

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



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Going Against Orders

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MEN IN LOVE:

GOING AGAINST ORDERS

Carol Lynne

Dedication

Dedicated to my Sunshine. Thank you for always being there to encourage me when I feel like throwing in the towel.

Author Note

“Don’t ask, don’t tell” is the common term for the U.S. military policy which implements Pub.L. 103-160 (10 U.S.C. 654). The policy prohibits anyone who “demonstrate(s) a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts” from serving in the armed forces of the United States, because it “would create an unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability”. This policy forbids any homosexual person from disclosing his or her sexual orientation or from speaking about any homosexual relationships, while serving in the United States armed forces. It also keeps commanders from investigating a soldier’s sexual orientation. The author of this series acknowledges the mention of sexual activity secretly happening while in the service, but does not use specific instances out of respect to our United States military branches. The stories in this series all occur long after the characters have been discharged from the U.S. military and therefore are no longer restricted or held accountable to this policy.

Chapter One

"Your mom left you, Niccolo. It's up to me to make you into a man now. There will be no more crying in this house. Crying is for girls. You're a soldier-in-training now so start acting like it." The colonel glared down at his son.

"I miss my mommy. I want my mommy," four-year-old Nicco cried.

The colonel slapped him across the face. "You will do as I say and stop acting like a sissy. As long as you live in this house you will follow orders like a good soldier. I'm all you've got left, Niccolo. So unless you want me to put you out on the street I'd suggest you shape up and start acting like a man."

The little boy dried his eyes. "Yes, Dad."

He received another slap across the face from his father. "What did I tell you about calling me that disrespectful name? I've earned my position by fighting in wars you don't even know about yet. You will address me as Colonel or nothing at all. Do I make myself clear, soldier?"

"Yes, Colonel."

* * * * *

Twenty-nine years later

Walking into Mac's office, Nicco looked like a man beaten down by life, his normal olive tone appeared sallow and drawn. Mac ended his call and hung up the phone. "What's wrong?"

Nicco went to the soft leather chair in front of Mac's desk and flopped down. "Nothing."

Mac rolled his eyes and leaned his arms on the desk. "I've known you practically your whole life. I can tell when something's wrong. Now spit it out."

"It's nothing. I just talked to my dad is all." Nicco lifted his feet and crossed them on Mac's desk.

Damn, he hated that bastard. "And what did the colonel have to say?" Mac noticed Nicco's jaw twitching, something that only happened when he was feeling very emotional.

"He said if I didn't bring a girl home with me for his sixtieth birthday party to not bother coming at all. He went on to say that if I didn't have a girlfriend by now it would tell him the extent of my sexual preferences and I should just stay away for good." Nicco ran his hands through the short black curls of his hair. He blew out a breath and

stood. "Anyway, I came in to tell you I'm taking off for the rest of the day. Got a headache starting and I want to be safely in my apartment before it hits."

Mac stood and went around the desk and stepped in front of him. "You need me to drive you? Because you know I'd be happy to." Hell, Mac would be happy to do just about anything for Nicco.

Nicco stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at Mac. "Yeah. I'd appreciate that. These headaches of mine get worse all the time."

Grabbing his suit jacket from the back of his chair, he ushered Nicco out of his office. "They're stress headaches and you know it. You also know you only get them after talking to the colonel." He started to say more but stopped himself. Nicco looked like a wounded puppy and he sure as hell didn't need to kick him too.

* * * * *

Mac parked his black SUV in the underground garage of Nicco's apartment building. He keyed in the security code for the elevator and watched as Nicco held both hand to the side of his head. Mac could tell this one was going to be a doozy.

He managed to get Nicco upstairs to his ninth-floor apartment before the pain got too bad. Leading him by the arm to the bedroom, Mac sat Nicco on the side of the bed. He unlaced his shoes and slipped them and the socks off his feet, before standing and starting on Nicco's shirt. His hands began to shake as he swept the shirt off Nicco's broad, heavily muscled shoulders.

Looking at Nicco, Mac couldn't decide whether he should help him out of his pants or not. Nicco had his hands back up to brace his head and his eyes were closed. Taking a deep breath, Mac unfastened Nicco's belt and unzipped his slacks. Nicco had the presence of mind to lift his hips enough for Mac to work the slacks down his legs and off.

Blowing out a silent breath, Mac looked at Nicco's body. The only item of clothing he still wore was his tight white boxer briefs. Mac didn't know how long he stared at the large bulge, but Nicco brought him back to the present with a hand on his shoulder.

"Mac?"

Mac looked up into Nicco's eyes. He saw the same love and wanting in Nicco's face that he was sure was on his own. "Sorry. I-I just got distracted for a minute." Mac cleared his throat. "Can I get you some aspirin or something, maybe a glass of water?"

Nicco looked like he wanted to say something but instead nodded slightly. "Yeah. Some of my pain meds and a glass of juice would be great."

Nodding, Mac stood and went to the kitchen. He found the pain medications and a glass in the cabinet where Nicco kept all his medicine. Mac leaned on the counter and bowed his head. It was so damn frustrating. He'd been in love with Nicco for almost twenty damn years. What made it worse was the fact that he knew Nicco loved him too. In their younger days, when they were still in high school, they'd fooled around a little

but nothing too serious. They thought at the time they'd have the rest of their lives to explore each other, but that was before the colonel let his feelings be known. The colonel didn't approve of homosexuality and he told Nicco he would not have a son who was gay. Since he was the only family Nicco had, he'd caved to his father's wishes, leaving Mac without the love of his life. An image of Amir flashed through his mind, but Mac shook off the thought.

