Because that'd mean Chris would have to come back up to the room with him after dinner.

Chris raised an eyebrow at him, hand hovering over the handle of the briefcase. Then he shut his hand and stood, nodding. "All right."

Darien headed toward the door. "There's a great Italian place here in the hotel. Okay to go there?"

A glance over his shoulder, and he caught Chris checking out his ass again. This time, he wasn't so quick to look away, even when he had to know Darien saw. "Sounds good."

"Great!" His heart gave that little jump it did when he knew he was on the right track with a potential lover. "They serve you *tons* of food. 'Course, it's not really like the food we had when we were in Italy." He held the door for Chris to pass by, then let it fall shut. "Oh, man, you said you'd been to Italy, right?! The food there is terrific! When we were staying..."

Darien picked up the wine bottle to refill Chris's glass. "So, what happened between you and Nathan?"

Chris caught Darien's hand to stop him when the glass was half full, giving him a look. Darien just grinned. He'd made sure that Chris's glass was full during salads and entrees, not sure until now if Chris really noticed. He couldn't even be sure how many glasses Chris had drunk, technically, but they were on their second bottle. It seemed like a good idea to keep Chris mellow. Besides, he liked the heavy-lidded look that had come over the lawyer. Very sexy, especially since the mood lighting of the dim lamp on the wall beside them made interesting shadows of Chris's sharply angular face.

Chris picked up the glass, his pinkie ring flashing in the light. "We wanted different things, I suppose."

"Not ready to settle down?"

"Not with Nathan."

"That because of that relationship in the past?"

"Pardon?"

"When you were talking about marriage earlier, you mentioned you'd been in a serious relationship before."



“Ah. Yes. Yes, I did.” Chris sipped again, thinking. “Yes, I suppose Simon is much of the reason.”

*Simon.* Darien filed that information away. Sounded English. Someone Chris knew before he moved to the U.S.?

He was about to ask when Chris set down his glass, right on the handle of his fork. Darien reached for it, knowing he wouldn't make it, but Chris caught the glass before more than a few drops could slosh over the rim. He frowned at his error.

Darien grinned. “You okay?”

“Mmmm.” Still frowning, Chris brought his hand to his mouth. Darien's mouth fell open slightly when Chris's tongue darted out to lick at the fleshy part between thumb and forefinger. Hazel eyes -- brown in this light -- darted up accusingly. “I think you're trying to get me drunk.”

Darien snapped his mouth shut and cocked his head. He let his eyes go half-lidded, still grinning. *Am I really doing this?* “Are you drunk?”

Chris couldn't miss the look. Couldn't misunderstand what it meant. But he said nothing, plucking his napkin from his lap and using it on his hand in lieu of his tongue. “No.” He replaced his napkin in his lap, then brought his hands back up to prop his elbows to either side of his empty plate. He smiled, and Darien's heart thumped at the sight. “I'm just relaxed.”

Darien laughed, shoving his empty plate aside. “Yeah, I'll say.” He folded his arms on the tablecloth before him. “This is the most relaxed I've ever seen you. You're usually so...”

“Uptight?”

Darien chuckled. “Put together.”

“Mmm, nice distinction.” Chris laughed, casting his gaze out across the restaurant. There wasn't much to see. They sat in a secluded booth toward the back. Only a few other

tables were visible to them, and just one of those had a couple sitting at it. “It’s all right. I know the face that I present to the world. It’s habit. Breeding.”

“Oh? You come from an upper-crust British family?”

Chris arched a brow at Darien’s awful attempt to copy his accent. “Somewhat, yes.”

“You one of them English lords or something? Got a family history that goes back to King Arthur?”

“Hardly. My mother would prefer that we had a finer pedigree, but, alas, we do not.” Chris picked up his fork and poked at the linguine before him. “My father, however, is a rather prominent barrister, so we were well off. My older brother is an MP.”

“How’d you end up being a lawyer in the States?”

“My choice. When time came to go to university, I chose to come abroad.”

“Your choice?”

A small quirk of a grin. “Heavily influenced by the fact that I am, and always have been, openly gay.”

Darien nodded. “Ah.”

“Yes, ‘ah.’”

“How long have you lived in the States?”

“For the better part of thirteen years.”

“I thought you went to school with Hell?”

Chris nodded. “I spent two semesters in Germany. While I was there, I took some classes in music.”

“How old was he?”

“Nineteen, I think.”

“That’s right, he went to school young.”

“A prodigy. And a brat.”

Darien smiled at the fond tone in Chris's voice. "How old were you?"

"Twenty-six."

"How old are you now?"

"Thirty-two."

A sudden thought occurred, and Darien leaned forward eagerly. "Was his hair purple back then?"

Chris laughed. He set his fork on his plate and sat back in his seat, taking the wineglass with him. "Oh, no. It was his natural white-blond."

"So *that's* what color his hair is!"

"Don't tell him I told you that."

"Do you know why he colors it?"

Chris shrugged, smiling. "He likes it. I'm not sure if you've noticed, but he's rather outlandish."

Darien hooted. "Oh, yeah, I noticed. Hey, can I tell Brent about his hair?"

Smile turned to smirk. "I imagine that Brent would know by now."

"Oh." Darien blinked, then grinned. "Yeah, he probably does, huh?" He took a sip of his wine, deciding which of many questions to ask next. "Did you ever sleep with Hell?"

Chris was relaxed enough to not be surprised. "Very early on, yes."

"Hot young thing? Nice."

Chris cleared his throat.

"Didn't work out between you?"

"It was very clear we were better friends."

Darien nodded, squelching a twinge of jealousy. It was stupid anyway. Hell and Chris had been friends for years, and Hell quite definitely had Brent now. But Darien couldn't help

the sudden images that popped into his head. Of tiny Hell in Chris's arms. Of them kissing. Of them... "What's it like?"

Eyes blinked at him from behind thin-rimmed glasses. "Pardon?"

"What's it like, sleeping with a guy?"

Chris stared at him blankly. There was that look that Darien liked to inspire, torn between incredulity, shock, and laughter.

Darien twirled his mostly empty glass on the table. He was concentrating so hard on not blurting out "*I want you*" that he was having more trouble than usual filtering the rest of what he was saying. Not that he was really good at it anyway. He watched the dark wine tumble in the glass. "You don't have to answer."

"It's not that. I don't know *how* to answer."

He stole a glance up and was mesmerized by the golden sheen the candlelight gave to Chris's smooth, high cheekbones. "Why not?"

"I've only ever slept with men. I'm not sure how to compare it to anything else."

"Oh."

"You should ask Johnnie or Luc. Or Brent."

Darien nodded, averting his gaze to finger the sugar packets in a little ceramic box near the edge of the table. "I've heard their answers." And a lot of what they'd said was starting to make perfect sense. His cock, he realized, had started to fill with blood, lazily pulsing at him, reminding him it was there. Yeah, like he could forget it.

"I take it you've never slept with a man?"

His hand froze. "I thought you knew that?"

"I suspected."

Darien shrugged, chewing. "It's never been my thing, y'know? Well, except for one blowjob, and I don't really remember it."

“Drunk?”

“Yeah. Plus there was this girl with us, and I was more interested in her.” He glanced at Chris, curious to see if the fact that he’d been in a ménage a trois bothered the other man.

Didn’t seem to. Chris only shrugged, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as he stared at the dregs of his wine. “I’m sure you haven’t lacked for offers to experience it again.”

Mmmm, now if the guy had been Chris...Those sharply defined, dusky-pink lips wrapped around his dick could definitely keep his attention. Darien chuckled at himself, resisting the urge to reach down to adjust his cock. “Nah. That’s kind of the nature of the band, isn’t it? The word is, I swing both ways. I get all sorts of offers.”

“That doesn’t seem to bother you.”

He grinned. “No way. It’s fun. ’Course, it’s all kind of changed now, what with Tyler, Reese, and Hell being in the picture.” He sighed, picked up the wine bottle, and upended the last of it into his glass. Did they need another bottle? “Everyone assumes we’re all just gay now.”

“Except you. You were married to a woman.”

Darien snorted, looking up for their waiter. “And now I’m divorced. The rumors started weeks ago.”

“No more wine for me, thank you.”

“No?”

“No. Rumors?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Rumors I’m really gay and was trying to hide it.” He grimaced. “’Course, that’s what Luc’s been saying all along. He thinks my marriage was a desperate attempt to prove I’m not gay. I’m pretty sure the other guys feel the same way, but Luc’s the only one who’s said it to my face.”

Chris set his glass carefully on the table, still sitting back in an almost-slump in his seat. Well, as much of a slump as Darien had yet to see him in. "I'm sure that's not true. You should know whether you're gay or not."

"I wonder sometimes."

Sleepy gaze sharpened. "Pardon?"

Darien shrugged, breaking direct eye contact. This was it, right? He was making his pitch here. For some reason, he was afraid to look Chris in the eye, so he spoke to the candle between them instead. "There must be something to it, right? My best friends have slept with both men and women, and they all settled on guys."

Chris snorted. "Because your friends are gay certainly doesn't mean you are."

"Oh, I know. But there's gotta be something to it."

"Are you attracted to men?"

Darien folded his arms on the table again, leaning on them. "Not usually."

"Not usually?"

Darien paused as the waiter returned to clear their plates. He forced himself to breathe normally while they both refused dessert and their table was cleared. He cradled his wineglass in his fingers, studying Chris over the rim. "What about you? You've only ever wanted to sleep with guys?"

"Yes." Confusion marred the relaxed look on Chris's face, and Darien was anxious at the sight of it. He wanted to tell Chris what he wanted, but what if Chris didn't want him? Maybe he only liked Darien's looks and nothing else.

"When did you figure out you were gay?"

Chris took a moment to compose himself back to that familiar calm expression. But Darien had seen what was behind it now and really wanted to try a few things to heat it up. "When I was fourteen. I had an unnatural fascination with the local rugby team."

Darien laughed. "Did you play?"

“Only for a year when I was sixteen. I broke my leg, and my mother wouldn’t allow me to play after it healed. She’d prefer I played golf.”

“I thought all lawyers liked golf.”

Chris grimaced, his generous lips turning down at the corners and his patrician nose wrinkling some. “I play, but it’s not my preference. I prefer the rough and tumble.”

*Whoa.* Darien’s cock twitched. “You ready to go?” Warmth suffused the skin of his neck, creeping through his chest. He needed to do this. Now.

Chris glanced the way the waiter had last gone. “What about the bill?”

“They’ll charge my room.”

“Ah.” Chris stood. “Sometime you must allow me to take you to dinner.”

Darien grinned, happy to hear that Chris wanted to see him again. “Sure thing. Next one’s on you.”

He stood. With both excitement and panic, he watched out of the corner of his eye as Chris’s gaze drew down his body. There was no way the other man missed the bulge. Not if the little widening of the eyes was any indication. Still amused that he wanted this, that he was absurdly pleased that Chris noticed him, Darien turned to lead the way out of the restaurant.

So. How was he supposed to do this? Jump Chris in the elevator? Wait until they got back to the suite? With a girl, he’d have already been obvious about what he wanted, probably done a lot more flirting over dinner. This was different. Was he really ready for what he was thinking? Did it really matter all that much? Sex was sex. At least, that’s what Johnnie had tried to convince him of for years. Darien was finally curious. *Really* curious. There was some chemistry between them. Chris didn’t seem to be looking for anything long term at the moment. Wasn’t that perfect?

His brain chewed as they walked the short hallway to the elevators. He had to use his keycard to get the button for his floor to light up. They stood, backs against opposite sides of the confined space as they started to rise.

“Are you all right?”

Darien startled out of his thoughts, meeting Chris’s eyes. The lawyer looked perfectly calm and relaxed, leaning against the elevator wall, hands deep in the pockets of his jeans. He smiled. “You’re thinking again.

“Huh?”

“You get this look on your face when you’re thinking hard.”

Darien laughed. “I do? Huh, I must not get it often.”

They laughed.

The elevator door opened, and again Darien led the way, flicking his keycard with his thumbnail as he thought.

“Hey, Chris?”

“Yes?”

They stopped at his door, and he inserted the keycard. “The divorce is final, right?”

“I have to file the papers with the state of Nevada, but it’s just a formality since Nicole has already signed. For all intents and purposes, it’s final.”

The door opened and they walked inside. “Does that mean I can have sex again?”

“Pardon?”

“Can I have sex again?”

“What do you mean?”

Darien stepped down into the sunken sitting room and turned to find Chris frozen just a few steps into the suite. Again there was that incredulous-amused look. The door clicked quietly shut behind him. “I haven’t had sex in, like, five months. Well, with another person.”



Chris stepped up to the edge of marble step down to the sitting room. "You've been separated for two months."

"Yeah, and Nicole and I stopped having sex before that."

"But...you were separated."

"I was still married."

Chris stared down at him. "You were faithful the entire time?"

Darien frowned. "Well, yeah. Marriage is marriage. You don't fool around with something like that."

Chris smiled, shaking his head as he took the step down onto the carpet, headed toward the table and his briefcase. "You are truly a wonder."

"Yeah, people tell me that sometimes." He took a step closer and caught Chris's hand, stopping the other man. His heart was racing, but his voice was amazingly calm. "So, can I have sex now?" Okay, maybe his voice was a little breathy.

Chris swallowed, the only sign that he wasn't completely calm. "Yes. I would say you are now allowed to have sex."

Darien took that last step, stopping mere inches from Chris. He looked up into those sharp hazel eyes and brought his other hand up to splay it over Chris's heart. Rapid beat to match his. A widening of the eyes and a sharp inhalation of breath. All good signs. He let his eyes go heavy and licked his lips. "Wanna have sex with me?"

Wide lips parted in shock. "Pardon?"

He released Chris's wrist and used that hand to hook the side of Chris's waist, holding him as Darien stepped closer. "Wanna have sex with me?"

Chris scowled, standing tall, which put Darien's eye level just below his chin. His hands found Darien's shoulders, holding him at bay. "You're not gay."

Darien balled his fist in Chris's polo shirt, using it to try and pull Chris's mouth within reach. "Can we forget that for tonight?" He licked his lips and watched Chris quickly mirror

the move. Unconscious? Didn't matter. Now that Darien had made the request, he wanted very badly to taste. He pulled again, and Chris's face got closer to his.

"No!" Chris stiffened his arms on Darien's shoulders. "Why this, all of a sudden?"

"I want you."

"Why?"

"I get a boner whenever I'm around you. I'm sick of fighting it."

Chris gaped. "What?"

"It's true. Let me show you." He tried to pull Chris's waist flush with his, but Chris was just strong enough to hold him back. He glanced down and saw the evidence of Chris's interest in the front of those jeans. *Okay, that's a definite advantage to doing this with a guy*, he thought, amused. *Visual evidence*. He grinned up at Chris. "You're gorgeous, you know that?"

"Me?"

"Yeah. I want to lick you all over. Let me?"

Chris shuddered, his eyes closing for a brief moment.

Darien used his moment to slide both hands up and around the back of Chris's head. Before Chris could protest, Darien pulled and their lips met. Chris froze. Darien froze. *Whoa*. He tilted his head, letting his lips slide against Chris's. That was nice. Softer than he'd expected and so very warm. No lipstick or lip gloss, either -- another plus. Not that different from kissing a girl, really, except Chris was taller and smelled different. Darien parted his lips and traced his tongue along the edge of Chris's lower lip. Chris's fingers dug into Darien's shoulders, but he didn't push away. Darien kept hold of Chris's head and opened beneath him, tongue pressing the seam of his lips. They parted, and he gently pushed inside, pausing for a slow swipe over Chris's top teeth before delving inside to invite Chris's tongue out to play. Tasted different. Tasted wonderful. There was the wine and tomato sauce mostly, but under that was a spice that was different than what he was used to.

Maybe it was the moan that came unbidden out of Darien's throat that kicked Chris's brain back into thinking. Damn it.

Chris pushed away, forcing their lips apart. Darien tried to pull him back, but Chris speared his hands in Darien's hair and did some pulling of his own. Pulling his hair happened to be one of Darien's hot points. He loved it but never actually told any lovers that, because you didn't go around telling people to pull your hair. That was just --

"What are you doing?"

Darien blinked his eyes open, sucking in a breath. "Kissing you."

"Why?"

"I want to fuck you."

Chris narrowed his eyes, lenses of his glasses shining in the lamplight. "What are you trying to prove?"

"I'm not trying to prove anything."

"Liar."

Darien snarled softly. He loosened his firm grip on the back of Chris's skull. The fingers, however, stayed, sifting gently through Chris's short hair. Soft but kinda thick. Probably why it always stayed just so. "Okay. I want to know what it's like."

"What it's like?"

"Sleeping with a guy." *Sleeping with you.*

"Why?"

"Maybe I do want to prove something. I don't know." He tried to push closer, got his groin to brush Chris's thigh before the other man pulled back. He sighed. "All I know is that when I'm with you, I want to fuck you. It's been like that for over a month now. So why not go with it?"

"Do I have a say in the matter?"

That stopped him. Darien blinked, eyes widening. "I thought you wanted me."

"Why would you think that?"

"Oh, come on. I've caught you looking plenty."

"Looking is one thing. Touching is entirely different."

"And fucking's even more," Darien added with an eyebrow waggle. "Come on, Chris. You want me."

Nostrils flared. Oh, that was new. "Perhaps..."

"Good, then. You want me. I want you." Darien settled his arms around Chris's neck. Weird, he'd never hugged a guy like this before, not with his arms up. Since he was usually shorter, his arms went around the waist. *Who cares? Focus!* "What's the harm? Neither of us is looking for anything serious right now."

Darien's move closer forced Chris's hands to readjust. Hands let up on his hair and slid down his back. "So that's what all the questions were about at dinner?" Darien took heart that the hands settled at his waist.

Darien winced. "Not all of them." He studied Chris's Adam's apple. "I did want to have dinner with you." He peeked back up at Chris's face. "It was nice, wasn't it?"

Fingers toyed with the top of his waistband, a hopeful sign. As was the way Chris's shock was melting into warm speculation. "Yes, it was nice."

Darien licked his lips, drawing Chris's attention to his mouth. "Kissing was nice, too. Can we do it again?"

Chris groaned. "Darien, this is probably not a good idea."

"Sure it is." Darien twisted one leg just enough so that a nudge forward pressed his cock into the meat of Chris's thigh. "More would be nice, too."

Sighing, Chris tilted his head up, taking his mouth out of range. *Damn.* Darien leaned in and brushed his lips against the thin skin beating over Chris's pulse, right under his jaw.

A slight tremor shook the body pressed to his.

Darien licked a line over that pulse. He liked that; Chris should like it. "Come on, Chris. Fuck me."

Chris groaned, swallowing. "Then what?" he asked the ceiling.

Darien kissed his clavicle. "Then we do it again?"

Chris laughed. "What if you don't like it?"

Darien rocked his hips again. "I kind of doubt that."

"You might not."

"Fair enough. If I don't, I won't hold it against you."

Chris laughed again, sliding his arms fully around Darien's waist to hold him close. *Yes!* His head came down and he nuzzled Darien's temple. "So if you do like it, what are we then? Lovers? Fuck buddies?"

*That's nice.* "Yeah. Sure."

"I need a better answer."

"Such a lawyer." Darien sighed, tucking his forehead in against Chris's neck. "I just want something different for a change. I haven't actually *wanted* anyone like this for a long time. It feels good. It's been a while since I felt good." He heard the wistful pain in his own voice and wondered at it.

A hand slid up to span between his shoulder blades, fingertips just teasing the nape of his neck. "If we do this, I'm going to fuck you. Do you hear me?"

A hot sizzle shot up Darien's spine, forcing him to shiver. "I hear you."

"You know what that means?"

"You want to fuck my ass."

The hand at his back slid up into his hair, grabbing a fistful. Chris used the hold to make him tilt his head back so they could look at each other eye-to-eye. "Yes."