When Mac turned eighteen and enlisted in the Marines, he'd dated around a bit, off base and in secret. He wasn't looking for anything emotional and he definitely wasn't looking for a dishonorable discharge for violating the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, just a night of impersonal sex from wherever he could get it. Besides Nicco, Mac had only truly had one relationship in his life. During the preparation for the U.S. Army's first deployment of special ops soldiers to Afghanistan, Mac had been "loaned" to the Green Berets. His fluency in Pashto and Dari made him an ideal candidate for the mission. At the time he thanked his father, not only for the strings he'd been sure his father had pulled, but also for the foresight to encourage Mac to study the languages of the region. While in Afghanistan, Mac met Amir, a quiet soldier serving with the British Army. Next to Nicco, Amir grew to be Mac's closest friend. No matter how guilty it made him feel, he couldn't help but fall in love on the hidden battlefields of Afghanistan. After being almost blown apart while out on patrols, he swore to himself that he'd never take another lover unless it was Nicco. He'd kept that promise for four years. "Damn, man, no wonder you've been so grouchy lately. Four years is a long time to go without getting laid," he told himself.

Shaking three pills out of the bottle, Mac carried them and the juice back into the bedroom. Nicco had managed to crawl under the sheet but had the blanket kicked off the end of the bed. *Damn, that was one fine-looking body.* Mac handed Nicco the pills and the juice. "I'll get you a cool cloth for your head."

* * * * *

Nicco watched Mac walk toward the bathroom as he took the pills. He couldn't get past what his father had said to him. *Why had he deprived himself of his soul mate all these years? What kind of father gave his son an ultimatum like that?* Nicco didn't know but he was so tired of trying to please the colonel.

When Mac came back into the room Nicco studied the way he moved across the floor. Solid and sure, that was his Mac. Nicco's breath faltered in his chest. *God, how I love him.* He looked down and was surprised to see the sheet tenting at his groin. *Well, hello there. Long time no see.* Nicco was amazed. Guilt had kept his lust at bay for so long he didn't know what to think of the erection he was suddenly experiencing.

Mac put the cool cloth on his forehead. Nicco was sure he had to have noticed the tented sheet but he didn't say anything about it. "I'll, uh, go into the living room and let you get some sleep. I'll be here when you wake up. So if you need anything just holler."

Nicco put his hand out to Mac. "Could you stay? Here with me, I mean. Just stretch out beside me for a while?"

Mac gave a short nod and lay beside him. With the cool cloth still on his forehead, Nicco reached out and took Mac's hand seconds before he drifted off to sleep.

He didn't know how long he slept but he awoke, he was curled against Mac's side. He looked up to see Mac watching him. "I'm sorry. Did I keep you awake?"

"No, I slept for a few minutes."

Not bothering to remove his arm from Mac's waist, he rested his head on Mac's chest. "Talk to me. My headache's almost completely gone and you know how much that whiskey voice of yours soothes me."

Pulling Nicco closer, he sighed. "What do you want to talk about?"

Closing his eyes, Nicco sighed. "Have you ever... I mean, did you ever have sex?" Nicco felt his face turning red. He was glad he still had his eyes closed and couldn't see Mac's reaction to his very personal question.

"Yeah. Some. When I was in the Special Forces. Not since I've been out though. You?"

Nicco swallowed. "I tried a couple times with women when I was a SEAL but they were complete disasters. It just wasn't who I was."

"No guys though?" Mac sounded a bit shocked at his admission.

"No. If there had been a guy it would have been you." He turned to Mac and opened his eyes. "You know that."

Scratching his head, Mac looked into Nicco's eyes. "You still love me?"

"Yeah. Only ever you." Nicco closed his eyes again but opened them when Mac touched his arm.

"A couple of days ago at Gabe's when we were putting the appliances in the kitchen. I wasn't imagining the sparks between us that day, was I? I mean, you wanted to kiss me as much as I wanted you to. Right?" Mac ran his hand up and down Nicco's arm.

Nicco reached up and rubbed his short curly hair. "Oh yeah. I wanted to do more than kiss you."

"Why didn't you?" Mac kept up the slow caresses.

"Guilt. Don't ask me to explain it because suddenly I don't understand it myself. My whole life I've tried to be the son my father wanted. I tried my best not to go against his orders. And for what? How much does he really love me?"

Mac surprised him by leaning over and kissing his cheek. "Not a quarter as much as I do. I know that he's all the family you have, but what about me? Can't you consider me and your friends family? At least you'll know we accept everything about you and still love you."

Nicco looked into Mac's eyes for a long time. Mac could plainly see Nicco was at war with himself. If they took the next step it would be thumbing his nose at his father and Nicco knew it.

Just how much did he still want his father's permission? Mac found out two seconds later when a soft pair of lips met his. Mac readily opened his mouth to let Nicco's hot, demanding tongue inside. The kiss ignited a wealth of long-suppressed feeling between the two of them and before long Nicco was pulling at the buttons on Mac's shirt.

"Hold on." Mac pulled Nicco's hands off his shirtfront. "I need to be certain of one thing first." He kissed Nicco's nose. "I need to know that you won't run away from me again if we do this."

When Nicco looked at him in confusion, Mac continued. "I know I'm the real reason you joined the Navy when we were kids. You were running away from me. From the things I made you feel. It almost killed me and I can't go through that again. If I make love to you you'll be mine. Forever."

Closing his eyes, Nicco shook his head slightly. "How'd you know? I told everyone it was to defy my father. How'd you know the truth?" He opened his eyes and looked to Mac for an answer.

"I knew because I know you. I've always known you, Nicco. You may act like the big tough ex-SEAL, but you're an insecure little boy left alone too young by his mother. You look to the colonel for his approval in everything you do. Only something more powerful than his disappointment could have driven you to the Navy instead of the Marines. I knew the feelings we had for each other back then were more powerful than your father's acceptance." He started to unbutton his dress shirt. "I love you."