“So you *are* a top,” Darien joked, just a little nervous. *Whoa, that’s heat*, he thought, watching Chris’s eyes burn dark brown. He really needed to get those glasses off.

“Yes.”

Darien swallowed, then nodded. “Okay.”

“You’re all right with that?”

“You’ll make it good.” It was not a question, rather a statement. He’d never particularly wanted his ass reamed, but the thought of Chris doing it didn’t seem so bad.

Chris’s eyes roamed his face for a brief moment. Then he smiled. The hand at Darien’s waist slipped down to cup his ass. Squeezed. “Oh, yes.”

There went that sizzle again. Geez, his cock was rock hard. “Then, yeah.”

The growl deep in the prim lawyer’s chest was just about the most sexy fucking thing ever. “That doesn’t bother you?”

Darien would have shaken his head, but Chris still had a firm hold on a good chunk of his hair. “I told you, I want to know what it’s like.”

The hand in his hair and the hand on his ass both moved. Then Chris was cradling his face. The heat behind those glasses mesmerized Darien. “By the time I’m finished with you, you’ll know.”

“Excellent!”

## Chapter Seven

The press of Chris's mouth back onto his muffled Darien's laugh of triumph. *Oh, yeah!* Chris's real kiss was awesome! All lips and tongue and so fucking take-charge that Darien couldn't even think to take the lead. All he had to do was receive and suck in that tongue and Chris growled again. Oh, yeah, the growl was great. He had to make that happen lots.

Chris's hands slid down his neck to his chest and pushed. "Get in there," came the order, along with a point toward the bedroom door behind Darien.

Grinning, Darien walked backward. He knew the suite well enough to avoid the furniture.

Chris stalked him. Enjoying it, Darien backed away at the same pace, just out of reach. He loved the wicked smile on Chris's lips. It promised great things to come. He'd used a version of that smile on many a woman. How cool to be on the receiving end.

He passed through the bedroom door, managing to just bump it a little. He didn't want to turn around, some irrational part of his brain telling him that if he didn't keep his eyes on Chris, the man would disappear.

"Stop."

Darien froze, halfway across the room to the bed. It wasn't a conscious decision. Chris said stop, and that tone just stopped him. A thrill of pleasure crawled over his skin.

Chris paused for a brief moment just inside the doorway to take off his glasses and set them on the dresser. So calm, so collected. Like Clark Kent taking off his glasses just before he became Superman. And oh, man, did *that* comparison heat Darien's blood! Chris turned on the light. Blue shadows fled from the recessed lighting along the ceiling. Those gold sparkles shone in Chris's hair. "Do you mind the light?" Chris asked, closing the distance between them.

And damned if Darien hadn't moved an inch! He shook his head. "No."

"Good." Chris reached up to tuck Darien's hair behind his ear, those eyes, brown in this light, roaming his face. "Because I want to see every bit of this."

Darien felt like a dog: told to stay, but itching to launch himself at the man before him. He wanted to lick all over. If he had a tail, he'd be wagging it hard.

Chris's hand dropped to span across the flesh bared by the opening of Darien's collar. "*This*," he said, watching the hand slide slowly down the center of Darien's chest, "has been driving me crazy."

Darien swallowed. Damn, he was going to start drooling any second! "What?"

"Watching your chest all night. Wanting to touch." The hand reached the bottom of the V opening, then slid back up, slipping underneath the shirt on the right side. "You did it on purpose, didn't you?"

Darien's eyes fluttered when Chris's fingers found his nipple. "Yeah," he sighed.

"You took your shirt off this afternoon to taunt me."

Darien grinned. "A little."

Chris snorted and pinched, making Darien jump. "When did you decide to seduce me?"



Darien had to grin, even as he winced when Chris rolled the pebbled nub. “I didn’t really decide it.” He shivered as Chris’s fingertips played through the hair surrounding his nipple. “But tonight seemed like a good night.”

“Because your divorce is over?”

“And you told me about Nathan.”

“Ah, yes. That.” Chris pulled his hand out and started to unbutton Darien’s shirt the rest of the way. “How long have you wanted this?”

“A few weeks.”

Chris smiled, watching his hands. “Do you know how long I’ve wanted you?”

“No.”

“But you knew I wanted you.”

Darien nodded, even though it didn’t sound like a question.

Chris yanked the shirt to open the final buttons. “How?”

Darien shuddered as Chris’s palms returned to his chest, sliding outward to open the shirt. “I caught you watching me.”

Chris smiled. “Did you like it?”

“Yeah.”

Chris leaned in to brush his lips across a shoulder he exposed. Darien’s head fell back and the shirt slid away, snagging halfway down his arms. “You’re beautiful,” Chris murmured, pulling back and slowly mapping Darien’s shoulders and chest with his hands.

Darien itched to touch, but Chris seemed to be enjoying himself, and who was Darien to deny him? Besides, the touch of those hands was awesome. They slid over his shoulders and down his arms, squeezing slightly when they found muscle. They pushed the shirt from his arms, then explored their way back up, across his shoulders again, then up his neck. Fingers speared in his hair, tilting his head back.

Chris kissed him, and that was the trigger that released Darien's limbs. Or at least his arms. Eagerly, he reached up between them and found the buttons of Chris's shirt. As Chris played with his mouth, Darien got rid of the shirt and did some exploring of his own. Okay, maybe not with as much finesse, but who could blame a guy? So much smooth, satiny skin! There was some hair covering his chest, but not a lot. Probably about as much as Darien had himself. Enough to cushion the fingertips and make you dig a bit for skin. He found a nipple and tweaked it, loving the groan that caused.

Chris's hands closed on his shoulders and pushed. Again Darien was walking backward. After a few steps, he bumped into the bed and Chris let him fall onto it. He landed on the soft blue sheets, missing the spread, which had been turned down by housekeeping.

Propped back on his elbows, he watched as Chris put a foot up on the chair by the window to unlace his boots. When Darien moved to get his own boots, Chris stopped him with a snap of his fingers and a look. Grinning, Darien sat back and waited as Chris removed his footwear and socks and set them aside. Coming to the side of the bed, Chris reached toward Darien's left foot, wiggling his fingers. Obediently, Darien lifted and watched Chris untie his boot. Okay, probably not the best choice of footwear when he'd been planning on taking the man to bed, but it was too late to gripe about that now. Chris dropped the boot, then peeled off the sock. Then, to Darien's amazement, he ran his hand over Darien's foot, exploring, pressing on the pad beneath his toes. Darien groaned. Chris smiled. He dropped Darien's foot and reached for the other. The whole process was repeated, and Darien fell back to enjoy.

*Oh, man, was this a good idea!* He'd thought it'd be hot and heavy, fast and furious. He hadn't expected slow and seductive. He wasn't complaining. It was a new experience on top of a new experience. With women, he was usually the one doing the exploring.

Chris dropped his foot and leaned over, reaching for his waistband. Those eyes fastened on his face. "Not going to stop me, are you?"

"Hell no!"

Fingers made quick work of his button-fly, then flipped it open. He grinned to see Chris's surprise at the lack of underwear. Hey, he liked to go commando, and tonight he'd even had reason. Darien felt the air on his cock as it nudged out of the opening.

Chris's eyes locked on it, closing halfway in lambent appreciation. Leaving the jeans open and just barely off Darien's hips, Chris braced on the bed, leaning in to press a kiss just under the head of Darien's cock.

"Shit." Darien hissed, gripping the smooth sheets beneath him. His head dropped back.

Hot breath ghosted over his cock. "Been a while?"

"I told you."

Lips nipped at his crown. "Are you going to last long?"

Darien gulped. He wished he could say yes, but... "No."

The bed jostled, and Darien looked down to see Chris staring at him.

"Please say you have condoms."

Darien grinned. "Yeah. With the lube in the drawer to your left."

"Ah, good." Chris bent his head to lick as much of the length of Darien's cock as he could. "I'll assume that you're clean."

Darien swallowed, hardly able to concentrate while Chris treated him like a lollipop. "I am."

"Good."

"You don't have to trust me. You can -- Ah, shit!"

Darien curled forward on the curse, driving his fingers into the longer hair atop Chris's head as the man swallowed him down in one gulp. The moan that tore out of Darien's throat came from somewhere deep in his gut, loosing warm liquid through his veins.

“Oh, shit, Chris,” he groaned, clutching the man’s hair. “I can’t...It’s been too long. I’m gonna...”

Fingers curled in his jeans to pull them down some, exposing more of him as Chris devoured him. Oh, damn! Chris had one fucking *talented* mouth!

Darien tried. He really did. He fell back on the bed and clutched at the sheets, trying to hold on. Thinking about something else just wasn’t an option. It felt way too good. “Chris, I’m gonna come.”

The man didn’t let up. If anything, he swallowed harder.

Well, Darien had warned him. Fire ignited at the base of his spine and shot through his groin. Darien heard the little whimpers that erupted from his throat, but couldn’t do anything about them.

Chris drank, suckling until every drop was gone. As Darien’s body went limp, Chris grabbed his jeans, taking them with him as he backed off the bed. He kissed down Darien’s thighs, nipped at his knees, and lapped at his calves. Sliding back up on the bed, he pushed Darien’s knees apart and bent to lick the crease between thigh and crotch. Darien shuddered, not expecting the, well, *zeal* with which the man touched him. Hands, lips, and tongue mapped his body.

“Oh, shit,” he groaned, enduring the electric sparks stirring just below his belly. “Chris, you’re killing me, man.”

Chris chuckled. He planted his palms underneath Darien’s thighs and pushed them up high. Darien’s ass came off the bed, his knees nearly touching his shoulders.

“Hey, what -- Oh, God! What are you doing?”

*Is he tonguing my asshole?* Oh, man, he was! Darien’s first reaction was to jerk away, but Chris had him bent double, and he was still humming from a pretty rocking orgasm, so he wasn’t in full control of his body. Darien spread his arms out, grabbing the sheet, trying to decide if he liked the feeling or not. Oh, who was he kidding? That felt damn good! He

closed his eyes and groaned as Chris's wet tongue played with his hole, tracing, tickling, then pushing in.

He was half hard again by the time Chris stopped. The tongue left his hole and dragged up the sensitive skin toward his balls. He glanced down to see Chris watching him as he took one testicle into his mouth.

"Oh, man, you're good at that." Darien sighed.

Chris chuckled, mouthing Darien's other testicle before he sat back, gradually allowing Darien to unfold so he lay prone on the bed. "You liked that," Chris proclaimed, licking his lips.

"Yeah."

Grinning a little cat grin, Chris turned to the drawer Darien had mentioned earlier. Darien kept his eyes on Chris's face as he rummaged around. This Chris was very different than the Chris he had known for the past few weeks. Just as he'd thought -- hoped -- there was fire under that cool exterior. *Excellent!*

Chris dropped lube and two condom packets on the bed beside Darien, then knelt up, hands at the fly of his jeans. Darien's eyes dropped to watch, his own hand lazily traveling down the center of his chest and belly to wrap around his cock.

Chris watched avidly as he stepped backwards off the mattress, opening his fly. A darker spot on his dark gray briefs spoke of leakage. He hooked his thumbs in the waistband of both jeans and briefs and shoved them down to his thighs. His cock sprang free, pointed full and accusing at Darien. After shedding the rest of his clothing, Chris stood and wrapped his left hand around his cock. "Are you sure about this?"

Darien licked his lips, squeezing his own cock tight. "Yeah." Okay, yeah, a part of him was screaming, *You're going to fit that in* where? But for the most part he was all for it. It'd been a great ride so far.

Chris smiled. "Turn over."

Darien complied readily enough, even got up on his knees, spreading them. He figured Chris was going to need room to work with that thing. Folding his arms beneath him and sticking his ass in the air, he turned his head to watch Chris pick up a condom packet and tear it open. *Shit, this is it.* He closed his eyes and waited. Chris seemed to be more than happy taking charge, and given the burble of unease in his belly, Darien was willing to let him.

Two hands took a good hold of the cheeks of his ass, squeezing, massaging. Darien had to groan. The hands parted his ass, and did he imagine feeling a breeze on his hole? Yeah, probably. He yelped when a tongue stabbed him. *Maybe not*, he thought, glaring over his shoulder at the man grinning down at him. “You like that?” He had to ask.

“Oh, yes.” Chris reached for the lube.

Darien watched him pop the cap. “Do all guys do that?” He thought briefly of Johnnie and Luc and just couldn’t quite imagine it.

Chris laughed, pouring a generous amount of liquid on his left palm. “No more than every man likes to go down on a woman.”

“Yeah, okay. That makes sense.” Darien tossed his head. “It’s weird.”

Chris grinned as he recapped the bottle. “You liked it.

“Yeah.”

Chris swiped his wet fingers down Darien’s crease, then back up. “I liked doing it to you. You taste fresh. I like it very much.”

*Good thing I took a shower*, Darien thought, but just couldn’t voice.

Chuckling softly, Chris teased his hole with the tip of one finger before slowly sinking it in to the first knuckle.

Darien winced, fingers gripping the rumpled blue sheets beneath him.

“Relax,” Chris soothed, smoothing his other hand across Darien’s lower back. “So hot and tight. Just as I knew you would be.” Chris twisted his finger, pulling out a little before pushing farther back in.

Darien’s eyes fell shut; his breathing hitched.

“Breathe, pet.” Chris pulled out his finger and pushed it back in again. “Talk to me.”

*Pet?* “Talk?”

Chris chuckled, finger pumping slowly. “You talk more than anyone I know. Talk to me. Tell me if you like this.”

“I like it.” He was only convincing himself a little. Actually, as he got used to it, there was kind of a cool thrill.

“Have you done this to yourself?”

“No.”

Chris turned his wrist, pressing his finger against the sides of Darien’s opening. “Have you fucked a woman’s arse?”

The breath whooshed out of Darien’s lips. His eyes bugged, staring unseeing at the far wall as Chris’s finger hit something *very* nice! The finger wiggled over that spot again, and Darien’s back arched all on its own. “Oh, fuck.”

“Have you?” Chris asked, his voice calm despite what he was doing to Darien.

Was that another finger slipping in, stretching his hole? Darien pressed his cheek against the hands he had clutching the sheet beneath him. “Have I what?”

“Fucked a woman’s arse.”

“Oh. Yeah.” Carefully, Darien rocked his hips, trying to get Chris to hit that spot again.

“Did they like it?”

“Ah!” There it was!

“Darien.”

“What?”

“Did they like it?”

He was pretty sure he was breathing along with the slow in-and-out pull of Chris’s fingers. “Did...did who like what?”

Soft chuckle. “The women whose arses you fucked.”

*Oh.* “Some.”

“They liked it a little? Or only some of them liked it?”

The sound Darien emitted was somewhere between a chuckle and a moan. “How do you expect me to talk when you’ve got your fingers up my ass?”

Chris’s free hand smoothed over the expanse of his back. “You love to talk. I like your voice. Tell me that I’m making you feel hot.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m hot.”

Chris wiggled his fingers. A third pressed in, making Darien gasp. “Relax.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know the drill. It’s just...Jesus!”

“Does it hurt?”

Did it? Yes, but no. It burned; it was kind of uncomfortable. “Not...really.” But it was kind of hot.

“You get used to it.”

Darien laughed, breathy. “God, I hope so, if you’re going to put that horse cock inside me.”

Chris laughed, low and evil. He leaned in over Darien’s back, scooting closer so his cock nudged Darien’s balls. “Do you like my cock?”

“Oh, shit, the way you say that.”

“Say what, pet?”



Darien rose up to his elbows, trying to get better leverage. His hips were rocking now. "Your fucking accent's gonna drive me out of my mind."

Chris laughed, worming in another finger. "You like my voice?"

"I love your voice."

"Then perhaps I should tell you what I'm going to do." He fingered what Darien could only assume was his prostate. *Shit!* Johnnie had told him that it felt good, but he should have been a little more adamant about it. If he'd known, Darien would have tried this ages ago! Chris pushed him down with his free hand, lowering him until his chest was flush with the mattress. "I'm going to take my 'horse cock' --" He enunciated with glee. "-- and I'm going to fuck this tight, gorgeous little round arse of yours."

"Chris, you...*damn!*...keep talking like that, and I'm -- ungh! -- gonna come again."

Warm breath preceded soft lips ghosting over the back of his shoulder. "Just from my saying I'm going to fuck you until you can't walk anymore?"

Darien groaned, burying his face in the mattress. "You're killing me."

Chris laughed and actually fucking *bit* the back of Darien's shoulder. Shocked, Darien arched up, only to have Chris's free hand slam him back down again.

The fingers kept pumping slowly in and out, scissoring over each other, stretching his backside. "I'm going to ride you, pet. Are you going to come just from that?"

*Pet.* He liked that. "Do it," Darien gasped, chancing a glance over his shoulder again. "Fucking fuck me already."

Darien would not have believed before tonight that Chris could look demonic, but there it was, staring down at him. His long face was shadowed from above, and those wicked eyes almost glowed. He should have had fucking horns, fangs, and a forked tail to go with that face.

"Fucking fuck you," Chris repeated, fingers sliding from Darien's ass. Calmly, he reached for the lube bottle and poured more on his hand. "Is that what you want?"

“Yes.”

“My fingers felt that good?”

“Yeah.”

His wet hand swiped over that sheathed cock, which looked even bigger than before. It was probably just Darien’s perception, considering what was about to happen, but it seemed real.

Chris grabbed his hips. “Then this’ll feel even better.”

Blunt pressure on his hole made Darien squeeze his eyes shut.

“Breathe and relax. Push back.”

Darien sucked in air and let it out with a shudder.

Chris pushed in.

Darien gasped at the burn. The fingers had prepared him, but those particular muscles had been virgin too many years to give too easily. It didn’t really hurt, not really, but it was still something to get used to.

Chris’s dry hand slid over his back. “So fucking tight,” he growled, fingernails scratching the meat of Darien’s shoulder.

Darien groaned, taking another deep breath. Chris flowed with it, pushing in another bit as Darien exhaled. “Shit.”

“Hurt?”

“No.”

“Are you all right?”

“Yeah.”

“More?”

Another breath, another inch. “Yeah.”

They worked together until Chris was in, fully seated *inside* Darien's body. The taller man draped himself over Darien's back, nuzzling the bend of his neck through his hair. "God, Darien!" Hands slid down his arms until fingers found his within the rumpled sheets. They both clutched the fabric and just breathed for an endless moment.

But Darien had never been very good at staying still for long. He squirmed and couldn't believe the whimper that squeezed from his throat. He also couldn't believe how it felt to be impaled. "Chris."

"Mmmm." The taller man drew back a little, rolling his head so that his lips could caress the back of Darien's shoulder. He slowly pulled his hips back, and Darien shuddered through an electric thrill that took his body.

Just before he was almost out, Chris switched direction and pushed back in. "Feel good?"

"Yeah."

"So hot," Chris murmured, reaching his limit again before pulling back slowly. "Your arse is gripping me so tight."

Darien buried his face in the sheets beneath him. "You can't talk."

Chris chuckled. "I have to talk. I have to let you know what a tight fuck you are."

Another shudder wracked Darien's body. "No fair, Chris," he whined.

Chris shifted, kneeling higher behind Darien. The new position had him gripping Darien's hips and allowed him more control as he picked up the speed a little. "Very fair. You teased me for weeks. It's my turn."

"I did -- ungh -- not!"

"You did." He slapped the side of Darien's ass, and Darien felt his own hole clutching Chris's cock. "Parading this beautiful fucking arse before me when I didn't think I could ever have it."

Darien arched back on a cry. Chris's cock was rubbing over that spot mercilessly, setting off bolts of electricity from somewhere in Darien's balls.

Chris pushed forward. "It's mine right now, though."

"Fuck yeah."

"Fuck yeah."