Nicco gave Mac a little pouty face. "What about Amir? You two are close. I see the way he looks at you when he doesn't think anyone's watching. What's going on between the two of you?"

Mac stopped unbuttoning his shirt. He ran a hand over his face. "We were together in Afghanistan. He saved my life. I know you know all that, but I've never told you how we came together, have I?"

When tears threatened, Nicco put the cool washcloth over his eyes and shook his head slightly. "No. Why don't you tell me now?"

Mac quickly finished undressing and slid under the covers and pulled Nicco into his arms. "When I met Amir he'd just lost his entire family. They'd chartered a private plane to go on holiday, but it was shot down and everyone aboard died in the explosion. Everyone he loved was taken from him, his two brothers and their wives and children along with his parents. He was alone and angry. I met him at the base where he'd come to help train the Afghani army. He was a highly trained officer in the British military. The two of us just hit it off. By then my dad was dead and like Amir I had no one." Mac looked at Nicco. He knew his words hurt.

"You'd left me. At the time I thought it was for good." Mac said trying to make Nicco understand why he did what he did. "Anyway, Amir and I started a relationship

of sorts. I'm not going to lie and say there weren't strong feelings on both sides because there were. But when I stepped across that booby-trapped threshold and the bomb went off everything changed. Amir carried me out of the hot zone and to the military triage center. While I was delirious evidently yours was the only name I called. Later when you opted out of the SEALs and came to be by my side, I knew I hadn't lost you. I swore to myself that I would live the rest of my life loving you."

Nicco rubbed his bristly jaw across Mac's chest. "Do you still love him?"

Sighing audibly, Mac ran his hand down Nicco's smooth muscular back. "I love him. But I'll never cheat on you with him. You have to know that. You're the one I want."

Snuggling closer, Nicco seemed to relax a little. "It's weird, though, to know that you've made love to someone else. How can I compete with that? I'm like a virgin."

Mac ran his hand over Nicco's underwear-clad erection. "I know how to remedy that. If you trust me enough?" At Nicco's sigh of approval, Mac pushed down Nicco's boxer briefs and took Nicco's shaft into his hand, feeling the heavy weight of Nicco's erection. "You've grown since you were seventeen." Mac smiled and winked at Nicco.

Nicco started doing some exploring of his own. He ran his hand down Mac's chest to his neatly trimmed nest of curls. Mac swallowed as Nicco's fingers wrapped around his erection. "Someone else is bigger than I remember. How do you carry around this thing anyway? It's got to weigh a ton."

Laughing, Mac thrust into Nicco's hand. "Well, not a ton but pretty damn close I'd say." Mac knew he was overly endowed by anyone's standard. What surprised him was just how big Nicco was. They'd spent a lot of time together over the years and he'd tried his best not to look at Nicco's package, but damn.

Getting Nicco's underwear down and off, Mac scooted down on the bed until his eyes feasted on Nicco's cock. Mac ran his fingers along the vein on the underside. At Nicco's groan, Mac smiled and replaced his finger with his tongue, causing Nicco to do a whole-body shiver.

"Oh God. I've waited so long," Nicco groaned as he spread his legs even wider.

Insinuating himself between Nicco's thighs, he licked around Nicco's sac and then up his shaft again. Nicco's tasted even better than he remembered. Mac nipped the veined flesh lightly, savoring every sigh Nicco gave him. When he reached the crown, Mac opened his mouth and took his man inside. "Maaaacccc." Nicco buried his hands in Mac's shoulder-length brown hair. He thrust his hips, burying his shaft deeper into Mac's mouth. He took it all, everything Nicco wanted to give him. The feel of Nicco's cock hitting the back of his throat felt natural, almost comforting.

Mac decided to take a chance and slid two fingers into his mouth along the side of Nicco's cock. Withdrawing them, he brought his fingers to the crack of Nicco's ass and circled the tight little hole with his wet digits. Nicco clamped his muscles tight at first but soon relaxed enough for Mac to slip one fingertip inside. He started to push it farther in when he met no resistance from Nicco, but Nicco chose that second to spurt

his seed deep into Mac's throat. Mac hungrily drank every drop and continued to push his finger farther into Nicco.

Once Nicco's cock was clean Mac pulled off. He looked Nicco in the eyes and tried to insert another finger. Nicco's head thrashed on the pillow. "Too much. Too good. Love you."

Scooting up the bed, Mac backed off, leaving only the one finger inside Nicco as he took his mouth in an explosive tongue-thrusting kiss. His finger barely had room to move. Mac didn't think he'd ever felt anything so tight. This was going to be a problem. He knew even stretched, it was a little uncomfortable the first time. He found Nicco's smooth walnut-sized prostate gland and pegged it with his finger. Nicco's entire body rose off the bed as his cock filled again.

Nicco reached down and wrapped his hand around Mac's erection. "I want you."

Mac shook his head slightly. "Not yet. I'm too big and you're too damn tight. Give me a little more time to get you used to something in your ass. I don't want to hurt you our first time together."

Raising an eyebrow, Nicco looked at Mac. "How do you plan to stretch me enough if you won't fuck me?"

Licking the side of his face, Mac withdrew his fingers. "I'm going to get you a set of butt plugs. Christ. Just the thought of you walking around with a plug in your ass is enough to make me come." Mac thrust his cock against Nicco's hand.

Nicco looked into Mac's eyes and scooted down the bed. "My turn," Nicco said as he looked at the throbbing cock in front of his face. He ran the tip of his tongue across the glistening head of Mac's cock. "Mmm, you taste just like I remember."

Mac thought back to their hours of exploring each other in his bedroom when they were seventeen.

"This," Nicco said between licks, "is one of the things that drove me toward the Navy. I knew I'd never get enough of you and I thought it was better that I removed myself from temptation before my father found out."

Now as he swirled his tongue around Mac's cock, Nicco sighed. He released Mac's cock and looked up at him. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything. I've been so damn stupid."

Mac saw tears in Nicco's eyes and pulled him back up his body. He ran his hand down the side of Nicco's face. "Hush, baby." Mac pulled Nicco closer and ran his hands down his sculpted back. "You're here now, that's the important thing. But you have to know up front. I'm never letting you go again. You're mine, Nicco Bellinzoni. Lock, stock and barrel."

With both of their cocks hard again, they started a slow rub. Nicco leaned down and ran his tongue over Mac's lips.

Man, could Nicco kiss. It would've made Mac jealous if he hadn't remembered they'd learned to do it by practicing on each other. He opened his mouth for Nicco's

exploration. Nicco increased the pressure of his tongue while applying a tighter grip to Mac's already-sensitive cock and worked him faster. "Mmm."

When Nicco reached down and took both of their cocks in his hand it was more than Mac could take. "Gonna come."

"Yes. Give it to me." Mac thrust against Nicco's hand and body a few more times, feeling the glide of Nicco's turgid length against him. Feeling his balls draw up tight, he came within seconds. Warmth covered both their stomachs as Nicco followed his example and climaxed.

"I love you. Always have and always will." Mac pulled Nicco even tighter into his arms. He wanted to say more, to tell Nicco of all the things he'd dreamed of over the years, but he knew they'd said enough, for now. He ran his fingers through Nicco's thick black hair. "Getting a little shaggy. I thought you didn't like it when your curls came out to play."

Nicco grunted a response and reached for the washcloth Mac had given him earlier. He separated himself from Mac and cleaned them both up with the cold cloth. At Mac's shiver, Nicco smiled. "Sorry. I just don't have the energy to get up and run it under hot water."

Mac chuckled. "It wasn't the temperature of the washcloth that was affecting me. It was the hand attached to the washcloth. I'm just having a hard time believing I'm here, with you."

"Believe it."

* * * * *

The two of them must have dozed off because Nicco was awakened several hours later by the ringing phone. He reached across Mac and grabbed the handset.

"Hello."

"Hey, Nicco. We just arrived home and Cory's apartment and the storage room above the bar have been trashed. It appears someone was looking for something and not too subtly."

"Remy?" Nicco sat up in bed. Mac ran his hand down Nicco's naked back.

"Yeah."

"Did you call the police?" The fingers playing over the top of his ass threatened to distract him. Without looking at Mac, he smacked his hands away playfully.

"Yeah, they're sending someone over. I asked Cory what they could be looking for and she had no idea. My guess is that it involves Anton. Cory confided that he was involved with some pretty rough-looking characters. They spoke Spanish so she never knew what they were talking about. I had no idea that Anton was involved in any other business besides the bar. Now this has happened along with the things I already told you about. I don't think Cory is safe living here anymore. I'm taking her home with me."

"Sounds like the right thing to do. I'll get started first thing in the morning looking into Anton. If he was into something dirty, I'll find it."

"Thanks, Nicco."

"You're welcome, buddy. Your main job right now is to protect Cory."

"With my life."

Nicco hung up the phone and turned toward Mac. "Someone trashed Cory's apartment. Remy thinks it was some guys that Anton was doing some kind of shady business with. He's taking Cory to his house."

Mac pulled him back down into his arms. He took the phone out of Nicco's hand and put it back on the charger. When he turned back toward Nicco, he smiled. "Damn, you look good in my arms." Damn, Nicco thought, he felt good in Mac's arms too.

With his feelings threatening to overwhelm him, Nicco decided to play. Chuckling, he pinched Mac's nipple and got an immediate response. "Oh, a little sensitive there, are we?" He bent his head and scraped his teeth over Mac's pebbled nub. He flicked his tongue against the sensitive nipple and latched on. The stronger he sucked the more Mac seemed to enjoy it. Knowing he was bringing up a bruise made Nicco feel possessive. He finally pulled off and looked at his handiwork. A nice big hickey now marked his man. "Mine," he stated, looking Mac in the eyes.

"You can mark me all you want." Mac ran his hand down Nicco's side to his ass. He squeezed and thrust toward him. "I was just thinking. We both know I can't take you yet but there's nothing to say you can't make love to me."

Nicco stopped licking the newly created hickey to look back into Mac's eyes. "Really? I've got stuff," Nicco said, pointing toward the table beside the bed.

"I just want to be one with you, Nicco. I never expected to be top all the time. I mean, we're both pretty strong men and if a relationship is going to work for the long haul we'll have to take turns." Mac reached over and extracted a bottle of lube from the drawer beside the bed. He held it up to Nicco. "You can't tell me with this in your bedside drawer that you're totally inexperienced."

He blushed and put his forehead down on Mac's chest. "Once in a while I get myself off thinking about you. I don't allow myself to indulge very often but there are times after I've been with you for a long time that I find myself needing that release."

"Nothing to be ashamed of. How do you think I've coped the last four years? I've got a bottle of lube in my bedside table, as well as one in my shower." Mac held the bottle out to Nicco again. "Will you get me ready?"

The picture of him thrusting his tongue and fingers into Mac's ass threatened to set him off. "Damn. I don't think I can do that and not come all over myself. You do it this time and I'll watch and take notes." He grinned and winked at Mac, hoping like hell his inexperience didn't show.

Popping the top on the bottle, Mac poured a good amount into his hand. He closed the lid and handed it back. "You slick yourself while I do this."