Fingers bit into Darien's hips as Chris thrust in earnest. Little atom bombs started detonating along Darien's spine, making him jump, making him writhe, causing him to cry out as Chris leaned in and pounded him. Chris kept talking, but Darien couldn't make sense of the words. Chris's cock was sliding easy now, and the burn of penetration had Darien's entire lower half aflame. There was too much sensation, too much to feel.

When Chris's hand reached forward to wrap around Darien's dick, it was too much, period. Two strokes, and Darien came.

Chris bit out a "Bloody hell!" pumping jerkily at Darien as he came as well.

When his muscles let loose, Darien fell forward in a heap. Chris, braced against him, fell on top of him.

Darien rediscovered his voice on a laugh. "Oh, yeah, that was *definitely* a good idea!"

## Chapter Eight

The warm body draping half of his back moved. Mostly asleep, he shifted as Chris got up and out of bed. Darien grumbled as cool air hit the warmed skin, waking him further. He ground his face into the thick pillow wedged between his head and his arms, trying to regain sheets. *No use.* The sheets were down somewhere around his waist, baring his back to the air, and his morning wood was pressed into the sheets.

*Hmmm, morning wood.* He cracked an eye and twisted his head just enough and just in time to see Chris's wide back and bare ass walk through a swath of light that shone through the partially open drapes and disappear into the bathroom. *Nice view.*

With a sigh, he turned over on his back and stared blearily up at the ceiling. He'd fucked a guy last night. Correction: a guy had fucked him last night. Johnnie had been trying to convince him to do it for years, at first with him, then later with anyone. But back when he'd had a chance to experiment with Johnnie, he hadn't been able to get his head around sucking a guy's cock or getting fucked up the ass. Fucking up the ass he'd done to girls, of course, but that was different, wasn't it? Well, not that he knew now even, since he'd been on the receiving end. And it really hadn't been that bad. Had been great, in fact. He wiggled

his hips experimentally. A little sore, but in a good way. He wondered if this was what girls felt like the morning after.

He laughed aloud, finding his hand around his cock, stroking languidly. What the hell was he doing lying there jacking off *thinking* about it when there was a warm body in the other room? A warm, *wet* body, judging from the sound of the shower starting.

He rolled out of bed and padded across the room. Chris had left the bathroom door cracked, so it only took a push to get it open.

The long counter to the right with the double sinks sat under a wide mirror surrounded with vanity lights. Across the green-and-white-tiled floor from the counter sat an extra-long bathtub. Directly across from the door was the wide shower. It was big enough to fit two, maybe three people, and had showerheads mounted on the walls to the left and right. A bench sat on the far wall, underneath a small, high window. The wide door was clear glass. Johnnie had once indicated that there was a “damn fine” reason all the luxury suites at both hotels had glass shower doors rather than curtains. Darien was pretty sure it was a sex thing between him and Tyler but had never asked for specifics. Right now, however, he had reason to appreciate the concept.

*Mmmm, very nice.* Darien leaned against one side of the door and just took it all in. Chris stood under one of the showerheads, his back to it, head thrown back as the water flattened his hair to his head. It was a crying shame that Chris usually wore so many clothes, because he had a really nice body. Toned with muscles, although not overdone. Clearly the muscles were from the gym, but that was okay. Long, strong legs to match long arms, a broad chest, a flat belly, and a nice, fat cock.

Chris turned, reaching for the soap, and saw him there. He froze, water dripping from his pointed chin.

Darien grinned, letting his gaze rake Chris's body again. “Mornin’.”

There was the start of a smile. “Good morning.”

“Mind if I join you?”

Surprise flitted over Chris’s face, but then his smile grew. “Not at all.”

Darien crossed the floor and opened the shower door. Disregarding Chris’s hesitation, he stepped straight into the man’s chest, sliding his arms up and around his neck to bring those tasty lips down to where he could reach them. The kiss they shared was gentle and soft, mostly lips. Darien knew he had morning breath and didn’t want to gross Chris out. He let his kiss slide to the side of Chris’s mouth, then drew a trail across the stubble on that sharp jawbone with his tongue until he could nibble at the prickly skin where jaw met neck.

Chris hummed, hands sliding over Darien’s back and shoulders to help spread the water that streamed over them. “You should be careful. Someone might think that you’re queer.”

Darien ducked his head to nip at Chris’s collarbone, letting his hands do some roaming of their own across Chris’s lower back and the top of his ass. “Yeah, huh? That’s okay.”

“Is it?”

He took two proper handfuls of ass and squeezed, liking the spasm in the cock against his belly that resulted. “A little late to be worried about it now.”

Chris’s hands halted. “No. It’s not. I don’t have to tell anyone about this.”

Darien tilted his head up to see the serious look Chris gave him. He smiled. “Thanks, but it’s not necessary.”

“Are you sure?” The hands started again, sliding over his shoulders. “I promise I won’t tell anyone.”

“I believe you, but I don’t care.” He leaned back, locking his hands at the small of Chris’s back. It pressed them together in a really nice way, with Chris’s growing erection against Darien’s lower belly and Darien’s wood pressed against Chris’s thigh.

“Yes, well...”

Hearing the hesitation in that smoothly accented voice, Darien cocked his head to the side. Water streamed off a lock of his hair into his eyes, so he shook his head to dislodge it. “What?”

Chris reached up to smooth the offending lock back from Darien’s forehead. Chris looked so different without the glasses. Well, not really -- he looked like him, but he looked more...approachable? Real? “I gather you would like to do this again?”

Darien laughed. “Oh, yeah. How about now?”

Chris chuckled. “That’s a distinct possibility.”

“Only a possibility?”

There was that Satan grin Darien liked. “A certainty.”

Darien matched the grin, watching the green shine in those changeable eyes. “But?”

Chris thought about it. Darien could almost see the wheels churning in his head. “I’d rather not have a paparazzi following.”

Darien blinked. “Oh. Oh, right on. I get you. That’s cool.”

“It is?”

“Totally. Just ’cause they hound me doesn’t mean you have to suffer.” He grinned. “Sides, I’m not sure I’m ready to let the gay thing out yet.”

Chris laughed. “And are you gay now?”

Darien dropped his gaze and pulled back a little, looking pointedly at the two erections pressed between them. He looked back up at Chris and laughed. “Well, I haven’t wanted to be with a woman since it happened.”

“Well, well. And that has been all of, what, six, seven hours?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

Chris dropped his hand down to wrap it around Darien’s boner. “Then allow me to take full advantage while I can.”



*Oh, yeah!* Darien thought, but couldn't say since Chris's hand felt too good. He rested his forehead against the bend between the other man's neck and shoulder and wrapped his own fingers around Chris's prick. He hadn't gotten to do that last night. Chris had fucked him twice, and both times had been from the back, so he hadn't gotten to do a lot of exploring of his own. It was weird holding a cock that wasn't his own. Not bad. He stroked up, gathering wet, loose skin over the purple tip. Chris was uncut. Darien wished he was. He'd heard that the sensations were out of this world.

"Damn," he murmured, squeezing and matching the rhythm Chris set on his cock. "I had this in my ass?"

A warm chuckle caressed his ear. "You did. It felt wonderful. So alive and tight, squeezing me." Chris matched his words with the motions of his hand.

Darien groaned, watching his hand, watching Chris's hand. He wished he were a little taller so they could put them together. He promised himself that they'd do that. Later. For now, the mutual jacking was good.

Too good. Chris nibbled at his ear, tongue darting out to tease the entrance. His hand picked up speed and pressure, probably goaded by the fact that Darien's hips started to rock. This was great. Maybe it was a little selfish, but Darien was digging the not-being-in-charge part. When he'd been with women, he'd always had to take charge. At least, for the most part. It was so cool to be on the receiving end, to let someone else direct and to follow someone else's lead.

He let his thoughts drift, losing himself in the feel of warm, wet skin pressed against him, a strong arm surrounding his shoulders, a hot mouth eating at his ear, and a knowing hand wrapped around his dick, squeezing just right.

"Fuck!" he muttered, clutching the meat of Chris's back as he picked up speed on Chris's dick, pumping it like he needed his to be pumped.

God bless him, Chris got the hint. The tongue left his ear and the breathing in the vicinity grew ragged. Chris's thigh rubbed Darien's as they ground together, both so close...so close...

"Fuck yeah!" Darien cried, throwing his head back, exposing it to the sheet of water careening down on them as he shot his load up against Chris's belly.

He managed to remember that his hand wasn't on his own cock and kept jerking for another few seconds before Chris let go and something warmer and thicker than the water from the showerhead splattered Darien's chest.

Chris pulled him close, and their arms slid around each other. They held on for a moment to catch their breath.

Chris nuzzled Darien's ear, groaning softly. "I have to go to work."

"Oh, man, really?"

"Mmmm." Chris's tongue batted the simple hoop Darien wore in that ear. "I have to file your divorce papers, if nothing else."

Sighing, Darien pulled away. "Yeah. Okay." He paused, hands on Chris's hips as he looked up into those ever-changing eyes. He couldn't quite read the facial expression. A little serious, maybe a little confused, but overall Chris seemed pleased. "Come back tonight?"

A smile teased the corners of Chris's mouth. "Haven't gotten enough of me yet?"

"Hell no. You haven't let me suck your cock yet."

Chris stumbled. Okay, he wasn't walking, so that wasn't exactly right, but his knees kind of gave out or something, because Darien had to grip his hips to steady him. That terrific laugh started in his chest, bursting from his mouth. Grinning, he reached up to caress Darien's jaw. "How can I possibly refuse that?"

Darien grinned, teeth and everything. "Excellent." He stepped away toward the shower door. "You go ahead and finish. I've got to brush my teeth. Hey --" He stepped onto the bath mat and reached for a towel. "-- I'll call down and get them to send up another brush."

“No need. I have to go home before I go into the office.”

Darien glanced over his shoulder, distracted for a second by the sight of Chris’s long hand sliding down his flat belly, wiping away any traces of their cum. “You’ll be even later.”

Chris dipped his head backward into the spray, exposing his lean neck. “I don’t have a suit with me.”

Oh, yeah. The jeans. *Mmmm*. “Right.” He watched for a few more seconds, jealous of the water. “Should I be sorry about that?”

Chris lowered his head and opened his eyes with a wry grin. “No. I’m not.”

He made it until four o’clock before he called. Chris had given him his personal cell number a few weeks ago, and Darien was real glad of it now because he didn’t want to hear anyone’s voice but one man’s.

“Hello, Darien.” And there it was. Caller ID was a marvelous thing, in Darien’s opinion.

“Hey.” He flipped through the comic book in his lap, but only saw a blur of color. Didn’t matter. He’d already read it. “What time will you be here?”

“Tonight?”

“Yeah, tonight. I was thinking of ordering food and didn’t want it to get cold before you got here.” He patted himself on the back for a reasonable excuse for the call. “What do you feel like?” *Mmmm, actually I know you feel good.*

He didn’t like the pause. “Chris? You’re not backing out on me, are you?”

“Backing out?” He knew stalling when he heard it. *Oh, shit, you’re not backing out!*

“C’mon, Chris. You’ve got to teach me how to give a blowjob, remember?”

Chris groaned softly.

“I figure there’s a lot of tongue and sucking that I gotta master, right? I mean, I tried to pay attention when you were sucking me last night, but I kinda got lost.” No, Darien did not play fair when potential deprivation of good sex was before him. Nope. Not gonna happen.

Another moan, a little lower.

Darien chuckled. “Sorry. Are you alone?”

“Yes.” Chris cleared his throat. “Yes, I’m alone.”

“You’re coming over tonight, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I’ll be there. I’ll leave my office around six.”

*Excellent!* “You’re going by your place first?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Hey, I was thinking...” He paused for effect.

“Yes?”

Hmm, didn’t take the “thinking” opening. Oh, well. “Why don’t you stay the weekend?”

“The weekend?”

“Yeah. I’m headed out on Tuesday for the west coast. Why don’t you stay with me until then? Or at least until Sunday?”

“You’re leaving town?”

“Remember? I told you. We’re going back in the studio. Luc’s finished up his movie, and we’re rarin’ to go.” The prospect of making music with the band again had him all excited, but the thought of being without Chris when he’d just discovered this great new sex wasn’t all that pleasant.

“What about the paparazzi?”

“No worries. They know how to keep it under wraps here at the Weiss. Tyler sees to it, for obvious reasons. We’ll stay in.” *Come on, that’s got to appeal.*

When he heard the dark little chuckle, he knew he'd won. "All right." *Yes!* "I was going to pack an overnight bag anyway, but I'll pack enough for the weekend."

"Sweet! So, what do you want for dinner? There's a great Greek restaurant that I've had deliver before..."

## Chapter Nine

Darien twirled the stick around the back of his right hand and back into his grip, then resumed the simple 4/5 beat he rattled out on the coffee table. The smell of lamb and chicken souvlaki and pastitsio tempted him from the cart set beside the couch, and MTV blared at him from the television, but most of his attention was on the cell phone sitting before him.

He should call Johnnie. He needed to know. Well, no, he didn't *need* to know. Darien had long ago given up trying to keep up with Johnnie's conquests. Although, in the past two years, Darien had certainly had more since Johnnie became monogamous. *Have I caught up? Probably not.* But Johnnie would want to know this. He'd tease Darien mercilessly, of course, but that was part of being friends, wasn't it? Damn, Luc was going to read him the riot act for this, and Brent was going to shake his head and laugh.

He couldn't wait!

Yeah, he could. Better to tell them in person. Let them get their digs in. He'd see them Tuesday anyway, and they'd be together for months.

Yeah, he'd wait.

He glanced up at the television, realizing he'd missed the whole show. But that was okay. He knew enough about what was going on. He just liked to know what others were up to. Helped to stay in the know.

But the only thing he knew right now was that his dick was hard, his skin tingled, and how the hell long did it *take* to get from Chris's place to Manhattan?! Where did Chris live, anyway? Surely he was in the city. Geez, he didn't live in, like, Long Island or anything? Because that would suck --

The sound of the room phone had him dropping his sticks in the general vicinity of the coffee table and lunging toward the side of the couch. He told the desk clerk that, yes, it was okay to let up a Mr. Christopher Faith.

Hanging up the phone, he sat forward and took a swig of some of the Greek beer he'd ordered with the food. Chris was here. For the weekend. Chris was going to fuck him into the mattress a dozen times over.

How cool was that?!

He laughed at himself. A few months ago, he was adamant about nothing going up his ass, and now he was all for it. Guess it needed to go with the fingers and the mouth and the...oh, yeah, the *mouth*! Not only did Chris have that sexy accent, but he had a mouth to suck you right into heaven!

A knock sounded at the door. Darien stood and palmed his cock through his shorts before hastening to the door.

*Hot damn, jeans!* Faded jeans, even, clearly old favorites. The T-shirt was a David Bowie tour shirt from the '80s, faded from many washings.

"Damn, man," Darien exclaimed, backing into the suite and holding open the door. "You keep dressing like that, I'll forget you're a stuck-up English boy."

There went the eyebrow, hiking up toward his hairline. Chris snorted as he walked over the threshold, an oversized laptop case in his hand. He set it down at the edge of the

carpet and turned as Darien released the door to let it slip closed. And there was that demon grin again. The one that made Darien's cock sit up and take notice. Well, sit up *more* and take *more* notice, since it'd been up before the man had arrived. "Stuck-up English boy?"

"Well, yeah," Darien teased, taking the two steps to close most of the distance between them. "Normally you're in a suit or something. But you look *damn* sexy in jeans."

Chris reached out a hand to hook around Darien's neck, yanking them flush up against each other. "For a man who's supposedly straight, you talk an awfully good game."

Darien grinned, sliding his arms around Chris's waist. "Hey, I'm *supposedly* bi."

Chris chuckled, shaking his head, then pulled Darien in for a kiss that made his bare toes curl on the chilly marble. Oh, *man!* Darien sucked in Chris's tongue, letting his hands splay flat over the long, hard muscles of Chris's back. He really did *like* how Chris kissed. No holds barred, no hesitation. Once he decided to kiss, he fucking *took*, and it was fucking awesome to be taken.

When Chris pulled back, it took Darien a few seconds to open his eyes and close his mouth. Fingers curling in his hair made him groan.

"This stuck-up English boy wants your lips wrapped around his cock as soon as possible."

Darien's fingers clutched Chris's back. He felt the huge grin that took his mouth. "You want me to drop to my knees here? You already got 'em all weak and shit."

Chris laughed, his embrace loosening. He glanced over Darien's shoulder. "Not here. That couch will do."

Darien nodded, turning out of Chris's arms. He twisted the dimmer on the wall beside him to bring up the lights as Chris stepped down into the big room.

"You sure you don't want to eat first?" Darien asked, grinning as he followed.

Chris's hands were at his jeans, and he had his fly open and his cock out almost as soon as his butt hit the soft upholstery of the couch. "It smells divine, but it has to wait." He



spread his arms out across the back of the couch, wearing that devil grin again. “First, you need to take care of the stiffy you’ve made me carry all day.”

Darien hadn’t thought his grin could get bigger, but it did. This Chris was *so* different than the everyday Chris. “*I* made you carry?” he asked as he moved the coffee table back to give himself room.

“Yes,” Chris said, calm as you please, as though his cock wasn’t sticking up straight out of his fly, red and swollen and stiff as a plank. He reached over and plucked a pillow from the couch, throwing it on the carpet between his legs. “You and your mention of wanting to learn how to give a blowjob.”

Darien chuckled, dropping to his knees on the pillow, touched by Chris’s thoughtfulness. “You liked that, huh?”

Chris snorted. “Rather.” As Darien leaned forward, Chris reached out a hand and stopped the motion by gripping Darien’s shoulder. “Take your shirt off.”

Darien gave him a skeptical look. “You need your shirt off to give a blowjob?”

“No. But you’ve got an amazing back and all this beautiful skin that I want to touch while you’re doing it.”

*Sweet!* “Oh. In that case.” Quickly, Darien ripped off his T-shirt and tossed it aside.

“Very nice,” Chris purred, putting his hand back on Darien’s shoulder. “Now --” With his other hand, he gripped his cock. “-- do you really need instruction?”

Darien leaned in, reaching out to wrap his hand around the top of Chris’s shaft. Yeah, thick and hard. Felt a lot like his own, but not. And all that loose skin! “Maybe. I’ve never done anything with an uncut cock before.”

Chris purred. He pushed up with the hand at the base of his cock, forcing Darien’s hand higher. Darien watched, fascinated, as the skin bunched up over the head, just leaving the deep-pink, leaking tip peeking out. Chris’s other hand came down and he plucked at the foreskin, pulling it up and entirely over the head.

“Whoa!” Darien cried softly, impressed.

“Lick it.”

“The skin?”

“Oh, yes.”

Darien glanced up quickly and saw the dark look of pleasure on Chris’s face. Trusting the man to know what he wanted, Darien bent his head, stuck out his tongue, and licked at the skin Chris still held.

“Run your tongue inside.”

*Really?* Darien thought, but didn’t ask. He was far too intrigued by the salty-spice taste of Chris’s cock and the liquid drops that leaked from the tip. Chris held part of the skin for him and Darien stuck his tongue inside, searching out the silky head of Chris’s cock.

A sigh of contentment sounded above Darien’s head, so he guessed he was doing it right. Chris’s hand slid back to the base of his cock, and Darien let his go with it. The fingers holding the foreskin released it, and suddenly Darien was sucking at the bare head of Chris’s cock.

“Just like that.” Chris sighed. Darien saw him grip the hem of his T-shirt and pull it up high, exposing his belly. The hand at the base of his cock released and fell away, clearly a sign for Darien to take over. “Suck me. Do to me what you like done. The foreskin just adds to it.”

Darien whimpered. An honest-to-God whimper. This was so cool! He let his lips slide wetly down Chris’s shaft as far as he could go, going slow so he could adjust to the width. He had a guy’s cock in his mouth! He really did. And it was good! He pulled back up and let his tongue play at the place just underneath the head of Chris’s cock, knowing that the spot drove Darien himself crazy. Seemed Chris liked it, too, if the husky groan was any indication, so Darien did that for a while.

Fingers speared in his hair, gently pushing his head down. He went with it, letting that awesome cock fill his mouth again. He gagged when the head went too far in the back of his throat.

“Easy,” Chris crooned, tugging gently on his hair to bring his head back up. “Just do what’s comfortable.”

Darien brought his head back up, pumping the shaft with his hand while his tongue played around the tip. This was fun! Especially when Chris made those moaning sounds and his hips started to rock. Darien sank down and took as much of Chris as he could into his mouth, covering the rest with his fist. He took a firm grip and started to bob up and down, sucking as hard as he could.

“Oh, shit!” Chris’s hands double-fisted in Darien’s hair. “You should...I’m going...You’ll have to stop...soon...or...”

Darien understood well enough but kept on pumping. Knowing he was making Chris crazy, hearing the abandon darken that crisp accent, drove him on.

He gasped when Chris’s fists ripped at his hair, forcing his mouth off that delicious cock with a pop.

“What --?”

Chris shoved him back, then quickly pumped at his glistening wet cock. Within seconds, cum shot from his cock and over his bare belly.

Darien licked his lips. “I would have swallowed.”

Chris settled down deep into the couch, clearly enjoying the afterglow. “You shouldn’t.”

“You swallowed me last night.”

“And I shouldn’t have done that.”

“We’re clean, aren’t we?”

“As far as I know, but why should you trust me?”

Darien jerked back. “Why shouldn’t I? You planning to screw me? Well, other than the physical, that is?”

Chris just smiled at him, shaking his head slightly. “You have no reason to trust me.”

Darien grimaced. “I have every reason.” His cock ached for attention, but he ignored it, wanting this discussion done and gone. “You’ve been Hell’s friend for, like, ever. You stood by me through the divorce --”

“You paid me well to do that.”

“You went above and beyond the call of duty, and we both know it. You didn’t have to take my calls like you did.”

Chris took a deep breath and let it out, his eyes glittering green behind the lenses of his glasses.

Darien leaned in, bracing his thighs against the front of the couch between Chris’s splayed legs and taking hold of the back of the couch to either side of Chris’s shoulders. He brought his face to within inches of Chris’s. “Can I trust you, Chris?”

Chris’s eyebrows hiked up. Startled, he searched Darien’s eyes intently for a moment before his smile resumed. “Yes.”

“I’m clean. I got tested before we got married, and I *know* I can trust Nicole. Are you clean?”

“As far as I know, but I can’t be positive about Nathan.”

*Damn.* Picturing the little twink, Darien had to agree with the caution. He sat back on his heels. “You think he cheated on you?”

“No, but I can’t be sure.”

Darien frowned. “Oh. Damn.”

“Yes.”

Darien reached up to smear his fingers through the cum splattered across Chris's belly. He was amazed at how much he wanted to taste it. "You need to get yourself tested."

When Chris didn't answer immediately, he glanced up. Chris was watching him curiously, eyes first on the hand and the cum, then on Darien's face. "Even if I were to be tested today, it wouldn't matter."

"Well, of course not. But later --"

"You do realize, to be absolutely safe, another test is required in six months?"

"Yeah, I know." He realized what Chris was getting at. "What? You think this is just a weekend thing?"

"To be honest? Yes."

Why did that sting? It was the natural assumption, given who Darien was. He flattened his palm over Chris's navel, feeling the spunk spread between them. "Listen, you're a friend. Hopefully a good friend." He grinned. "A friend with benefits? I hope we're still gonna be friends after this weekend?"

A hand settled over his. "I would like that."

"I mean, I'm not asking you to stop dating or anything." He didn't want Chris to think he was asking for *too* much. "I know you've got a life and all, but if we're both still free..."

Chris's other hand cupped his chin, making him look up. He was smiling. "If we're both free, we can still fuck."

Darien overexaggerated a shiver. "Fucking hell, I *love* how you say 'fuck.'"

"Do you?" Chris leaned forward until their faces were mere inches apart. The hand stayed on his chin, rubbing gently. "How about 'suck'?"

"Yeah, that's good, too."

"Brilliant." The finger and thumb on his jaw applied pressure. Darien got the hint and knelt up. Chris's eyes, deep green in this light, never left his. "Then what say you come up here so I can *suck* you dry; then I'll bend you over the arm of the couch and *fuck* you hard?"

“Oh, man.”

Before he could leap to obey, Chris’s mouth closed over his, tongue immediately sliding in between Darien’s open lips. Lips and tongue toyed with him, pressing in, then pulling back, making him chase down the pressure and invasion that he so very much wanted. Darien brought his hands up to sink his fingers into the thick silk of Chris’s hair, holding the other man so Darien could plunder his mouth.

Eventually, Chris managed to escape, pushing Darien back despite his whimpering protest. “Get up here so I can suck your cock.” Chris grinned, glancing toward the food containers on the little warming plate. “Then we’ll eat.”

Sounded like a plan to Darien. He flung himself into the corner of the couch, eagerly unfastening his shorts and shoving them down. Chris caught them when they were halfway down Darien’s thighs and pulled them the rest of the way off. He removed his glasses and set them on the table. Then he was kneeling between Darien’s legs, swallowing down his cock.

“Oh, man!” Darien gripped Chris’s shoulders, digging in.

Chris popped his mouth off the tip of Darien’s cock and, with his eyes on Darien’s, sucked on two of his own fingers. When they were good and wet, he lowered them between Darien’s thighs, his dry hand pushing one of Darien’s legs up so that his foot was braced on the edge of the couch.

“Shit!” Darien groaned, throwing his head back as the fingers wiggled their way into his ass.

Chris chuckled and gulped down Darien’s cock again, swallowing around the head.

Darien cursed, pumping up into that hot mouth, then groaned as he pulled back, impaling himself further on those fingers. “Ah, shit, Chris, fuck!” He was too keyed up. He was too hard and wanted this too much. “Oh, man!” Too soon, fire sparked at the base of his spine, forcing him to pump, releasing the ache in his balls and clenching his muscles around

Chris's fingers. He came with a cry, curling forward over Chris's head as the man swallowed him down.

Yeah, he could get used to this.

## Chapter Ten

If Darien ever doubted that the guys in the band were like family to him, having dinner with all of them together reminded him. Dinners with just the four of them -- no, five, no, really seven -- had to include Tyler and Reese these days -- were every bit as loud and comforting as any dinner he'd shared with blood relatives when growing up.

The house they'd rented was terrific. A hotel guest had mentioned it to Tyler, who had passed on the information to Johnnie. Johnnie was even toying with the idea of buying it outright. It was set up on a cliff, overlooking the ocean. A winding, tree-lined trail led down to a private beach that was kind of rocky, but that was okay. There were some neat tidepools nearby, too, that Darien spent much of his first early afternoon exploring. The house itself had seven bedrooms, a living room, game room, formal dining room, and a wicked cool kitchen. But the selling point for the band was the third floor loft. It took up the entire length of the house, and the wall that faced the ocean was nearly all glass. Currently all of their equipment had been set up in that space, along with assorted seating arrangements. It was all ready for the five of them to get their ideas together and make some music, an idea that made their record company very, very happy.



They all arrived at the beach house at varying times on Monday and Tuesday. Well, Johnnie was already there since he'd rented the house and it was only a few miles away from the Weiss West. Darien flew into Los Angeles and drove up to the central coast with Luc and Reese. Brent and Hell had already arrived when they got there, having flown into San Francisco from Germany, then driven down. So, except for Johnnie and Tyler, they were all exhausted, but they sat at the big twelve-seater dining table in the sunny, formal dining room and had a loud reunion over pizza, calzones, and beer.

It took a while to get caught up, and for once, Darien kept his own news under wraps. He listened and helped to grill Luc about his experience in making the movie. That was actually fascinating enough to take up half of the meal. Then Brent and Hell told about their extended trip through Europe. Everyone toasted Reese's new gallery opening, then listened as he and Tyler explained the new murals he was going to paint for various parts of the Weiss West.

They adjourned with beers to the living room with the French doors that stood open to the ocean vista and breeze. Darien followed his friends, chewing on the realization that he wanted Chris to be there. He would have fit in nicely, Darien thought.

He was taken off guard when Johnnie threw an arm around him and hauled him down to sit on one of the deep, plush pale yellow couches.

"All right, you." He released Darien and leaned back against the arm of the couch, crossing his arms over his chest. "Out with it."

Darien blinked, trying for innocent. He was awful at keeping stuff from his friends, and he knew it. "What?"

He glanced around the room as they all took seats, each naturally keeping close to the man he loved. Tyler came to sit on the arm of the couch behind Johnnie, gathering Johnnie's long braid in his lap and toying with it. Reese sat in an overstuffed chair that matched the

couch, and Luc sat on the plush carpet at his feet. Hell and Brent sat in the other overstuffed chair and a loveseat, respectively, but they were close enough to whisper if they wanted.

*I want that*, Darien acknowledged to himself. *I want what they have*. What he'd never had with Nicole. Was he jumping the gun to think he could have it with Chris? Probably.

"Don't give me 'what?'" Johnnie grimaced, watching him carefully. "You've been way too quiet, and you haven't even mentioned the divorce once. Something happened. Spill."

*Aha! Diversion!* "I haven't? Oh. Well. I signed the final papers on Thursday."

"So it's done?" Reese asked, big blue eyes sympathetic under the long hang of royal-blue bangs. Darien had confirmed with Reese on the drive from Los Angeles that the hair was bluer than the last time Darien had seen him.

"Yeah, it's done. Chris got me through it with very little muss or fuss." He smiled at Hell, who smiled back.

Tyler reached over to pat his arm. "Congratulations."

"Thanks." He grinned at the concerned looks around him. "I'm fine, really."

"Sure he's fine. Because something happened," Luc pronounced, sipping his beer.

Johnnie nudged Darien with his bare foot, a sudden grin on his face. "You met someone."

Darien beamed. "Yep."

"So give. Who is she? Why didn't you bring her? You know we have to approve of your dates now, don't you?"

Darien squirmed, too excited to take the bait of Johnnie's teasing. "I didn't bring him, because he's working." *Yeah, good delivery.*

Silence thick enough to cut with a knife. Darien glanced around at the blank, shocked faces. At almost the same time, similar grins drew up the corners of each of their mouths. He laughed.

Johnnie hooted, throwing back his head to land in Tyler's lap. "Oh, man! You finally fucked a guy?"

Happily, Darien nodded.

Tyler slapped his palm over his face, laughing. Reese fell back in his chair, curled into himself with his own laughter. Luc grinned, shaking his head, matching Brent's reaction. Hell was torn between laughter and shock.

Johnnie reached over and punched his arm. "What the fuck, man? What made you do it? Who is he?"

Darien shrugged, picking at a tear in the knee of his jeans. "I dunno. You guys seemed to like it a lot, so I was just thinking about it. And, thanks to the divorce, I didn't really want to *think* about women."

"Hey," Brent spoke up, "you can't rule out all women because of what happened between you and Nicole."

"Yeah," Johnnie agreed, mirth sliding into concern. "Just because it didn't work between you guys doesn't mean you have to change your whole life."

Darien blinked at Johnnie. "You've been telling me I should fuck guys the entire time I've known you."

Johnnie flushed. Guilt from Johnnie? Whoa, call the international press! "Well, yeah, but not just because you got divorced and were depressed or anything."

Darien cocked his head to the side. "Me? Depressed?"

"It *has* happened." Johnnie scowled.

"Yeah, okay." Darien laughed. "Well, whatever. That's not why I did it. I mean, yeah, I didn't really want to sleep with any women, but..." He shrugged again, "I was really curious, y'know? Seemed like a good time and all. And the guy's really hot."

Luc's grin was wolfish. "So, you pick up some hot piece of action from a club?"

"Nope. It's Chris."

“Chris?”

Again he looked to Hell, who was frowning slightly. “Chris Faith.”

“*Chris?*” Reese asked. “Your lawyer? Hell’s friend?”

“Yep.”

Hell gaped. “Why him?”

“Hel-*lo?* Have you seen him? He’s hot.”

“Is he?” Johnnie asked. But it wasn’t so much a question for his own benefit. Sounded more like he was confirming that Darien thought Chris was hot.

“You don’t think so?”

Johnnie sat back. “Doesn’t matter what I think.”

Darien grinned at Tyler. “You’ve got him well trained.”

Tyler rolled his eyes and snorted. “Yeah, right.”

See, that was the thing. Maybe before now, Darien just hadn’t met his type. Now, Tyler was one hot piece of ass. He knew that. The blond man’s looks had been a topic of discussion between the members of Heaven Sent before and after Johnnie had hooked up with him. Those shining blond curls and huge blue eyes over that wide, generous mouth brought to mind a delicious butterscotch sundae. At least they did to Darien, although he’d never told anyone about that particular imagery. But Tyler wasn’t what Darien wanted. Darien didn’t even have a twinge of lust for the man, just admiration, like for the sunset behind him. He turned back to Johnnie. He knew his friend was stunning. Had known it since he’d joined the band way back before they were famous. Johnnie was good-looking and knew it well. *Used* it well, both for himself and for the band. Darien wondered sometimes if the band would have been half or even a quarter as successful without their flamboyant, excessive lead singer. But, again, Darien only felt admiration for him. Hell, he’d had a chance to sleep with Johnnie -- many chances, in fact -- and he wasn’t sorry to have turned him down. Nope, seemed Darien was into tall, stuffy-looking Brits with a wicked streak.

He smiled at that and met Johnnie's gaze. "Yeah, Chris is hot."

"Wow."

Johnnie watched him for a long, measuring moment, then slowly smiled. "You like him."

"Yeah."

"You like him a lot."

"Yeah."

One dark brow arched over a snarky grin. He glanced Luc's way, then back at Darien. "You liked fucking him?"

Darien heard Luc's chuckle and smiled. "Oh, yeah."

"You go the whole nine yards?" Luc asked.

Quite happily, he turned to the redhead and nodded. "Yeah."

"I had no idea I was matchmaking when I suggested you ask him to be your lawyer for the divorce," Hell said with a self-satisfied smile. "How wonderful."

Darien shrugged. "He didn't expect it either."

That made Brent laugh. "Well, yeah, since you kept on telling everyone that you were straight."

Darien met Brent's teasing condemnation with a grin. "Yeah, well, I *was* until recently. Why didn't you *tell* me butt sex was that good?"

Caught off guard, Brent snorted, then coughed. Hell broke into a fit of laughter.

Brent raised a skeptical eyebrow. "You fuck or get fucked? Or both?"

Calmly, Darien sipped his beer before answering. "Actually, I got fucked."

Johnnie whistled. "So the ass is no longer virginal, is it?"

"Nope."

Johnnie chuckled. "I'm hurt that you didn't let me pop your cherry years ago."

Darien heard Tyler's shocked gasp and laughed, seeing the teasing twinkle in Johnnie's eyes. Tyler yanked hard on Johnnie's braid, which just made the singer laugh. He laid his head back in his lover's lap, making big eyes up at Tyler. "That was years before you, blond-of-my-heart."

Tyler snorted and shoved Johnnie's head off his lap. He stood and pointedly went to sit next to Brent on the loveseat. "See if *you* get any tonight."

Which made it Johnnie's turn to gasp in outrage.

The rest of them laughed.

## Chapter Eleven

He'd made fun of Johnnie during the tour that had separated him and Tyler when they first got together. They all had. Johnnie, their brash lead singer, had been celibate and almost a damn hermit while they toured Europe and Asia, more concerned with getting things for Tyler or emailing Tyler than he was with finding a bed partner for the night. At the time, it'd been laughable.

*Now...* Darien stared at his laptop screen, wondering if he should send the email to Chris.

The first few weeks working with the band had taken most of his attention. He'd managed to forget that he wasn't getting laid, by diving into the music. It worked, for the most part. Since Reese and Tyler weren't staying at the beach house, it really was just the band and they could concentrate on work. Brent and Hell got so focused in music that Darien sometimes wondered if they even had sex during that time. Not that it was any of his business. There were times that they all went out, either together or separately. Mainly they hung out at the White Room, the nightclub at the hotel. But when Darien went, he spent more time watching the bands performing and analyzing the music than talking to people. It wasn't exactly odd for him. When Heaven Sent were writing or recording, he did tend to get

preoccupied. They all did. This was what they *did*, after all. The music was why they were millionaires and known the world over.

But it finally got to him. He realized that he was *missing* Chris. And wasn't that just absurd? A few months in Chris's company to handle the divorce and one absolutely stellar weekend of sex, and he couldn't get the man off his mind. The week before last, Chris had emailed to let him know that the divorce was officially final. Darien had written back to ask a stupid law question. He couldn't even remember what he'd asked. Chris had been nice enough about it and sent a reply. Even made a joke at the end. Which was heartening. Darien sent a follow-up the next day. A few days later, he'd sent a link to a blog with an entry that was just too funny. Chris had sent a laughing reply back. After which came another email from Chris, remarking on a news article that just couldn't be believed. In the last week, they'd emailed daily. Never anything of real importance, but it was a constant stream of conversation. And sex wasn't even the main topic, although it did come up. Namely in innuendo and sly remarks.

But now Darien wrote something real. *I miss you. Take a vacation and come out and see me.* Yeah, it'd be stupid to send that.

He stood and walked to his room's window. His beach house bedroom overlooked the ocean since he didn't mind the constant pounding. What did it matter to him? He had drumbeats constantly going in his head; the surf just acted as another one. It was still early and the day was bright. His bandmates had yet to rise, or that'd been the case when he'd gone down to the kitchen a little while ago to get breakfast. He was an earlier riser than most of them anyway. He'd expected to see Brent, the only other one likely to be up, but the guitarist must have decided to sleep in.

Spur of the moment, he decided to go swimming. He spun and dug through the dresser for the trunks he knew he'd packed somewhere. Ah, yes! Quickly, he shed his sweats and changed into the shorts, stuck his feet into some sandals. He grabbed his cell phone and



sunglasses on the way to the linen closet at the end of the hall that contained all the towels and stuff.

An hour later, he sat on the sand, letting the sun bake into his skin, drying the ocean water from his swim into a thin layer of salt. He stared at the waves crashing over a line of rocks and watched the seagulls circle overhead.

He picked up his cell phone and dialed.

Chris answered on the second ring. "Hello, Darien." *Man, that voice.*

He leaned forward, bracing elbows on his bent knees. "Heya, Chris. I'm calling you from the beach." He scooped some sand and watched it slip away through his fingers.

"That would explain the sound of waves in the background."

Darien smiled. Chris was in a good mood. "Yeah. You should see it. It's gorgeous."

"I imagine it is."

"Do you like the beach?"

"Pardon?"

"Do you like the beach?"

"Occasionally. I prefer boats."

"Oh?"

"I go scuba diving once a year. Usually in Hawaii."

"Really? How cool! I've always wanted to do that. When do you go?"

"I'll be in Kona the last week in August."

"Oh, man, I wanna go."

Chuckle. "You'll still be with the band, won't you?"

He tossed sand onto the pile in front of him. "Yeah. Probably. But I could take a week off, I'll bet. We'll be sick of each other by then." Not entirely true, but not entirely false.

They'd probably need a break before then, but Chris didn't need to know that. "So, do you have any more vacation time?"

"Vacation?"

"Yeah. Say, a long weekend? I was hoping I could talk you into coming out here."

"Why?"

*I miss you.* But Chris might not want to hear that. Darien picked up a small rock and smoothed it through his fingers. The wind played with his hair, blinding him temporarily. "I'm lonely. I need company."

Chris snorted. "You can't possibly be lonely."