As he watched, Mac rolled over and brought his knees up. Nicco groaned at the sight of Mac's hole. He felt the saliva pool in his mouth as Mac ran his fingers around the rim. Nicco squirted some of the lube into his hand and returned the bottle to the table. He stroked his cock as he watched Mac's long, slender fingers disappear into his hole. "So pretty." Nicco licked his lips. When Mac slipped the third finger into his own ass, he almost lost it. "Hurry."

Mac pulled his fingers out and braced himself on his hands and knees. "I'm all ready for you, baby."

Swallowing, he knelt behind Mac and ran his hands down the strong, broad back. He playfully swatted Mac's butt as his man once again fell down to land on his shoulders. Mac reached back and separated his own cheeks to make it easier for Nicco to line up. Look at that, Mac always had tried to ease his way in life. "Now," Mac grunted.

With the crown of his cock against Mac's puckered hole, he slowly pushed his way inside. It was slow going at first. He wondered whether he was doing something wrong. Mac grunted and asked for more, seeming to read his fears before he even had a chance to speak them. He pushed in a little and pulled out a little, slowly working his way deep inside. The squeeze of Mac's heat around his cock was unbelievably erotic. When he reached a certain point Mac's body seemed to suck him the rest of the way in. Nicco looked down and realized he was buried balls-deep inside the man he loved. "I've waited so long."

Grunting his approval, Mac let go of his ass and braced himself once again on his hands. He began rocking back and forth on Nicco's cock. Nicco watched in awe as his swollen shaft pumped in and out of Mac's body. Nicco held on to Mac's hips as he began to set a hard, fast pace. Smiling, he bent over and kissed Mac's spine, the muscles quivering under his lips. "We make a good team." He couldn't believe how fast they'd both found their rhythm.

Mac let go of the bed under him with one hand and wrapped it around his cock. "Gonna come." Mac worked his cock as Nicco pounded into him even harder, feeling his heavy sac spank Mac's ass on every thrust. He could tell he was about to fall over the edge when his strokes became erratic. Nicco's roar of release echoed through the room. He watched as Mac's back went rigid as he came. Next time, he wanted to see his lover's face when that happened. Nicco smiled at the thought of next time.

Nicco collapsed on top of Mac and the pair rolled to their sides. Mac took his mouth in a passionate kiss, tongues tasting and teeth nipping. Nicco seemed to take longer than Mac to recover his normal breathing pattern and was forced to break the kiss. "I think I've died and gone to heaven." He looked into Mac's amber eyes and felt his heart clench. "God, I've been a fool."

"Well, you've finally come to your senses so let's forget about the past." Mac kissed him once more and flung his legs over the side of the bed. He picked the washcloth up off the floor and headed to the bathroom.

Nicco stretched and waited for his new lover to return. *Damn, he couldn't stop smiling.* Mac came back and handed him the warm cloth. He cleaned himself and pulled Mac back under the covers with him. They snuggled up together like they'd been doing it for years. "Goodnight, sweetheart."

"Night, baby."

Chapter Two

At almost three o'clock in the morning the phone rang once again. Nicco blindly reached for it.

"H-Hello? Remy, is that you?" Nicco struggled to get his eyes open. He could hear choked breathing and then sobbing on the other end of the line.

"No, Nicco, it's C-Cory."

"What's happened? Where's Remy?" Nicco was suddenly wide awake. He sat straight up in bed and flung his legs over the side. "Cory? Where's Remy?"

"There was an explosion. His house. He's—I mean, we're—at the hospital. I think it's bad, Nicco. The back of his head was bleeding and he had a pretty big piece of wood sticking out of his back. They have him in the emergency room working on him. I'm all alone and I didn't know who to call."

"You did the right thing calling me, Cory. I'll be on the next flight out. In the meantime you call Mac or Jake if you need someone to talk to. Okay?"

"Thanks."

Mac was already out of bed and walking naked toward the dresser by the time Nicco hung up the phone. Mac opened Nicco's drawer and pulled out a pair of jeans and threw them over his shoulder. He opened the top drawer and pulled out socks and underwear. Flinging them Nicco's way, he strode toward the closet and chose a red polo shirt.

Nicco stared at Mac's body as he moved efficiently through the room. "That was Cory. There's been an explosion and Remy's hurt. She called from the hospital." Nicco picked up the pair of white boxer briefs and put them on. By the time he had his socks on, Mac was standing in front of him holding out his jeans and shirt. "You okay?"

Nodding shortly, Mac looked at Nicco. He finally sighed and fell to his knees. He put his head in Nicco's lap. "I know you need to go, and I understand why you're going but I can't stand the thought of you leaving me already."

Nicco swept Mac's hair out of his eyes. "I love you, but Cory's scared and alone. I shouldn't be down there very long. I'll call ten times a day if that's what it takes to make you understand that I'm not running away again."

Lifting Nicco's hand out of his hair, Mac brought it to his mouth. He kissed his palm and buried his face in it. "Should I go with you?"

"I'd love for you to go with me, but I need your investigative skills back here. The quicker we get whoever's behind this, the sooner we can start our new life together." Nicco played with the silky strands of hair until Mac stood and sat beside him on the bed.

"Will you have phone sex with me?" Mac asked, flashing that irresistible dimple and rubbing his own cock.

Nicco groaned as he watched Mac stroke himself to a hard-on. "Damn, that's sexy. Yeah, okay. I'll call you as soon as I'm in bed tonight. Make sure you're in bed naked when I call. And make sure you're alone." Nicco said the last part with a combination of a teasing tone and a bit of seriousness.