Darien speared a hand through his hair, grunting when his fingers caught on a snarl. "I am."

"You're with your friends. I'm sure you've visited every nightclub on the central coast and then some. Where are the fawning teenage fans?"

"All right, I'm horny. I can't have sex with teenage fans." He worked at the snarl with his fingers.

"You have plenty of fans who are of age."

"Yeah, so what? I'd rather have you."

Pause. Damn, he hated it when Chris paused like that. Meant he was thinking. What good did that do? "I'm sure you could find a willing man."

"With a stuffy English accent and a horse cock, who's gay? Come on."

Luckily, that made Chris laugh. That was it. Just compliment his cock and it cracked that shell.

Darien warmed to his cause. "C'mon, man. You got me hooked on getting pounded in the ass. Least you can do is come here and help a guy out."

"The least I can do?"

“Yeah.”

“I do have a job to do.”

“That’s why I mentioned vacation.”

“I don’t know that it’s a good idea...”

Darien snorted. “C’mon, if you won’t do vacation, bring a laptop. There’s excellent broadband access. I’ll even promise to let you work some during the day.”

“‘Some?’”

“Well, yeah. When we’re working.”

“Big of you.”

“Did I mention your tasty horse cock?”

“You failed to mention ‘tasty’ before.”

“Silly me.” Darien tossed his hair from his eyes, gazing at the horizon. “Well? What do you say? If you come for the weekend, I’ll even get you backstage for our anniversary show at the Weiss. It’s sold out, y’know. Pretty big deal around here. But I’ve got an in with the band.”

Chris laughed. “How can I possibly pass on that?”

“That’s what I’m thinking.”

“I asked Chris to come out for the show this weekend.”

Hell paused, knife hovering over the tomato he was slicing for his sandwich.

They were alone in the kitchen at the beach house. The others were upstairs. Brent and Johnnie were hashing out lyrics. Luc was kind of his in own space, working out a passage in one of the new songs. Darien and Hell had figured it was as good a time as any to come down to get eats. Well, Hell had decided to come get some eats, and Darien had followed, seeing an opportunity to talk to Hell alone.

“Oh?” Hell said casually, knife again descending through the tomato.

“Yeah. I called him this morning.” Darien bit into a pickle before resuming mixing the tuna salad in the bowl before him. “He’s bitching about where to stay, but I think he’ll come.”

“It’ll be nice to see him.”

“That’s it?”

“What’s it?”

Darien studied Hell’s profile. The little guy looked cute and innocent, but Darien knew him far too well now not to know there was something going on underneath that lavender hair. “No comment about my asking Chris to come for the weekend?”

“No. Should I comment?”

“You haven’t said much about me and Chris being together.”

At that, Hell turned, regarding him steadily. “*Are* you together?”

“Well, there’s the sex thing.”

“That doesn’t mean you’re together.”

“True. I dunno, but it definitely wasn’t just a weekend thing like he thinks.”

Hell dropped the tomato in a plastic container, then started spreading mayonnaise on three pieces of bread. “That’s what he thinks?”

“Yeah. I told him it wasn’t, but I don’t think he believed me.”

Hell nodded. “Has he told you anything about his past?”

“He told me about you and him.”

Hell glanced at him, then nodded. “Yes. We had a brief sexual relationship.”

“But you were better friends.”

“We are. Did he tell you about Simon?”

“He mentioned that he was in a serious relationship in the past that kind of messed him up. Well, no, he mentioned the relationship. I’m guessing that it messed him up.”

Hell smiled sadly. “Yes. Simon wasn’t good for him.”

“Tell me about him.”

“Simon?”

“Yeah.”

“Why do you want to know?”

Darien met Hell’s curious gaze steadily. “It’s important to him.”

“Why not ask him?”

“I will. But you’re here now.”

Hell smiled and started stacking lunch meat on the three sandwiches. Then he frowned. “Luc said ham, didn’t he?”

“Heck if I know.”

Hell scrunched up his lips in a grimace, then shrugged and went with the ham. “You’ve heard of Simon Ritter?”

Darien started dumping tuna on the two sandwiches he was making, frowning. “Sounds familiar.”

“Have you seen the Volton movies?”

“Oh, yeah! He was that sidekick guy.”

“Yes.”

Connection made, Darien could picture the young man he’d seen in the movies. Slim, toned blond with blue eyes and wicked smile. He was all the rage for a while a few years back. Nothing new that Darien could think of. “Whoa. He’s cute.”

“Yes, he is.”

“Chris was dating him?”

“Yes.”

“Y’know, for a lawyer type, he meets all sorts of famous people.”

Hell chuckled. “When Chris was young, he went to acting school. He’s Shakespearean trained, in fact. When he first came to the United States, he worked part-time at a law firm while he was looking for work in the theater.”

“No shit, really?”

“Yes. So you can see why he’s always enjoyed being with actors and musicians far more than he enjoyed being with his fellow law students.”

Darien finished spooning tuna and stood to dump the bowl into the sink. “So why not do it professionally?”

“He hates to audition. He doesn’t believe he’s good enough and manages to sabotage himself. At least, that’s what he’s said. I’ve never seen him perform.”

*That’s a shame.* Darien could imagine that Chris was a pretty good actor. “But he knows enough people now to get past that, doesn’t he?”

“Most likely. But I think he enjoys what he does now. Most of his clients are in the entertainment business. He is able to spend time with the type of people he enjoys. I believe that is enough for him.” Sandwiches built, Hell started to clean up.

Darien nodded. That fit the man he knew. Still would be cool to see him perform. “So what happened with Simon?” He opened the cupboard where there were all kinds of chips and stuff.

Hell sobered a little. “He and Simon were together long before Volton. When Chris moved to the US, Simon came with him. Simon was a struggling actor and lived with Chris while Chris was a student. I do believe they were in love. I don’t know firsthand, as I didn’t see much of Chris during that time.”

“Let me guess, Simon dumped Chris when the movie happened?”

“More or less. It wasn’t that clean of a break. Eventually, Chris found out that Simon cheated on him during the filming of the movie. With a woman.”

“Hey, yeah, didn’t he just get married like a year or so ago?”

“Yes, he did. And he now proclaims that he never was gay.”

Well that made a lot of Chris’s reservations more clear, didn’t it? “Damn.”

“Yes.”

“Hmmm.” He poured some chips onto both plates, knowing Johnnie would want some. “Was Chris set on marrying Simon?”

“I don’t know if they talked of marriage, but he certainly had decided to spend the rest of his life with Simon. He practically supported Simon in the early days.”

“Ouch.”

“Yes.”

They worked in silence for a few moments, putting various items away. When they were ready to head back upstairs, Hell stopped him by grabbing his arm. They stood face-to-face in the middle of the sunny kitchen. “Darien?”

“Yeah?”

“How serious are you about Chris?”

“Honest?”

Nod. “Please.”

Darien glanced out of the window over the sink, watching a fluffy white cloud race by. “I think I’m pretty serious. I can’t stop thinking about him.”

“Him specifically?”

He looked back to Hell. “What do you mean?”

Hell shrugged. “He’s the first man you’ve slept with.”

“Oh, I get it. Yeah. I thought about if it was just the guy thing.” He crossed his arms and leaned back against the counter beside the sink “I’ve thought about doing other guys. Almost picked up one when we went out the other night. The model. You met him.”

Hell nodded.

Darien shrugged. “But it’s just...not that appealing.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Do you know how he feels about you?”

“Not really.” He sighed. “Not at all. I think he likes me. We had a lot of fun together.”

Hell shared his chuckle.

“But if I talk about anything remotely serious between the two of us, he shuts off. I mean, I didn’t push that much because, yeah, it was just one weekend, right? But even when we’ve been emailing each other, he’s been...distant.”

Hell stepped up to put a comforting hand on his arm. “Chris has learned to protect himself from his feelings. Perhaps too much. He hasn’t allowed himself to have a relationship since Simon.”

Darien nodded. “I hear you. Take it easy.”

“That might be best.”

“Yeah. Okay. I can do that. At least until I figure it out myself, right?”



## Chapter Twelve

Darien sat in the VIP bar just off the lobby of the Weiss, sipping a Coke and half watching the baseball game on the high-def television mounted to the side of the bar. Normally he could sit in the regular bar in the restaurant with the picture window that looked out over the town, but this weekend, with the show and all, it got to be kind of crazy for any member of Heaven Sent to be seen in the public areas. Most of the time, fans were cool about it as long as you smiled, signed something, and let them snap a picture. But on weekends like this, they tended to mob.

He thought, of course, about Chris. It had taken some negotiation, but Chris was finally on his way. Darien had wanted him to stay at the beach house for the weekend, but when Chris asked if Reese or Tyler were staying, that idea got nixed. Darien saw his point of not wanting to be the only non-band member staying at the house. Kind of screamed "I'm here for sex." Not that Darien minded, but Chris wasn't him. So they had to arrange for him to stay at the hotel. Chris got all weird about Tyler having to pull strings since the Weiss was technically sold out for the weekend, but it ended up being no big deal. Not that Chris would believe that or anything.

The guys were surprisingly quiet about Chris's arrival. Darien had expected Johnnie and Luc, at least, to give him no end of shit about bringing his *male* lover all the way across the country. Especially when it would be absurdly easy to find one close by.

But that was the thing, wasn't it? Darien didn't want anyone else. Male or female. When he'd gone out in the last few weeks, he'd looked, sure, but he'd politely declined all offers. Of which there were plenty. After all, he was the only unattached band member. Again. So although the opportunities were there, he didn't take advantage. What he wanted was to experience more of the heat that existed underneath Chris's composed exterior.

Could he be in love? Now wouldn't that just beat all? Kind of weird for *all* of Heaven Sent to end up with men. But then, why not? They were all alike in some way or another, which was why they were such close friends. Brothers almost. Why not all have the same leaning? After all, he'd tried it with a woman, right? Well, the marriage thing. He'd tried a *lot* of other things with women. He enjoyed it, but it wasn't a long-time thing. Never had been. He wasn't the slut that Johnnie used to be, but he'd had more than his fair share. He could try other men, but why? It didn't interest him. If he hadn't taken Johnnie up on his offer years ago, it wasn't likely that other men would surpass that offer. After all, Johnnie was...well, Johnnie. In comparison, if Chris had more appeal to Darien, then there was something special about Chris, right? Right.

"Mr. Hughes?"

He looked up at the bearded bartender in his crisp white shirt and snazzy little bow tie.

"The front desk just called. Your visitor has arrived."

"Sweet." He stood and pulled a tip out of his wallet. "Charge the rest to my room?"

"Of course. Thank you, sir."

He'd tried to get the man to not call him "sir," but knew why he didn't comply. Tyler wasn't an ogre of a boss, but he was very keen on how his employees should act, even with -- or maybe especially with -- his close friends.

Shoving his hands into the deep pockets of his khakis, Darien exited the bar into the deserted hallway beside the elevators. Neat place, actually. Big potted plants kept the area kind of secluded. So he saw Chris headed his way before Chris saw him. He stepped out just as Chris hit the elevator button.

“Hey.”

Chris jumped, spinning around. Whoa, his eyes were all big. Well, maybe not really big, but big for Chris. “Darien! Where did you come from?”

Darien jabbed a thumb toward the secluded hallway. “There’s a bar down there. I had them call me when you checked in.”

“You were waiting for me?”

*Ding.* The elevator doors shushed open and they stepped inside.

He waited for the doors to shut before stepping into Chris. Chris stumbled a little, back hitting the side of the elevator. Right where Darien wanted him. His arms went up and around Chris’s neck, hauling the other man’s tasty lips down for a kiss. “Yeah.”

*Oh, yeah!* That was nice. Chris was hesitant at first, receiving, not responding. That was okay because Darien liked the feel of his lips. Soft and warm, with a little stubble around the edges for added sensation. Then Chris sighed into it, dropping his bag beside them and letting his arms slide around Darien. His mouth opened and his tongue swiped Darien’s teeth. Their tongues met in a lazy, swirly hello. *Very nice.*

The ding of the elevator reaching Chris’s floor broke them up. Darien smiled up at Chris before stepping away. They both bent for Chris’s bag. Darien backed off, chuckling.

“Shouldn’t you be working?” Chris murmured, leading the way down the hall.

*Jeans, yum!* He did like what jeans, even relaxed ones, did for Chris’s ass. He wondered if Chris would let him fuck it. “Nope. We gave ourselves a few days off. Well, except for tomorrow night’s gig, of course.”

Chris glanced at him as he stopped at his room's door and swiped his keycard. He smiled. "Must be nice to be your own bosses."

Darien snorted. "We're not our own bosses in most things. Usually, Gretchen or the record company people are telling us what to do. But since the gig is for the Weiss..." He stopped beside Chris, who'd frozen just inside the room. "What?"

"There must be some mistake."

"Why?"

"This room is huge."

Darien grinned. "Yeah. This is the room I usually get when I stay here."

Chris frowned at him.

"Oh, come on, don't be like that. It was the only thing Tyler had left. And he only had it left because I was technically still reserving it." He walked farther into the suite, completely at home in the spacious green-and-black-accented sitting room. "I figured I'd better keep the room open in case I wanted to come stay here for the weekend." He turned and let his grin go wicked for Chris. "Nice, huh?"

*Well, shit. Now what?* Chris didn't like it. His frown said as much. "What?"

"You didn't tell me I'd be staying in your suite."

"No, I didn't. Is it a problem?" He cocked his head to the side, striking a pose that he hoped Chris found appealing. "I was kind of hoping that we'd spend most of the weekend together anyway."

Chris blinked, then took a breath, and the frown eased from his face. "There is that."

Darien stepped into him, bumping groin to groin. He slid one arm around Chris's waist, then used the other to make him release his bag. They indulged in another long, drawn-out kiss that made the boner in Darien's pants ache. Chris's lips were just so...*ungh!* And his tongue. Darien sucked it in, relearning the subtle, dark taste that was Chris. He slid his hands down Chris's back, then took some handfuls of polo shirt to yank it out of his jeans.

Underneath the shirt he found warm, satiny skin. Skin he'd missed touching. Skin he wanted to taste.

Chris pulled back from the kiss, hand toying lightly in Darien's hair. "Impatient?" he teased.

Darien slid his arms forward, spreading his palms over Chris's flat belly before he let one travel lower to cup the erection that pulsed behind the zipper of those jeans. "Yeah. You mind?"

"Oh, no, not in the least." Hands on his shoulders pushed and his thigh nudged; then they were walking -- Darien backwards -- toward the open bedroom door. "I'm here for your pleasure."

Darien chuckled, an evil tone to it. "Hey, I like the sound of that."

"Do you?"

Darien hooked his fingers in the waistband of Chris's jeans, right over the zipper, and used it to pull. "I hope it's your pleasure, too."

Chris smiled. "It is."

"Good." He let go, quickly popping the button of Chris's jeans before stepping back. He whipped his T-shirt over his head and tossed it aside. "What say we get naked?"

Chris took off his glasses. "Sounds like a plan."

Suppressing a giggle, Darien toed off his sandals and quickly dropped his briefs and khakis. He plopped on the bed and watched as Chris slowly peeled off his polo.

Wearing that demon grin that Darien had come to crave over the weekend they'd spent together, Chris approached. Without a word, he lifted one foot and set the sole of his boot down on Darien's thigh. "Do you mind?"

Grinning, Darien obediently lifted the cuff of Chris's jeans so he could untie the boot. With Chris leaning on his shoulder for balance, he also eased the boot off his foot and dropped it to the carpet, then got the sock as well. They repeated the same for the other foot.

Then Chris was standing between Darien's spread knees, hands on his fly. "So quiet," Chris murmured, long fingers toying with the zipper without opening it. "Nothing to say, magpie?"

Darien chanced a brief glare up before returning his attention to Chris's hands. "Don't call me magpie."

"But you usually chatter just like one." Chris chuckled, holding the waistband with one hand and exaggerating the hold of thumb and forefinger of the other on the zipper's tab. "What if I want to call you magpie?"

Darien licked his lips. "Take out the horse cock, and we'll negotiate."

Chris laughed, the full, rich sound that Darien could only recall hearing when it was the two of them. His laugh elsewhere seemed so...careful. Chris pulled the zipper down, exposing white briefs underneath. "You'll let me call you magpie for just the sight of my cock?"

"More than just sight." Darien reached up and hooked his fingers into the sides of Chris's waistband, helping the man to ease both jeans and briefs down over his hips. Once free, his hard cock sprang out, nearly slapping Darien in the face. Darien abandoned his hold on the clothing to reach up and wrap his fingers around that long, thick rod, mouth watering.

Chris hissed. "What else do you want with it?"

"This," Darien rasped, then opened his lips and let them slide down the shaft until they met his fist at the base.

"Bloody fucking hell," Chris cursed, hands sliding into Darien's hair.

Darien hardly heard him, eyes closed and tongue working as he rapturously relearned Chris's taste. He pulled back wetly and lapped up the precum at the tip, delving as much as he could into the hole before sliding back the loose foreskin so he could tease the rim of the head. He'd paid attention when they were together before and thought he'd clued in on what

Chris liked. He glanced up at the tight expression on Chris's face and decided he was doing okay.

Chris's fingers in his hair tightened, and then all Darien had to do was keep his mouth open and watch the teeth as Chris's hips took over and slowly thrust in and out of his mouth, so very careful when the head got near the back of his throat. He wanted to tell Chris to stop being so careful, but he wasn't quite certain he could take it and, well, his mouth was a little busy at the moment.

Then Chris pulled away entirely, ignoring Darien's groan of disappointment. "Are there condoms handy, or do I need to get my bag?"

Darien licked at the saliva coating his lips. "In the drawer, right here." He pointed.

Chris nodded. "Good." His eyes locked on Darien's tongue, and with a little hungry groan, he swooped down and took Darien's mouth in a punishing, involved kiss. Then he stood, turning toward the nightstand. "I'm glad your mouth is good for something besides talking."

"Hey!" Darien protested, edging back to the middle of the bed. "That's not nice."

Chris found the condoms easily and tossed the bottle of lube onto the mattress beside Darien. "No, it's not." He paused at the side of the bed to stare at Darien, who had taken the moment to lie back, knees bent and spread. He stroked his cock for good measure, in case Chris had forgotten it was there. The heat in Chris's eyes at the sight was worth any amount of teasing. "Are you aware of how beautiful you are?"

Now, Darien had actually been told that on a number of occasions. He tried not to let it go to his head. He thought he was a reasonably good-looking guy, leaning more toward traditional cute than out-and-out gorgeous. But the look in Chris's eyes and the rasp in his voice told Darien that Chris really meant it. "I'm glad you think so," Darien replied, putting as much sincerity into the words as he could.

Chris inhaled sharply, eyes locking on Darien's for an endless moment. He opened his mouth as though to say something, but he evidently changed his mind. He turned his attention instead to opening the condom packet.

*What were you going to say?* Darien wanted to ask, but he was uncharacteristically tongue-tied. He picked up the lube and poured some on his palm, the better to jerk himself off.

Chris kneeled on the bed between Darien's legs, plucking the bottle from his hand. "I'll have to taste you later," he promised, squeezing some liquid onto his fingers, then rubbing it between them as he snapped the cap shut and tossed the bottle aside. "Right now --" He pushed at one of Darien's knees, forcing the leg back against his chest. "-- I need to fuck you."

"Oh, yeah," Darien moaned, jerking himself harder as Chris reached down to poke fingers into his hole. Why that felt good, he hadn't a clue. But it did. Especially when Chris rubbed around and found -- *"Shit!"* He arched -- *that!*

"You like that."

"Oh, God, yeah."

Fingers left and something bigger prodded at the opening. "You like this more."

Something like "um-n-ah" escaped Darien's lips. He hadn't a clue if it was a word. There was no thought process behind it. Not when Chris's cock was stretching him, pushing inside of his body.