"I know who you're worried about, don't. I told you I haven't slept with Amir since before my accident in Afghanistan." Mac leaned back on the bed and continued to work his own cock for Nicco's viewing pleasure. He brought one foot up and rested his heel on the edge of the bed, opening himself even further to his eyes.

Knowing he needed to dress and get to the airport, Nicco battled with himself. He finally gave in when Mac started squeezing his sac. He leaned in and took Mac's cock into his mouth. Mac groaned his appreciation as Nicco sucked him. When he took as much of Mac's cock as he could, Mac gave up the fight and shot down his throat.

"Oh fuck." Mac arched up off the bed as Nicco continued to milk his cock dry.

Nicco lapped up every drop before releasing Mac's cock and looking into his eyes. "I know you love each other. I can see it every time you're both in the same room. Why me and not him?"

Mac covered his eyes with his arm and sighed. "Because he's not you. I'll be honest and tell you if I could have both of you, I would. But love is nothing without you. You hold the majority of my heart."

"So you're saying that if I agreed with it, you'd bring Amir into this relationship?" Nicco sat up and looked at Mac through narrowed eyes.

"Honestly? Yeah. But I wouldn't do anything without your approval and enthusiasm. I just wish you'd get to know him."

Standing up to finish dressing, he looked over his shoulder at Mac, who was still sprawled out on the edge of the bed. "How can I get to know the man? He won't even say two words to me. He's like some dark knight or something."

Mac sat up and ran his fingers through his hair. "I don't know how you can't relate to him on some level. You're both in the same business. You work down the hall from one another, for Christ's sake. You'd think you two would at least be able to talk about something." Mac sighed and looked out the window. "The man has no one. Not one member of his family survived. The one person he thought he had—me—turned his back on him after he left the service."

Nicco interrupted Mac. "Turned your back, hell. You gave the man a very high-paying job as soon as he set foot in New York. How can you say you turned your back on him?"

Shaking his head, Mac stood and picked up his slacks and underwear off the floor. "I turned my back on our love. After I was blown to bits I told him if I couldn't have you I didn't want anyone. How would that make you feel?" Pulling on his pants, Mac

shook his head. "I'm sorry. I know it hurts you when I talk about Amir but you have to know these things. You have to understand why he acts the way he does."

Nicco pulled his heavy boots on and sat on the bed to lace them up. "We'll talk about it when I get back. I'm having enough problems just wrapping my mind around the fact that I'm finally going against the colonel's orders." He stood and walked toward Mac. Pulling him into his arms, he kissed him. "No matter what happens with my father and Amir, I want to be with you. Understand?"

Mac took a deeper kiss in return. "I understand. Now go see what the hell Remy's gotten himself into now."

* * * * *

As Mac was finishing up a meeting later that day his assistant Peggy buzzed his intercom. "Sorry to interrupt, but Nicco's on line four for you."

"Thanks, Peggy. Can you tell him I'll be with him in a minute?"

"Will do."

Mac looked from Bram, his lead investigator, to Amir, his top bodyguard. "Do you two need anything else from me on that assignment?"

Both men looked at each other and shook their heads. Mac could tell Amir wanted to say something but Mac nodded his head at the two men and picked up the phone. "Hey there."

"Hi. How's work today?" Mac could tell Nicco was pretty wrung out. His voice, although warm, was short.

"It's fine. How's Remy?" Mac couldn't help himself. He reached down and gave his cock a little rub through his dress pants. It was funny how just the sound of a weary Nicco could perk his cock right up.

"He'll be fine, I think. They finally took him to a private room. Well, not really private since it currently contains a sleeping and concussed Cory. I was glad I was here to insist they put the two of them together." Nicco yawned over the phone line. "I miss you. I'm getting ready to go over to Remy's house or what's left of it." Nicco yawned again.

"Damn, it sounds like you need to find a bed yourself." Mac rubbed his cock again, harder this time. "Wish I could be in it with you. I'm sitting here at my desk with a killer hard-on just thinking about you."

"Mmm. Sounds nice. Don't forget I'm calling tonight. Probably be around eleven by the time I get Cory out of here and check us in to a hotel room."

"Two rooms, I hope." Mac flashed his dimple even though Nicco wasn't there to enjoy it.

"I thought I'd get a two-room suite. How could I possibly have phone sex with you if I was sharing a room with Cory? Besides, Remy's one jealous boyfriend."

"He wouldn't be if you'd just tell your friends about us." Mac's cock started to deflate.

"I will when the time's right. Right now I think my friends have other things on their minds. I love you and I'll talk to you tonight."

"Love you too." As soon as Mac hung up the phone, there was a knock at the door. "Come in."

Amir came in. Mac never tired of looking at the stoic warrior. He'd never met anyone who could rival Amir in combat, either gunplay or hand to hand. He was tall and lean. What weight he had was pure one-hundred-percent muscle. His thick blue-black hair was still cut military short even though he'd been out of the service for going on three years. His black eyes ate Mac up with every glance. He observed everything and Mac suddenly knew he was in trouble.

"I wanted to ask about Nicco's disappearance but I've changed my mind." Amir stopped in front of Mac's desk and sat in the chair with a defeated look on his face. "So I guess this is the point when you tell me that the two of you have finally found each other again."

"Amir."

"Just tell me." Amir crossed his legs, resting his ankle on his knee. "When?"

"Yesterday." Mac couldn't hide anything from Amir.

"And me?" Amir's face was completely open to Mac for the first time in years. Mac could see the other man's pain in the glassy look of his eyes.

"To be honest, I don't know. I talked to Nicco about you. About what we feel for each other and why I haven't been with you since I left the Special Forces. He knew some of it, I think. He knew we loved each other in some capacity but I don't think he knew we'd been intimate. I told him all of it." Mac shifted in his chair. He felt like a complete ass, knowing Amir still loved him and being unable to reach out to him.