"You want that," Chris murmured, bracing his hands on the mattress beside Darien's shoulders, edging his hips closer so that steely rod could slide in deeper. "You want my cock in your ass, don't you, magpie?"

"Oh, fuck, not that." Darien groaned, throwing his free arm over his eyes. It was too much to try and focus when his body was igniting from the inside out.



Chris chuckled, the rat! “Talk to me, magpie.” He stopped moving, that entire cock now fully encased in Darien’s body. “Tell me you love being filled with my cock.”

“Chris, damn it!”

Teeth bit at the forearm covering his eyes. “Say it.”

Snarling, Darien looped the arm up and around Chris’s neck, hauling the man’s face closer to his. He opened his eyes and locked gazes with Chris, immediately and totally serious. “I love being filled by your cock.” If Chris wanted to play that game, he was up for it. “I wanted it every night since I left New York.”

Chris blinked, and some of the heat faded from his eyes as he heard Darien’s words.

“Fuck me, Chris,” Darien demanded, not letting him look away. “Fuck me like I need it. Fuck me like only you can do.” *That scared him.* Darien saw it. He couldn’t exactly blame him. Darien heard what was in his own voice just as well as Chris did. But he wasn’t sorry, and he wouldn’t take it back. He rocked his hips, squeezing as best he knew how on Chris’s cock, forcing a heated moan out of that gorgeous, cultured mouth. “Fuck me.”

That did it. With a snarl, Chris switched positions, getting into a near crouch, gripping Darien’s hips. All pretense at gentleness was gone as he grimaced and set to pounding. It actually hurt some. Nothing that Darien would complain about, of course. The physical assault was awesome. It took him out of his own mind, distracted him from wondering at his own heated words, and drowned him in a lava flow of friction and flood.

He came before he really knew it, spurting onto his hand and belly. But Chris wasn’t done with him. Those hazel eyes were screwed shut, and that mouth was drawn into something between a snarl and a cry. Sweat dotted his forehead and chest, then gathered in rivulets that streamed down his neck and belly, some of it splattering on Darien’s chest. Darien spread both arms out on the mattress, grabbing hold of the raw silk of the bedspread and hanging on for dear life, getting off on the punishing rhythm and the fact that Chris had completely lost control.

“Fuck,” Chris snarled, his rhythm wavering. “Ah, fuck!” he cried, fingers bruising Darien’s sides. “Bloody. Fucking. Hell!” He thrust on each snapped word, hips lost in a feeling Darien knew from experience. Knowing Chris came that hard almost made Darien come again.

Chris faltered, falling forward over Darien, barely catching himself on his elbows. Darien brought his hands up to slide his palms over the sheen of sweat on Chris’s back.

“Darien...”

Darien glanced down, only seeing the top of Chris’s head. The gold sheen of Chris’s hair twinkled at him. “Yeah?”

“I...I...”

*What?*

But Chris shook his head. He collapsed forward, falling on Darien’s chest. The new angle of his hips slid his cock out of Darien. “I’m knackered.”

Darien chuckled, but his heart sank. *That’s not what you were going to say.* But he let it go, content for the moment to just hold the man struggling to regain his breath.

## Chapter Thirteen

*Crack!* Billiard balls scattered over the green felt of the table, but not one of them dropped into a hole.

“Crap!” Darien cursed, setting the butt of his cue stick on the hardwood floor between his feet.

Luc chuckled, chalking up the tip of his cue stick as he eyed the balls. “You just aren’t good at this.”

Darien snorted. It was true. He wasn’t very good at playing pool. He hadn’t caught on to the knack of the angles and crap. No amount of practice here in the game room at the Weiss had improved his game. But he did love cracking the balls together.

Luc leaned over the table, legs spread and long arms working as he carefully slid the cue stick over the backs of his knuckles.

“Mmmm, nice view.”

Reese’s words as he passed through the entrance to the room didn’t throw Luc off. The bastard just smiled as he pushed forward with the stick and made the balls crack again. He stood and kept watching the balls, even as Reese walked up to his side.

“Hey, tiger,” Luc murmured, lifting an arm to encircle the shorter man’s shoulders.

“Here.” Reese handed a glass of Jack and Coke to his lover.

The sight of Chris entering the room with Tyler distracted Darien from the sight of Luc and Reese. Tyler laughed at something Chris said as they both approached the pool table. Tyler stopped beside Johnnie, who sat on a high stool to the side, awaiting his turn at the game.

Chris rounded the table to Darien’s side, holding up a glass toward Darien. He smiled. “For you.”

Darien couldn’t help the goofy grin on his face. He felt...well, damn it, he felt special. Chris had gone to get him a drink. A small thing, sure. But he’d left the private room with Reese and Tyler, who had also gone to get their lovers’ drinks. He was here with Darien, with Darien’s best friends, sharing a quiet night playing a game. It was all so ordinary, but at the same time...

*Sap.* “Thanks.” He took the black Russian from Chris and sipped it.

“Your turn,” Luc announced.

Darien turned back to the game, realizing he hadn’t even heard Luc take a shot. Several shots, actually, judging by the few striped balls that remained on the table.

He grimaced, setting his drink on the counter behind him. Dutifully, he studied the table before him, but none of the straight shots he could actually make lay on the table.

“Word of advice?” Chris asked softly.

“Yes!”

“No!” Luc snapped, frowning. “You’re a ringer.”

Chris grinned, a shadow of the demonic expression he wore during sex, but it was still effective. “I’m merely suggesting a shot.”

Reese laughed, slapping Luc’s arm. “Oh, shut up. Darien probably can’t make the shot anyway.”

Darien flipped Reese off, which only made the blue-haired ass smirk at him.

“Fine.” Luc sighed, hitching up into one of the high stools as he sipped his drink.

Chris stepped up to the edge of the table and leaned over slightly. He briefly glanced over his shoulder at Darien, glasses shining in the harsh pool table light. “This one.”

Darien scowled, eyes scanning the table. “How the hell am I supposed to get *that* one?”

Chris stood straight, then crossed behind Darien, placing a hand on his lower back. “Lean over, take aim, and I’ll show you.”

Darien felt them. Luc, Johnnie, Reese, and Tyler didn’t make a sound, but they were watching. Their attention was palpable. Darien wondered if he was blushing as he bent over the table.

Chris bent over beside him, hand still on the small of his back as he pointed at the cue ball with the other. He calmly explained that hitting the ball at a certain angle would cause it to bounce and catch the ball he’d pointed out. Darien struggled to concentrate, distracted mightily by Chris’s warmth and the subtle scent of his cologne.

Chris drew back after he finished his explanation, his hand slowly slipping from Darien’s back as he stepped to the side. Darien remained bent over the table, eyes focused on the white ball with the tiny blue chalk smudges on it, far too aware of other, more intimate scenarios where Chris could have him bent over a table.

He took the shot before he collapsed on the table. With distracted amazement, he saw the cue almost hit the ball Chris had him aiming for.

A warm hand squeezed his shoulder. “Very good. You almost had it.”

He grinned.

Johnnie groaned. “Oh, God damn. Would you please just kiss him?”

Darien’s head snapped around, and his eyes bugged out at his friend.

Johnnie was looking at Chris, though. “Please? He’s dying for it, and I’d really love to see the proof myself.”

“You asshole!” Darien cried, hands gripping the cue stick. “What the fuck --?”

He barely heard Chris's chuckle underneath his own outburst. Chris's hand on his chin shut him up. Shocked, he let his head be turned.

Chris grinned at him. That wicked grin was back, but Darien didn't see it long, since Chris dipped down to seal their lips together.

Well, at least Darien managed not to let the whimper in his throat escape. Chris's thumb pressed his chin, and he opened up to Chris's tongue, sucking in the faint taste of Chris's martini before the taller man pulled out of the kiss.

Darien stared up at him, licking his lips, willing to forget that his friends were present if Chris would kiss him again.

Chris, however, aimed a smile up over Darien's shoulder. "Like that?"

Now Darien did blush. He could feel it heating his neck and cheeks. He ducked his head as Johnnie laughed.

"Oh, yeah. That was great."

"Well, damn," Luc murmured. Darien glanced up to see the tall redhead smirking, with arms crossed. "You were telling the truth."

Darien scowled. "I wouldn't lie."

Luc grinned. "Yeah, I know, but it's something to see the proof." He stood, grabbing his cue stick. He looked at Chris. "My condolences, man. This one's a handful."

Chris's hand closed gently over the back of Darien's neck. Gentle, but it made Darien shiver even so. "Of that, I am well aware, I assure you."

Later that night, his head pillowed on Chris's naked chest, Darien remembered to apologize.

"Sorry?" Chris asked.

Darien toyed with the fine layer of hair over Chris's left pec. "Johnnie and Luc can be real assholes sometimes."

"Oh, that." Chris chuckled. "Nothing to be sorry about. I quite enjoyed staking my claim." Amusement laced his voice.

Darien had thought the same thing, that the scene had been some kind of pissing match. Didn't make much sense, but then, they were his friends and probably just trying to look out for him. "Is that what you were doing? Staking your claim?"

Warm lips nuzzled Darien's forehead. "For the weekend, certainly."

Darien didn't like the phrasing, but he decided to let it go. It was enough, for the moment, that Chris had felt comfortable enough to kiss him in front of his friends. He wasn't going to push it.

## Chapter Fourteen

Darien tossed aside the towel he'd been rubbing on his hair and glanced at himself in the mirror. *Freshly fucked*. He grinned at himself. *Best way to go to a show*. Of course, he'd never played a show sitting on his stool when his ass had been thoroughly pounded a few times in the last several hours. Should be interesting. Chuckling, he wrapped another towel around his waist and went to the bedroom.

Chris lay back against the headboard, propped up on most of the pillows, watching the evening news. One arm was bent over his head and the other was draped over his bare chest, the remote tucked under his hand. One leg was bent, the other lying flat on the mattress, which sort of kind of put him in an open position. He turned his head to watch Darien, a grin growing on his lips. Did Darien imagine that they were still slightly swollen from kissing? From sucking? From...

Darien pointed at him. "Don't you start. I've got to get dressed."

Chris raised that damned eyebrow. "Start?"

Darien licked his lips. "Laying there all naked and reeking of sex. You're not making it easy for me not to pounce, y'know that?"

Chris pulled the sheets up over his hips. "There."



Darien snorted. "Like I don't know what's underneath there." He dropped the towel as he turned to his bag, which was open on a luggage rack near the closet.

"Mmmm, nice."

Without looking back, Darien wiggled his ass. "Yeah, yeah, you can't have any until later tonight."

"Cruel."

"Hey, I gave you as much as I could."

"Mmm, that you did." The feline rumble in Chris's voice made Darien's skin tingle.

*Down boy*, he thought at his cock as it started to take notice. He turned his attention to dressing and tried to ignore the man in the bed. White briefs, white jeans, and a white button-down with the sleeves torn off were his outfit for the night.

"All white?" Chris mused, reminding Darien of his presence.

Darien turned, but bent his head over buttoning his shirt rather than look at Chris. "Yeah. The White Room, get it?"

"Ah, yes. I've heard of it."

That made Darien look up. "You have?"

Chris half-smiled. "I've had reason to do some research on Heaven Sent lately."

Darien grinned.

"The White Room isn't the one Luc owns, is it?"

"No." He sat on the edge of the bed with his socks, setting his white sneakers on the carpet at his feet. "He and Reese own the White Tiger at the Weiss East in New York. The White Room belongs to Tyler and his two friends. Well, I guess Johnnie owns part of it now. Do you know the story about it? Our first gig here?"

"Yes, it seems to be Heaven Sent legend. It was that performance where Johnnie and Tyler met?"

“‘Legend.’ I like that.” He chuckled. “Tyler and his partner wrote our management, asking if we’d play there, and we thought ‘why not?’ It was as good a place as any to warm up for the tour, and it was different, y’know. Being the first band to play at a nightclub is kinda cool, yeah?” He tied his shoe. “Anyway, we get here and Tyler meets us and it’s like -- pow! -- Johnnie’s hooked. I mean, really hooked. He got one look at that curly blond hair and those big blue eyes, and he was a goner. He bored us with it *all* weekend. It was nauseating.” He smiled as he said it.

“It was love at first sight?”

“If you ask Johnnie, yeah. If you ask Tyler, no. ‘Course, Tyler thought he wasn’t gay at that point, so Johnnie says his opinion doesn’t count.”

“Tyler wasn’t gay?”

Darien heard the hesitation in Chris’s voice even though he was sure he wasn’t supposed to. He was getting rather good, he thought, at reading Chris’s moods. Well, he was normally pretty good at it with anyone, but it meant more to him with Chris.

*Which means...?*

“Nope. He’d even been engaged a few months before he met Johnnie. Or was it a year? Well, something like that. But I’ve talked with Edward, his best friend, and according to him, it was always kind of hard to tell which way Tyler swung.” He tied his second shoe and turned, bringing one leg up on the bed so he could face Chris. “But he’s completely into Johnnie now. So that proves that straight guys can be turned, right?” He said it with a smile, but both he and Chris knew there was more to it than that.

Chris’s eyes narrowed slightly. Without his glasses, he looked far less uptight. Or maybe it wasn’t the glasses and more the fact that he sprawled naked in sheets that smelled of sweat and sex. “Some men, perhaps.”

Darien crawled up the bed, careful not to touch as he positioned himself on hands and knees above Chris. All of a sudden, jeans felt really tight. "I like what we do," he said seriously, planting a soft kiss on Chris's lips. "I really do."

Chris's smile was forced, some deep conflicting thought behind it. "I'm glad."

Darien wanted to say more. He wanted to shake Chris and make him speak his thoughts, but that wasn't fair. Because he wasn't speaking all of his, was he? But right at that moment, he didn't have time. He needed to get downstairs and limber up for the gig.

He kissed Chris again, lingering a little this time, knowing this would have to last for hours. "I've got to go."

Chris reached up to cup Darien's jaw with both hands. "Yes." He pulled him in for a thorough kiss.

Darien pulled away reluctantly. "Go down to the front desk when you're ready. They know who you are. Someone will take you to the VIP section for the show."

Chris nodded, tongue darting out to quickly trace Darien's bottom lip. His hands slid down Darien's neck, over his shoulders, and rubbed lightly up and down his forearms, making the hair stand on end. All the while his eyes searched Darien's face. "All right."

Darien wanted to talk about that look, but he didn't have time. Not now. Maybe tonight. They kissed again, and then Darien sighed, slowly crawling backward off the bed. "I've got to do the mingling thing after the gig," He grinned as he stood. "Good news is, the dancing at the White Room is killer. Johnnie hired an awesome DJ. You dance?"

Chris slid a hand down his chest, coming to a stop low on his belly. Darien wasn't sure he was even aware of doing it. "Not in a long while."

"I'll bet you're good." Darien forced himself to step away.

"I've held my own in the past."

Darien laughed, forcing levity when what he really wanted to do was rip off his clothes and follow that hand's suggestion down underneath the sheet to what he knew lay beneath. "There you go again, sounding stuffy." He stopped at the doorway. "See you later."

Chris nodded. "Later, yes."

"Tyler! How has your life changed since you met Johnnie?"

Darien barely held in a giggle as he looked over at Tyler's wide-eyed gape.

"Where do I begin?" Tyler finally said, holding out his hands helplessly.

Standing beside his lover, arm slung possessively around his shoulders, Johnnie leaned in to kiss Tyler's cheek. "His life sure hasn't been the same."

Tyler snorted. "Now *that's* for sure."

Flashbulbs continually went off, but Darien took it in stride like his friends. This was part of what they did. He stood with Johnnie, Tyler, Luc, Reese, Brent, and Hell and smiled like he was supposed to. The performance had gone great. They'd cleaned up and changed into their second all-white outfits for the night, and now the press was getting their piece of Heaven Sent before everyone joined the invitation-only party in the main area of the White Room.

*Where's Chris?* Darien wondered, keeping his smile as his eyes darted through the room behind the dozen or so reporters that had the band cornered. He'd been there. Darien had talked to him briefly before he'd been dragged away for this mini-press conference. He'd complimented the performance, and he seemed to really *mean* it, which was very cool. Darien wouldn't have pegged Chris for someone who liked their music, but then, he wouldn't have pegged Chris for a Shakespearean-trained actor, either. And damn it, he'd forgotten to ask about that earlier!

But he wasn't there now. Darien was sure of it. *Where'd he go?*

Luc elbowed him in the gut to get his attention.

“What?”

Luc gestured with his chin, and Darien turned to face a female reporter who was eyeing him expectantly.

“Oh, sorry, what was the question?”

She giggled. “I asked if you’ve started dating again since your divorce?”

He sighed and put on the look that he and Gretchen had agreed on. “Not just yet.”

The reporter showed sympathy, although who knew if it was real or not. “Are you and your ex-wife still on speaking terms?”

“Nicole and I are great; we just weren’t great together.” He smiled, *really* not liking this woman. But they’d expected the questions, and this was the first real time any press had access to him since the divorce.

“So there’s hope for the women of the world?” she asked coyly.

He laughed. “Well, sure.” When what he was really thinking was “Not likely.”

Another reporter barged in and asked when the next album was going to be released, and Darien happily turned to Luc or Johnnie to answer. Soon after that, the questions stopped and there were a few minutes of pictures. Then he was free to mingle. The nasty woman reporter tried to catch him, but he managed to evade her with Gretchen’s help. He ended up chatting with a reporter from a local magazine.

Still no Chris.

Luc was standing near the doorway, talking to tall, skinny guy with a small recorder. The bassist’s arm was wrapped around Reese’s shoulders, holding his shorter lover against his chest. Reese took it in stride, leaning back against Luc as he talked to a reporter on their other side. So easy. They touched each other like it was just natural.

Darien wanted that. He’d sort of had it with Nicole. They’d touched easily. But not like *that*. Not like it was necessary.

He parted ways with the first reporter and found Edward, Tyler's friend. He liked Edward, and they spent a few minutes catching up.

Then Tyler stepped up. "Sorry, Darien, but Edward has announcements to make in the main room."

Edward checked his watch. "Oh, shit, I do. See ya, Darien."

"Yeah, later." He smiled at Tyler. "Everything okay?"

"Crazed, hectic, and out of control. Yeah, everything's okay." They laughed. Tyler reached out to squeeze his arm. "Everything okay with you?"

"Yeah, sure."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Tyler glanced around. They were far enough away from everyone else so that when he leaned in, no one else could hear. "Where's Chris?"

Darien grimaced. "I don't know."

"He did show up?"

"Oh, yeah, he's here. He's just not *here* here. I don't know where he went off to."

"You need help finding him?"

Darien snorted. "Yeah, right. You're not using me as an excuse to get out of talking to more press."

Tyler opened his eyes wide, but the innocence was feigned. "What do you mean?"

Darien shook his head. "Don't even try it."

Tyler grimaced. "Gee. Thanks, buddy." He looked up. "Looks like it's time to join the crowd."

Darien laughed and slapped Tyler's shoulder. "Buck up, Tyler. It's not so bad."

"I've told you that you're insane, right? You and the rest of the members of your band."

“Quit with the small talk, ladies,” Johnnie said, appearing behind Tyler. He nudged his lover forward, urging him to follow the people who were filing out of the door. “Let’s go, blondie.”

“Don’t rush me.”

Smiling, Darien left them to their playful bickering. He wanted that, too. Didn’t he kind of have that with Chris? When they were alone?

And where the hell *was* Chris?!

Darien wanted to go look for him, but there were a few hundred people filling the main room, not to mention the balconies. So he settled for doing the mingling thing while keeping a watch to see if he saw Chris. Although, he wasn’t sure what he’d do if he found him. He couldn’t jump him, couldn’t kiss him, couldn’t hold him, and just that frustration alone was getting in the way of his ability to carry on a conversation.