"So where does that leave me?" Amir picked at some imaginary lint on his charcoal gray dress slacks.

"I don't know. I was honest with him about wishing we could all become a family. He's got a friend, Gabe, who lives with two men. So the idea is not totally foreign to him. All he said was he didn't know how that would even be possible when you can't seem to say two words to him." Mac looked at Amir, waiting for some sign that he too wanted them all to be together.

"It's hard for me. Don't you understand? I know that Nicco's your number one." He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward with his head down and his arms resting on his thighs. "I'm jealous, okay. I'll admit it right here and now. I don't understand how you can love him so much and for so long when he's done nothing but push you away. You love him so deeply that you ignore the love the two of us already have. I mean, I know you grew up together and everything, but Christ, Mac." He blew out a breath. "I'm here and I've been here, and none of it mattered to you until Nicco finally came around." Amir stood and paced the office with his hands in his pockets.

"I'm sorry. I can't explain it to you. I love Nicco with every fiber of my being but that doesn't mean I don't love you. It's not that you were second-best to Nicco. It's just that it wasn't right without Nicco too. And Nicco would never have come around if I was with you. I'm a bastard, okay. Is that what you want to hear?" Mac's voice rose to echo across his office. "I want it all. I've waited too damn long not to have it all and I'm not giving up on having both of you."

Amir stopped pacing and looked at him. "And if Nicco and I can't find a way to share you? Then what?" He shook his head and held up his hand. "No. That's okay, you don't have to answer. I already know. I'm taking the rest of the day off. I'll see you tomorrow." Head down, Amir left the office, looking like a defeated man.

Mac scrubbed his hands over his eyes. "Damn," he said to the empty office.

* * * * *

At almost exactly eleven o'clock that night Mac's phone rang. He smiled and picked it up after the first ring. "Hey, baby."

"Hey. What's wrong?"

Mac laid his head back against the pillow. "Not much. I think I broke a heart today is all. How 'bout you?"

Nicco sighed into the phone. "Amir?"

"Who else? I don't think I've broken your heart today, have I?" Mac knew he sounded a bit snappish but he felt like a total piece of shit right now.

"Don't let it get you down. We'll figure it out."

"I hope you're right. I've never seen a look on a man's face like I witnessed today. It was especially hard coming from Amir. He's always so in control, and to see the pain in his eyes almost brought me to my knees." Mac sighed again. This conversation was making him feel worse, not better. Here he had an incredibly sexy man on the phone and he was busy talking about another beautiful man. "So what are you wearing?"

"A smile. You?"

"The same now that I'm talking to you." Mac kicked off the covers and ran his hand down toward his filling cock. "You hard?" He made a pass over his crown and gathered pre-cum to ease his way as he began a steady rhythm.

"Getting there. You?"

"Just about there, baby. Talk dirty to me." Mac smiled to himself, knowing this was totally foreign territory to Nicco.

"Uh... Okay, I can do that. Um...pretend your hand is my hand. Can you feel my fingers running up the side of your cock? Touching that sweet vein on the underside of your massive shaft. Can you feel me, sweetheart?"

"Mmm. I feel ya." Mac ran his finger up the protruding vein. He stopped at the crown. "Now what do you feel?"

"I'm circling the head of your cock with the lightest touch you've ever felt. Like the kiss of a feather. Your cock is begging for something a little harder, isn't it?"

"Yes. Give it to me, baby." Mac ran his finger around his head just as instructed.

"I'm swiping off the drop of pre-cum with my thumb and...umm...tasting it. Oh God, you taste good."

Mac brought his hand toward his mouth and licked the salty pre-cum he'd just gathered. A deep growl erupted from his throat. "Oh, I wanna stick this big cock inside your tight hole so bad. I wanna pound that pretty ass of yours into the bed. While I'm busy fucking you, I'll reach around and take hold of your aching cock. Hold it tight in my fist and jerk it to the rhythm of our lovemaking. Do you feel it? Finger your pretty hole for me." At Nicco's groan, he continued. "Oh yeah. One more finger. We've got to get you ready for me." Mac was fingering his own hole with one hand while the other hand kept stroking his cock. "Oh God, I'm gonna come."

"Yeah. Do it. Oh, hell yeah."

Mac heard Nicco's grunt of release as he sprayed himself with white globs of cum. "Oh, fuck."

The two men said nothing as they struggled to get their breathing under control. Finally Nicco laughed. "That was a first. Thank you, Mr. Phone Sex Operator."

Chuckling, Mac took the washcloth from where he had left it beside his bed and cleaned his chest and hands. He was glad he thought of it before his phone call because no way could he gather the strength to make it to the bathroom. "Call me in the morning and I'll help you take care of that morning wood problem."

"I may just take you up on that offer. Night."

"Night."

Chapter Three

It was almost ten days later and Mac was about to go crazy without Nicco. He'd received a package after his first day in Key West with a notebook in it and a note from Nicco. *Thought you could use something besides us to wrap your mind around. Find out who the people are in this notebook of Anton's. Love, Nicco.*

Since getting the notebook Mac had made it his mission to find out just what Anton was involved in before his death. This was his favorite part of the job. He enjoyed the research aspect of his job more than anything. A couple of names stood out when Mac first looked through the book. He immediately went to the computer and pulled up the FBI's Most Wanted list. Bingo. He'd gleefully called Nicco to let him know that Anton, Cory's dead husband, had been in bed with a Colombian drug cartel.

Nicco seemed pleased at Mac's quick work and told him he was still investigating the explosion that destroyed Remy's house and the boat explosion that killed Anton.