So he didn’t fight when three women dragged him onto the dance floor. At least there all he had to do was move. Besides, dancing would help blow off a little steam. He was surrounded. Not surprising. Normally, it’s what he cultivated. He had about six of them around him, some he’d met before and some were new. None of them were especially close, and none of them had shared his bed before. Which was a relief, actually. Made it easier to keep them at bay, although he tried not to make it seem that way. Had to keep up appearances, right?

He spun one of his partners around so that her plump little ass fit into the curve of his groin. Laughing over her shoulder, he looked up.

And saw Chris. Dancing not twelve feet away from him. *Oh, yeah, he can dance!* Darien was kind of surprised to see Chris holding his own on the crowded floor. He moved easily with the music, just a little stiff around the edges. Nothing that made it awful, just made him look a little bit off. Darien thought it was endearing. Made him compare it to how smooth Chris moved during sex.

*You've got it bad*, he told himself, tearing his gaze away from Chris as he released the hot little number in his arms.

But she didn't go away. She turned and wound her arms around his waist as the pulsing beat of song around them morphed into a slower thump. Going with it, he slid an arm around her shoulders and drew her close. It was nice, but he wondered what it'd be like to dance with Chris. Different, surely, not the least of which because Chris was taller than him.

He let his gaze drift to the side.

And froze.

Chris was dancing. With a guy.

Well, of course he was dancing with a guy. He was gay. He wouldn't dance with a woman. Well, gay men danced with women, sure, but...No, hey, not the point! The point was that Chris was holding another *man* close when Darien wasn't even twenty feet away from him.

"Darien?"

He heard the plush female in his arms, but he couldn't take his eyes off Chris's hand, pinkie ring glinting where his hand was spread over the black-shirted back of the man in his arms.

*No!*

"Sorry, sweetheart," he murmured, brushing a kiss across the woman's brow. "I've got to talk to someone right now."

"But..." The rest of whatever she said was swallowed in the music as he stalked away.

He grabbed the wrist of the hand with the pinkie ring and yanked.

Chris faced him, completely unsurprised to find Darien there. Was that a challenge in his eyes. *Oh, no way!*

"I need to talk to you," Darien ground out.



“Right now?”

*No way!* He turned to the guy who’d been dancing with Chris. “Excuse us.”

The guy stammered a reply, but again Darien didn’t hear. Hand still clamped around Chris’s wrist, he led the way off the dance floor and through the crowd to the guarded back entrance.

“Let go,” Chris muttered, flanking him, shaking his imprisoned arm.

“No.” It was exceedingly important that he didn’t let go. That he didn’t think too much about what he was doing. He just had to get Chris out of the crowd and in private.

They reached one of the dressing rooms, which was thankfully empty. Only then did Darien release Chris’s arm as he turned to close the door.

“What was that all about?” Chris asked, insufferably calm. He looked way too good in a loose black button-down and charcoal slacks. His hair was arranged just so, and his glasses failed to hide the fire in his eyes. Good, he was pissed, too.

“You know what it was about.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“You were dancing with a guy.”

There went the eyebrow. “You were dancing with a woman.”

“That didn’t mean anything.”

“Oh?”

He’d hoped that Chris would come back with an answering “it didn’t mean anything” about his dance. That he didn’t just pissed Darien off. “Of course not.”

“Where does ‘of course’ come from?” Heat was in Chris’s eyes, but his body language and voice were as cool as ever. “You’re straight. Why shouldn’t I believe it could mean something?”

*“You were the one who didn’t want anyone to know about us!”*

“Which doesn’t mean I particularly want to watch you dance with a woman.”

“It was just dancing!”

“For now, yes.”

“What the fuck? Do you think I was going to take her up to the room and fuck her while you were down here?”

“Perhaps you wouldn’t have taken her to the room.” He glanced at their surroundings, pointedly at the couch. “I’m sure you know plenty of private places in this hotel.”

“Fuck you! Is that what you think of me?”

“Quite honestly, I don’t know what to think of you.”

“Care to explain that?”

“Certainly. Only a few months ago, you were a married man. Before that, you were an acknowledged playboy, having slept with God knows how many women.”

Darien took exception to the word “playboy,” but he let it go for the moment.

Chris was in full lawyer mode. “Then you seduce me because you’re curious about sleeping with a man. I will admit to being flattered and star-struck. You are both an amazingly attractive man as well as a famous one. I thought this would be a one-, maybe two-time, instance, after which you would go back to your merrily heterosexual life. But first you spend a weekend with me; then you invite me here, claiming to have missed me.”

“I did miss you.”

“Why? I’m nothing to you but an experiment.”

“That’s not true. I *told* you it wasn’t like that!”

“You said we were friends. That we could do it again. Which makes me a convenient fuck buddy when you get the urge to have a cock up your ass. Which is fine, but you can’t be jealous of a fuck buddy.”

Darien shook his head. “You’ve got it all wrong.”

“Do I? Then enlighten me. What are we doing?”

*Ah, crap, this is getting serious.* Darien paced away from Chris, toward the battered couch up against one wall. “I wouldn’t sleep with someone else when I’m with you. No matter what you think of me, I don’t do that.”

“Darien, you’re not *with* me.”

“You’re here this weekend because of me.”

“Yes. I know. And I still don’t fully understand why.”

“Fine.” Darien balled his fists together, staring at the colorful splotches in the framed print mounted on the wall before him. “I like you,” he told it, trying to sense the man behind him without turning. “I like you a lot.”

No answer. No hint of movement.

He took a deep breath and turned. “I think I’m falling in love with you.”

Chris’s reaction was far from anything he could have hoped for. Hazel eyes went saucer-wide, and he took a step back, one hand coming up waist-high as though to ward Darien off. “No.”

“Yeah. I think so.”

“No.” It was amazing Chris’s glasses didn’t fly off when he shook his head so hard. “No, you can’t mean that.”

“Why the hell not? I think about you all the time. I see things and I want you to see them. I laugh at a joke and I wonder if you think it’s funny. I wasn’t even tempted to sleep with anyone else when I was away from you. I just want to *touch* you when we’re standing near each other.” He reached out.

Chris stepped away, turning from him. “Stop.”

“Why? Why’s that so bad?”

“Why?!”

Darien flinched at the rage in Chris's voice when he turned back.

"Why?" Chris's hands clawed into fists, a visible indication of an anger out of control. "Why should I believe anything you say? You don't know anything about relationships."

"I --"

"No! You got married on a *whim*. I'd be willing to wager that your seven-month marriage is the longest romantic relationship you've experienced in your short lifetime. You have women -- *and* men -- falling at your feet, begging to share your bed. Why should I believe that you want me?" He laughed mirthlessly. "You don't even have a proper place of residence! You have enough money to support a woman who you don't even love without it hurting at all. You do things just on the spur of the moment. How do I know this isn't just another in a long series of games that you stop and discard?"

Darien's own rage melted in the face of this unreasoning anger rolling off Chris. "Getting married was a mistake," he said carefully. "I've admitted that. But that doesn't mean --"

"Don't. Just, don't."

"But, Chris --"

"No." Chris took a deep breath, obviously trying to rein in his emotions. It wasn't working much. "Even if you believe what you say now, there's no guarantee you'll mean it later."

"Chris, I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it."

"You mean it now, maybe, and I should be flattered by that."

"Flattered? Jesus, Chris, I just told you that I love you."

"And just how many people have you told that to?"

"Hey, I don't go around telling everyone I love them."

"Why not? You could. And you could bloody well get away with it."

"This isn't about me, is it? You don't want to believe me. You're scared."

Chris stared at him, wide-eyed. Nothing physical stood between them, but it was like the few paces between them were filled with an impassable mountain. "Yes. I'm scared. I've been with someone like you before. I *won't* go through it again."

"I'm not Nathan."

Chris barked out a sharp laugh. "Not Nathan."

"I'm certainly not Simon."

Judging from the second harsh laugh and the scraping of the hand across his jaw, Darien figured that was the one.

"Listen, Chris, I'm not that guy. I wouldn't use you like that."

"What do you know about it?"

"Some. I talked to Hell." He took a step toward Chris. "Please listen to me. I'm not Simon."

Chris shook his head, backing up toward the door. "Perhaps not." He stared at the floor. "But I can't take that chance."

Those words injected ice into Darien's veins. He took another step forward. "Chris..."

Chris shook his head and turned, grabbing the doorknob. "No. I can't do this."

Darien caught his arm as he opened the door. "Chris, don't leave."

The taller man yanked his arm free, then crossed the threshold. "I'm sorry, Darien."

"Chris!" He followed into the hall.

"No, damn it. Stay away."

"But --"

Chris whirled, eyes wild. "Darien, stay the fuck away, or I swear to God I will deck you."

Darien froze, shocked. "Don't do this."

Chris met his gaze. Darien thought he saw something melting, but then the cool exterior was back. “Goodbye, Darien.”

He turned, and Darien could only watch his back as he disappeared through the far door.

## Chapter Fifteen

Hell found him a few hours later at the beach house. Darien had left the club without saying a word to anyone, but the driver worked for the hotel, so he had probably called back to notify the powers that be of Darien's whereabouts.

Darien sat at the open window, arms crossed on the sill, chin propped on the backs of his hands, watching the stars blink. He only knew it was Hell when the man pulled up a chair and sat beside him. The lavender hair was kind of hard to miss.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah." He heard movement behind him, signaling the presence of another, but he couldn't be bothered to turn.

Brent appeared on his other side, crossing his arms and leaning against the wall beside the window. "What happened?"

"He left." Darien was surprisingly calm about this. He'd had a little bit of a tantrum on the front lawn of the beach house when he'd arrived. There were a few bushes that had taken the brunt of his rage. But now everything was level. His thoughts were even clear. He wondered if he was in shock. Or maybe Chris was right and what he'd felt wasn't love.

How were you supposed to know?

“He went to the airport,” Hell said.

Darien startled, glancing at Hell. But then, it made sense, didn’t it? Why would Chris stick around? He sighed and put his chin back on his hands. “That figures.”

“Talk, man,” Brent prompted. “What happened?”

“I told him I loved him. He didn’t take it well.”

He heard Hell’s little groan.

“I know, I know. I said I’d take it slow. I meant to. But he was dancing with this guy, and I just...” He shook his head. “I lost my head.”

“It’s not like you to get jealous,” Brent pointed out.

“I know that.”

“You really think you’re in love?”

He sat back, hooking his fingers around the windowsill. “I think so.” He turned to look at Brent. “How do you know?”

Brent’s lips curved into that self-deprecating smile of his. He glanced past Darien at Hell. “Don’t look at me. I had to get beaten over the head to admit it.”

“Yeah, but you *did* admit it.” He glanced at Hell, then back. “Both of you. How do you *know*? How does anyone know?”

“I don’t think that’s anything we can answer for you, buddy,” Brent admitted.

“I know.” He sighed. “I *think* I love him. Really, I do. But maybe he’s right. Maybe I’m not capable of it.”

“What? He said that?”

Was it wrong that Brent’s instant anger warmed his heart a little? Well, he wouldn’t tell anyone. “Sorta. He pointed out a bunch of things, all true, that kind of suggest it.”

“Like what?”

Darien shrugged. “I got married on a whim.”



“People get married for all the wrong reasons. You knew then that you didn’t love her.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. You were just too boneheaded to admit it.”

“I’ve never had a long-time relationship.”

“So? When you’ve got the kind of life we have, it’s damn rough to have any kind of relationship.”

“I don’t own a home.”

“Oh, please, that’s just scraping for reasons. You’ll get one when you need one. You’ve been traveling solid for, like, seven years. I’ve thought about getting rid of my two places.”

“Oh?” Hell asked.

Brent flushed. “Yeah, I said ‘thought about.’”

Darien chuckled. “See? You guys...I can tell you’re in love. I could tell before dickwad here admitted it.”

“Hey!”

Darien smiled up at Brent, then sobered, shaking his head. “Johnnie and Tyler, Luc and Reese. You all have it. I never have. I *think* I started to with Chris. It feels right.”

“So go after him.”

“No.” This from Hell. “I know Chris. I saw him before he left.” Hell’s cherub face was full of sympathy. “Yes. You’ve frightened him.”

“I frightened him? He scared the hell out of me.”

Hell nodded. “You have frightened him. Which leads me to believe that he *does* feel for you. Very much.”

He stared hard into violet eyes. “What do you mean?”

“He’s had boyfriends confess love in the past, but he hasn’t reacted this badly to any except Simon.”

“You mean, you think he loves me?”

“I think he cares for you very much. He wouldn’t be frightened if he didn’t.”

Hope flared, then died. “Yeah, well, even if he does, he won’t talk to me.”

“Not tonight. Maybe not tomorrow. But he’s going to calm down eventually,” Brent pointed out.

Hell nodded. “Chris is a man of reason. He’s not accustomed to strong emotions. Once he calms down, you should try and talk to him again.”

Darien pushed a breath through his lips. “Yeah. And have him blow up at me again.”

“Well,” Brent said, pausing until Darien turned to face him. He arched a brow, and it was a little bit too much like Chris’s for comfort. “Is it worth it?”

## Chapter Sixteen

For two weeks, Darien called at least once a day. He left rambling messages on Chris's voicemail and waited for some kind of reaction, even if it was Chris telling him to shut the hell up.

He'd already made flight arrangements to head to New York at the end of the third week, when Chris finally picked up.

"Darien. Stop."

"Hey, Chris." It was nearly nine at night in New York, so he didn't worry that Chris had anyone with him. He'd *better* not have anyone with him.

"Stop calling."

"Can't do that."

Chris sighed. "Darien..."

"I love you."

Pause. "Stop saying that."

"Why? It's true."

"For now, perhaps."

“For always.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“What can I do to convince you?”

“I don’t know.”

Darien sat back, staring at the wall above the mirrored dresser in his room at the beach house. An idea that had started to take root in his head the previous week. Hearing Chris’s voice helped make it grow.

“Darien, please stop calling. This is not going to work out between us. We’re far too different.”

The trick was to prove Chris wrong, and his new idea just might do it.

“Darien?”

“Yeah, okay. You’re right.”

“I...am?”

“Yeah. It won’t work like this. You can’t let yourself trust me.”

“Darien...”

“And any good relationship has to have trust. I trust you, but that doesn’t matter, does it?”

“Darien...”

“Okay. I’ll stop calling.” His heart beat fast. He knew what he sounded like. He knew Chris heard exactly the type of flippant response he expected from Darien. He was taking a chance, but his gut told him he was walking the right path.

“You will.”

“Yep. I thought I could make you see it, but I can’t. So I’ll stop.”

Pause. “Thank you.”

“No problem.” He swallowed over the nervous lump in his throat. “Hey, Chris?”

“Yes?”

“For the record, I *can* be trusted. I’ve never had a bad breakup with anyone. Even Nicole. Until you.”

He hit the button on his cell to end the call.

*Oh, shit, was that a mistake?* He stared at the number pad on his cell, dying to call back and explain himself. But that wouldn’t work. Chris was dead set on not listening to him.

## Chapter Seventeen

*Faith*

*That I'll hold you*

*Faith*

*That I'll need you*

*Faith*

*That I'll be there when you need me to be there*

*And it takes faith to know I'm always by your side*

Darien twirled a drumstick through his fingers as he sat on the floor, back to the wall, letting the music wash over him.

It was a rough recording of a brand-new song. It wasn't perfect by any means. The song would go through a number of changes before they went into the studio and laid down the tracks, but it clearly had a solid foundation to build on.

When the music faded away, Darien opened his eyes.

They were all staring at him. Hell stood beside his keyboards. Brent sat on a stool over the by the recording console, his favorite working guitar cradled in his lap. Luc was beside him on a straight-backed chair, bass guitar face-up on his thighs. Johnnie sat cross-legged on the floor with Darien, facing him.

They were waiting.

Darien smiled and nodded. "I like it."

Their smiles followed his.

Johnnie leaned forward to pat his knee. "You think it'll work?"

Darien shrugged. "Who knows? But I gotta try."

Johnnie nodded. "Good." He pushed gracefully to his feet, holding a hand out to help Darien up. "When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow."

Raw guitar notes drifted in the air. "We're going to change that chorus when you get back, y'know? Not the words."

Darien smiled. "Yeah, I figured you weren't happy with that. It's cool."

"Hey, Hell." Johnnie left him to wander over to the keyboards. They started muttering together.

At the table, Brent was fiddling with the recording console and Luc was pulling out smokes for both of them.

These were his friends, and he'd never felt closer to them.

"Thanks, guys."

They all stopped, looking at him again.

He knew he was being sappy, but he had to say something. "You guys are the best. You didn't even blink an eye when I asked you to do this."

Johnnie chuckled. "It's not every day you hand me lyrics like that. Made my job easier." Johnnie was the main lyricist, sometimes with contributions from Brent. But he hadn't protested at all when Darien had handed them the sheet of paper the other day.

Brent nodded. "Yeah. This is going to be a good one." They all contributed, but there was no doubt that Brent actually ran the game when it came to the music. But he, too, had just followed Darien's lead, listening as Darien used his rough piano skills on one of Hell's keyboards to illustrate the melody in his head.

Darien knew they'd improve on his original thought, and they had. They would continue to do so. They didn't even have a studio date for any real recording, and there was no doubt the song would go through many changes before the final cut.

But Darien had a song now. Something tangible made from an idea in his head. His friends had made it possible.

He swallowed over a sudden lump in his throat. "You guys gave me all sorts of shit about Nicole," he told the chair beside him, unable to look at any of them. "Why's it different now?"

Silence. Then a chair scraped and soft footfalls came toward him.

Luc slid an arm around his shoulders. "You didn't talk about her like you talk about Chris."

"You didn't write a song about her," Johnnie added from where he still stood at the keyboard rack.

"You don't think I'm just obsessed?" Darien asked, chest tight. Because it was possible. It was possible that he was making more of this than it really was, because it was different.

"Yeah, you're obsessed," Luc answered.

Darien's heart fell.

Luc chuckled, squeezing his shoulders. "But, personally, I think it's the kind of obsession that goes with love."



Darien looked up at him. “Yeah?”

Luc grinned. “Yeah. God knows I’m obsessed with Reese.”

“True.”

Luc’s arm slid higher, wrapping around his throat to pull him in for a joking chokehold. “Go with your heart, nimrod.”

“All right,” he laughed, pushing at Luc. “Let go, asshole.”

## Chapter Eighteen

A car door shut outside. Darien looked up from his seat on the staircase, watching the front door. Afternoon sunlight made the frosted glass of the three little windowpanes in the door shine.

Footsteps on the covered porch outside, then a knock.

“It’s open.”

The knob turned and the door swung inward. Chris stepped inside.

*God, he looks good.* Dressed in a charcoal-gray suit with a pale blue shirt, he looked every inch the lawyer. He’d probably come straight from the office. His hair needed a trim, the bangs actually touching the rims of his glasses. It had been three months since that fateful night at the Weiss, and Darien hadn’t seen him once. The sight of him now made Darien’s heart swell in his throat.

Chris didn’t see him immediately, casting his gaze around the empty entryway, no doubt seeing the equally empty living room to his right. No furniture in sight. Then he looked up the gold carpet of the dark wood staircase to finally find Darien sitting on the top step of the first flight of steps.

Darien smiled. “Hi, Chris.”

Chris took an audible breath. "Hello, Darien."

Darien kept his hands folded between his bent knees. "You like the house?"

Chris clutched something in his hand. A CD case. "It's lovely."

"It's mine."

"I know."

"Richard talked to you?"

"Yes."

Good. He'd worked with Chris's realtor friend for a reason, hoping he'd contact Chris even though Darien hadn't mentioned the lawyer other than to say who'd recommended him.

"Congratulations." Chris standing so very still. He looked nervous, although you'd have to know him to see it.

Darien saw it. Breathing over his own rapid heartbeat, he nodded toward the case in Chris's hand. "You got the song."

Chris held it up, glancing at it. "Yes."

"Did you like it?"

Chris opened his mouth twice before he finally got out words. "It's beautiful."

Darien stood. "It's still rough, but I think it came out okay. It was my first shot at lyrics."

"You wrote the lyrics?"

He'd made sure to send a hard copy of the lyrics with the CD, just in case Chris missed hearing them exactly. "Yep. And I meant every word."

Chris's panicked look stopped Darien halfway down the staircase. "Why?"

"I love you."

Chris closed his eyes, shaking his head. "No."

“Yeah. I do.”

Chris glanced at the empty space around them. His arm curled into his chest, clutching the CD like a young child might clutch a favored toy. “You bought a house.”

Darien slowly descended the last few steps. “Yep.”

“Because I accused you of not having a home.”

Darien shrugged. “Wasn’t that I was *against* it. Just didn’t have a compelling reason before.”

Chris scowled. “And proving me wrong is a compelling reason?”

Darien scowled right back. “It is when you’re using it to keep us apart.”

A helpless look passed over Chris’s handsome face. He shook his head, staring at Darien. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because I have to. I have to get you back.”

“You never had me.”

“Not true. I think I did. I think I had you until you got scared and backed away.”

“This won’t work.”

“This has to work. I love you.”

“Stop.”

“No. I love you, and I’m pretty damn sure that you love me.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Not completely, but I’ve got a sneaking suspicion.”

“And why is that?”

“If you didn’t love me, you wouldn’t be scared to talk to me.”

“I’m not scared.”

Darien took a few steps closer. “If you’re not scared, then let me touch you.”

Chris stepped back. Did he realize he did it? “What?”

"Let me touch you. Let me kiss you. If you can convince me that you don't care about me, I'll leave you alone."

"Darien, stop!" Chris's hand came up, palm out toward Darien.

Darien stopped. For the moment. "See?"

"See what?"

"You love me."

"You're talking nonsense."

"Why'd you come today?"

"You...I wanted..."

"You wanted to see me."

"We needed to get this settled once and for all."

Darien took another step. "You're absolutely right. Say you don't love me."

"This is absurd." Chris's back came up against the wall beside the door.

"Say it."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because you need to stop fighting this. I need you with me."

"Whatever for?"

"Everything. I want you in my life."

"Until you find someone better."

"There's no one better. Not for me."

"You hardly know me."

"I know enough."

"You know the sex."

"It's more than the sex."

“You don’t know that.”

“Prove me wrong. Give us a chance.”

“I --” Chris shook his head, eyes wide as he stared at Darien. “No. I can’t do this.” He spun, reaching for the doorknob.

“Chris!” Darien grabbed his arm, spinning him and slamming him back up against the wall.

The CD case flew from Chris’s grip, clattering to the floor. The look of fear and longing on Chris’s face broke Darien’s heart.

Darien braced his hands on Chris’s shoulders, pinning him to the wall. “Stop being scared. I’m not Simon. I’m not going to leave you.”

The icy demeanor cracked. “Stop.”

“I want you. I *need* you. I want to tell the world. Just tell me I can.”

Chris’s eyes shut, his face crumpling. “Don’t.” His knees gave out, and he was suddenly a heavy weight against Darien’s arms.

“Chris, please. I don’t say the words lightly. Please believe me.” He eased up, letting Chris slide to the floor, following him down. “You have to believe me a little; otherwise you wouldn’t have come.” Chris’s legs slid flat across the hardwood flooring, and Darien straddled them. He cupped that wonderful, sharp-angled face and kissed the tear that started to roll down one defined cheek. “I love you.”

“Darien.” Hands gripped high on his thighs.

He kissed Chris’s jaw. “I love you.”

“God.”

He held Chris’s head, forcing the man to look at him. The glasses were slightly askew, and tears rolled down those cheeks. The hazel eyes bored into his, challenging. Darien smiled, putting everything he felt for this man into his eyes. “I love you.”

“God help me.” Chris’s gaze darted back and forth from one of Darien’s eyes to the other. Searching. Searching hard. “I --” He shook his head. “I can’t say that.”

Darien smiled, taking heart in the pure emotion showing in Chris’s face. “You don’t have to say those words. Just don’t say no. Give us a chance. That’s all I’m asking.” He thumbed away a tear that tracked one cheek.

The bite of Chris’s fingers in his thighs hurt, but it was a good thing. Chris snarled faintly. “This had better be real.”

Darien kissed him, tasting the salt of his tears. “It’s real.”

“Kiss me.”

*With pleasure.* He would have said the words, but he figured the kissing would do the trick. Chris’s mouth opened to his, tongue stabbing between his lips. Eagerly, he sucked it in, drinking in the taste he’d missed so much. One of Chris’s hands speared in the hair at his nape, crushing his lips closer. There might have been blood from teeth digging into gums, but Darien didn’t care. That reckless, out-of-control thing was taking over Chris, and Darien was going to feed it as much as he could.

Chris’s glasses bit into Darien’s cheek. With a growl, Chris pulled away and snatched them off, then yanked him back.

“We gonna do it here?” Darien asked, words muffled against Chris’s lips.

A hand slid into the back of Darien’s jeans as far as it would go, which wasn’t far, but it was enough for fingers to dig into one cheek of his ass. “You mind?”

“Nope. I’m yours wherever you want me.” He paused for Chris’s groan. “But the lube’s upstairs.”

A little bit of reason came back into Chris’s eyes. The hand came out of Darien’s jeans and slapped his ass. “Up.”

“Yes, sir.” Darien jumped to his feet. He held out a hand to help Chris up.

Some of the heat faded as Chris stood, worry clouding over his face.

Darien hooked a hand around the back of his neck and pulled his face close so that their foreheads touched. “I love you. This is real. Must fuck me now. *Stop. Thinking.*”

Chris smiled. A real smile. “Yes. Upstairs.”

Nodding, Darien took Chris’s hand and led the way up the stairs. He tried not to recall the disastrous results of the last time he’d dragged Chris off. *No, not disastrous. If that hadn’t happened, you wouldn’t be here.* Well, probably.

Who cared?

They reached the bedroom with its brand-new California king. Bed, nightstand, and lamp were the only furnishings so far in the big room. Darien sat and bent to pull off his boots. The bottle of lube he’d placed on the mattress rolled toward him.

“You have furniture here.”

He glanced up. At least Chris was undressing. The jacket was gone, and those gorgeous fingers were unbuttoning the blue shirt.

“Yeah.”

“Presumptuous.”

“Hey. I figured if I got you up here, sex was happening.”

Chris chuckled.

*Oh, thank God!*

“Good thinking, magpie.”

Tossing away his second boot, Darien groaned. “Oh, geez, not that. You’re not calling me that.”

The shirt was all unbuttoned, open to reveal a swathe of smooth chest and belly. Calmly, Chris unbuttoned one wrist cuff. “It’s an apt name for you.”

Darien tugged off his polo. “Is not.”

“It is.”



Darien grumbled, standing so he could take off his pants. "You're just saying that to piss me off."

"No."

Hands on his jeans, he froze when Chris's hand came up to splay across his bare chest. The cuff at his wrist was open, dangling to show off his slim wrist. *God, he's beautiful.* He looked up into serious hazel eyes.

"I don't say it piss you off."

There was more to this than just the name. "Okay."

The hand came up to cup his jaw. "That's *my* name for you. Mine alone."

Warmth spread over Darien's skin, making him tremble. "Yeah. Okay."

"Are you sure about this?"

"I've never been more sure of anything. Really."

"I want to trust you."

Darien reached out and slid an arm around Chris's waist. The other went around his neck, pulling him down. "You can trust me, Chris. I promise."

Time slowed as they kissed, lips fused and tongues twining in a dance of new knowledge and new feeling. They had all the time in the world to simply meld, chest to chest, lip to lip, soul to soul.

Gradually, without stopping the kiss, Chris nudged Darien's jeans and briefs down farther to his thighs. This freed Darien's aching cock, and Chris wrapped those wonderful fingers around it and pulled.

Darien groaned, head tilting back. Chris nipped his bottom lip, his chin. "Beautiful," he murmured, other hand flat on Darien's lower back to keep him upright. "All mine?"

"All yours," Darien sighed without hesitation.

Chris released him and pushed him back on the mattress. He went willingly since he didn't think his knees were going to hold much longer, despite Chris's support. He lay back as Chris took hold of his jeans and underwear and got them the rest of the way off. Moving as though he had all the time in the world, Chris unbuckled his belt and slid his own slacks and underwear off. He must have gotten his shoes off when Darien wasn't paying attention. When he straightened, his hard, leaking cock gave lie to the calm in Chris's demeanor.

Darien sat up, reaching, but Chris stopped him.

"Not this time. If you touch me, I'll go, and I want to be inside you."

Darien melted back onto his elbows. "Kay."

"Condoms."

"Don't need them."

"What?"

"I haven't had sex since you."

Chris stared at him. "No?"

"No. I'm serious, Chris. I don't want anyone but you."

Chris swallowed. "How can you be sure I haven't?"

Moment of truth. He'd thought about this, but there wasn't anything he could do about it except go on. "I guess I can't. Have you?"

"No."

Darien smiled. "We're good, then."

"Why should you trust me?"

"Did I mention I love you?"

Chris shut his eyes. "Darien, I..."

"Look. Either we do this love thing, or we don't. I love you. I'm willing to trust you. Seems our only problem is whether you're willing to trust me."

Which, of course, was really it. He watched that dawn on Chris. Darien had figured out that it scared him. He hoped against all hope that Chris was willing to overcome that for him. With him.

After a very long moment, Chris nodded. "I trust you."

"Sweet." Darien fell back and drew up his knees, providing Chris with an excellent view of his hole. "On with the barebacking."

Chris laughed. So, okay, if Darien wasn't good for anything else, he could at least make the man laugh.

Then that dark demon grin grew, and Darien recalled that he was good for something else. Getting royally and thoroughly fucked.

*Oh, yeah!*

He picked up the lube bottle and held it out. Chris took it, but set it back down on the mattress. Darien frowned, but said nothing as Chris climbed up on the mattress between his thighs. Obviously, he had something in mind. When Chris grabbed his thighs and pushed them up toward his chest, effectively raising Darien's ass off the mattress, he figured it out.

"Oh, *fuck* yeah!" he cried as Chris leaned in and swiped his tongue over Darien's very exposed hole.

"That's it, magpie," Chris crooned, shifting to get Darien right where he wanted him. "Talk to me. Tell me you missed my tongue in your ass."

"Oh, man." Tongue played around rim. "Oh, yeah, Chris. Oh, *God*, I missed this." Tongue prodded, stiffened, poking his opening as far as it would go. Darien gripped the spread beneath him, trying to balance in this completely vulnerable position. His cock oozed precum down onto his chest. He babbled on, encouraging Chris, pleading with him.

Chris bit into his thigh, then backed away. He snatched up the lube and poured some in his palm. "Turn over."

Darien whimpered, but obeyed. He'd kind of wanted it face-to-face, but he had to admit that it felt better doggy-style. Chris got in deeper that way.

He was barely in place before Chris's lube-wet hands grabbed his ass, parting his cheeks. No fingers, just the blunt tip of his cock smearing lube with the saliva already there. Darien fell forward on his elbows, bracing himself for the bite of pain as Chris pushed in.

"Fuck," he grunted, mashing his face into the mattress.

Chris paused, waiting for him to adjust. Darien felt the tremble in the hands that smoothed over his ass and lower back.

Once the initial bite passed, Darien needed more. Slowly, he shoved back.

Chris took the hint and pushed forward. "Darien, God!"

It was tight going, but they pushed and pulled until Chris was seated fully inside. The taller man draped himself over Darien's back, hands sliding in the layer of sweat that had broken out across his shoulders and back. "God, Darien, so tight. You feel so good." Kisses along his spine, little nips at the base of his neck. "Want you so much. Need you."

Darien groaned, twisting his neck.

Chris leaned in and they kissed awkwardly as Chris ground his hips against Darien's ass.

"Chris, fuck, do it! Fuck me."

Chris's fingers slid down his arms, finding the hands Darien had bunched in the bedspread beside his shoulders. Their fingers wove together as Chris pulled his hips back, dragging that hot, bare cock almost all the way out of Darien's body. "Darien," he cried softly, and there was pain there. But Darien was pretty sure it wasn't physical pain. It was probably a lot like the heart squeeze he felt himself, knowing that the man he loved was deep inside his body. "Magpie." Darien didn't mind the pet name at all now. In fact, his heart swelled further.

Chris strained above him, going slow, pushing and pulling that steely rod inside Darien, rubbing that spot that ignited the fire at the base of Darien's spine.

Words spilled out of Darien's mouth, but he couldn't figure out what they were. Didn't matter. He wanted more. He *needed* more, and he seemed to be conveying that.

Chris picked up the pace, freeing one of his hands to slide down Darien's chest. He took hold of Darien's cock and squeezed the head.

Darien cried out, arching back. "Chris, *ah!*" He came in Chris's palm, unable to stop. His ass clamped down on his lover as his whole body shook violently.

"*Bloody --*" No more words. Chris came, hips spasming against Darien. A warm flood filled Darien's body.

Darien slid forward onto his belly.

Draped over Darien's back, Chris slid forward, too. They lay like that for precious moments, simply enjoying the knowledge that they were together.

But idyllic moments only last so long. Darien had to move his leg for fear of cramping. As soon as he moved, Chris groaned, pushing up off of him. Darien flopped onto his side as Chris left the bed, padding unsteadily to the bathroom. *Shit, are there towels in there?* But there must have been because Chris came back with two, one small wet one and a bigger dry one. He used the wet one to carefully wipe Darien clean. Darien watched him do it, smiling.

"Thank you."

Chris's answering smile was heartfelt. "You're welcome." He tossed the dry towel at Darien.

A few moments later, the towels were discarded and the two of them lay together under the sheets. Daren tucked his head into the bend of Chris's neck, one arm and one leg thrown over the other man, who lay on his back.

"I do love you," he said. "You believe me?"

"I'm trying."

“I believe that you love me.”

Arms hugged him. “That remains to be seen.” The brush of lips over his forehead told a different story, though. A story Darien was willing to progress gradually this time, as long as Chris didn’t shy away.

Chuckling, Darien pushed up onto his elbow so he could see Chris’s face. “Come on, Chris, you’ve got to have faith in me.” He let his grin go crooked. “Get it? ‘Faith’?”

Chris groaned and punched his arm. “Bad joke, magpie.”

Laughing, Darien settled back down. *Oh, yeah, we’ll be fine.*

## Epilogue

“You don’t have to do this.”

Chris calmly adjusted his already pristine white collar. “I know that.”

Darien glanced nervously toward the door to the little lounge room. Someone would arrive any moment to lead them to their table in the main banquet room. They were the guests of honor at the party celebrating Heaven Sent’s first album going platinum. It was a huge deal for the band, something that not all that many bands managed to do anymore.

Chris had agreed to come with him. It was still only a few months since they’d gotten together, and Darien hadn’t really seen much of Chris since then. He’d gone back to recording and Chris stayed in New York, but they’d stayed in constant contact. Darien had only gotten back to the east coast twice. He certainly hadn’t expected Chris to make such a big step so soon.

The backs of three fingers brushed Darien’s cheek, prompting him to turn to face Chris.

Hazel eyes smiled behind the thin lenses of his glasses. “I’m fine.” Fingers traced his lips. “I want to share this with you.”

“Careful, Chris.” Johnnie poked his head between them, reaching up to sling an arm around each of their shoulders. The long, heavy braid of his hair thumped against Darien’s

side as the singer turned his head to face Chris. The two of them were the same height, both looming over Darien. “When we get out there, you can’t let him talk too much. He’ll tell a *lot* more than you want him to. He always does.”

Darien scowled. “I will not!”

“Yeah,” Brent drawled from where he stood nearby. Darien turned to see him leaning up against a wall, turning his lighter in one hand. “There was one time he told a reporter, in detail, about his father’s hemorrhoids.”

Luc laughed from somewhere close behind Darien. “Then there was the time he almost blurted when Johnnie slept with that governor’s wife.”

Johnnie straightened, glaring at Luc. “Hey!” He twisted his head to look Tyler’s way. “I *didn’t* sleep with her.”

Tyler just raised an eyebrow, clearly skeptical.

Darien ducked his head. “I don’t mean to blurt stuff out,” he grumbled. He reached up to grip Chris’s lapel, peeking up at the man from beneath his lashes. “I’ve been good lately, though, huh? I haven’t said anything to anyone about us. Honest.”

Chris’s indulgent smile remained. “You’ve been very good, for which I am profoundly grateful.”

Darien gave Johnnie an I-told-you-so-look.

Johnnie snorted, stepping back from them. “Who’d have thought that fucking his ass would give him some discretion?”

“Damn it.” Darien started for his friend, hands fisted, “If you don’t shut the hell up, I’m gonna --”

Laughing, Chris wrapped his arms around Darien’s shoulders and pulled him so they were chest to back.

Grinning, Johnnie scuttled away, ducking behind Tyler, who rolled his eyes.



"It's all right, magpie," Chris murmured near his ear, loud enough for the others to hear. "We both know you know exactly what to do with your tongue...and when."

Stunned, Darien glanced up at Chris, to see his demon grin pointed at Johnnie.

Johnnie, of course, cracked up. As did Luc and Brent. And Reese. And Hell. Oh, damn, they were all laughing, and all he could do was blush and glare around at his so-called *friends*.

Yeah, his friends. Outside of his family, all of the people who meant the most to him were in this room. Grinning, he settled back into Chris's embrace, reaching up to lace his fingers with his lover's. Including the most important one of all.

"Yeah, well, fuck you all," he grumbled.

"Nah," Luc said, waving his hand, "that's Chris's job."

Teeth nipped his ear gently. "Yes, it is."

Warmth suffused Darien, threatening to tent his suit trousers, but just then the door opened.

A pretty girl smiled at them. "I'm here to lead you to your table."

The others filed out, but Darien made no move out of Chris's embrace.

"You don't have to do this," he muttered. "Last chance. I swear, I understand."

Chris kissed his neck, squeezed his hand. "I know." He unwound his arms from Darien's shoulders, then reached to relace their fingers as Darien turned to face him. "I'm ready to be with you." His smile grew. "I love you."

Darien stared at that gorgeous, angular face, besotted. "Say it again." It was the first time he'd heard the words from Chris's lips.

"I love you."

"Yo, guys?"

He heard Johnnie but couldn't take his eyes from the wonderful man standing before him.

Johnnie whistled. "C'mon, Darien. Sex later, big ta-do and an award now."

Chris bent to brush a quick kiss on Darien's lips. "Let's go."

"Yeah." Darien turned, then stopped and faced Chris again. "I love you, too."

"I know."

 THE END 

## Jet Mykles

Jet's been writing sex stories back as far as junior high. Back then, the stories involved her favorite pop icons of the time but she soon extended beyond that realm into making up characters of her own. To this day, she hasn't stopped writing sex, although her knowledge on the subject has vastly improved.

An ardent fan of fantasy and science fiction sagas, Jet prefers to live in a world of imagination where dragons are real, elves are commonplace, vampires are just people with special diets and lycanthropes live next door. In her own mind, she's the spunky heroine who gets the best of everyone and always attracts the lean, muscular lads. She aids this fantasy with visuals created through her other obsession: 3D graphic art. In this area, as in writing, Jet's self-taught and thoroughly entranced, and now occasionally uses this art to illustrate her stories or her stories to expand upon her art.

In real life, Jet is a self-proclaimed hermit, living in southern California with her life partner. She has a bachelor's degree in acting, but her loathing of auditions has kept her out of the limelight. So she turned to computers and currently works in product management for a software company, because even in real life, she can't help but want to create something out of nothing.