Mac had calls in all across the world getting more information about the names in Anton's little spiral notebook. He was glad he had the project to keep himself busy. At night when he went to bed, after his nightly phone sex, all he could do was think. He had to figure out a way to get Nicco and Amir talking. Things between him and Amir had been a little strained since their initial confrontation in his office, but at least Amir didn't act like he hated Mac.

Mac was lying in bed, thinking about Nicco and Amir when his phone rang. He looked over at the clock. It was twelve-forty-five. *Who the hell would be calling him at this time of night?* He'd already talked to Nicco. Mac reached over and picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, I hope I didn't wake you."

"No. I was just thinking about you. What's wrong?" Mac sat up against the headboard. He knew it couldn't be good if Nicco was calling twice in one night.

"I just got a call from Jake. It seems someone poisoned Cory while she was in Vegas on her honeymoon. They left a rose beside her pillow while she slept. The rose had some sort of poison on the thorns. Anyway, Remy and Cory are at Jake's now and Jake thinks we need to circle the wagons and come to the Triple Spur to help protect her until we can figure out what the hell is going on. I'm flying out in a couple of hours. The airport here is closed so I'm gonna drive to Miami and fly out from there."

"Who the hell's doing this?" Mac thought quickly. As much as he needed to see Nicco he needed Nicco to see Amir more. The two of them needed to work through some of their issues with each other or his hopes of a family that included all of them would never happen. He picked up some of what Nicco was telling him about Anton

and the explosion that had killed him. But his mind was racing to come up with a plan fast.

"I don't know, but I aim to find out. Anyway I was thinking you could meet me at the airport in Santa Fe."

"Sorry, but I can't right now. It's going to be really pushing it to get away for the opening of Gabe's rehabilitation center on Sunday. I've got calls coming in from my contacts in South America and here in the U.S.A. Baby, you know I would if I could." Mac hoped he wouldn't burn in hell for the lie. "I know you're not going to think too kindly about this, but I'd like to send Amir."

When Nicco started to argue Mac cut him off. "Just listen. Keep an open mind about this. Amir is not only the best bodyguard in the world but he's in dire need of a cause right now. He needs to protect Cory as much as she needs his protection."

Blowing out a long breath over the phone, Nicco sighed. "Okay. I'll meet Amir at the airport in Santa Fe tomorrow morning. And Mac? You'd better know what the hell you're doing."

"I do." God, he hoped he did. "I'll call you tomorrow and see you at Gabe's on Sunday."

"All right. Um...I love you."

He was a little startled at first. It wasn't that he hadn't longed to tell Nicco the same damn thing every time he talked to him, but he was surprised Nicco said it first. "I Love you too." Mac hung up the phone and immediately dialed Amir's number.

"Hello."

"It's Mac. I've got a job for you. I need you to fly out to Santa Fe tonight. There's a dear friend of mine and Nicco's who's been poisoned. She needs your skills." Mac crossed his fingers and waited for Amir's reply.

"Why do you need me? Isn't that whole group ex-SEALs? Surely they can protect one woman."

Fuck, Amir was too close to the truth. They didn't need Amir at the Triple Spur, but Mac desperately needed him to go there. "That's not really the point. The point is they called and asked if Nicco and I would come and help protect her, and I can't go. You know how crazy things have been with tracking these drug guys down. I told them I'd send you in my place. I'm begging you to do this for me. My honor among my friends is at stake." Mac knew he was laying it on pretty thick, but sometimes the ends justified the means.

"Fine. I'll dress and fly out as soon as possible. But, Mac?"

"Yeah."

"You owe me big for this."

"I owe you big for a lot of things. I owe you more than I'll ever be able to repay in this lifetime." His thoughts flashed back to that horrible day when Amir carried Mac's

broken and bloody body out of the hot spot. Amir started to speak and Mac shook the memories away.

"I've only ever asked one thing from you."

"I know, and I'm still working on it." Mac hung up and ran his hands through his hair. "Please God, just let them get along."

* * * * *

Nicco looked at his watch for the fourth time in the past ten minutes. He took another sip of coffee and watched the airport activity out the bar window. Amir's flight had been delayed coming out of Chicago. It was due to arrive within fifteen minutes and Nicco's hands wouldn't stop sweating.

Why should he be nervous about Amir coming to the Triple Spur? The fact was there was no reason. He didn't really even know him. Thanks to Mac he knew about him, but he didn't know the man himself. Truth was, he'd always felt jealous whenever Amir was around Mac.

He knew Amir's looks far surpassed his own. Hell, Amir's looks surpassed anyone he'd ever known. The man was absolutely breathtaking in an aloof sort of way. He looked like someone had morphed together the very best body parts and come up with a picture-perfect human being. That was Amir. His looks were so flawless he could easily be the creation of the most gifted plastic surgeon. The fact that he didn't seem to notice his effect on people riled Nicco even more. It was like he was just too good to lower himself to everyday conversation. Amir carried the English aristocratic features of his English-born mother as well as the dark coloring of his Saudi Arabian father. And that damned slight English accent was enough to drive him crazy. Mac had told him that Amir was from a very wealthy family in the Middle East and had been raised predominantly in a London boarding school, hence the perfect English speech pattern. Once again perfect. He heard over the loudspeaker that Amir's plane had finally arrived. He took out his cell phone.

After Remy agreed to pick them up at the airport Nicco turned off his phone and headed to meet him. He spotted Amir passing through the security gate and gave a slight wave. Amir approached with a large carry-on bag over his shoulder. "Is that all you brought or did you check a bag?"

The corner of Amir's lip turned up just the slightest bit. Not really a smile but at least Nicco didn't think it was a snarl. Whatever the hell it was supposed to be, it was damn sexy. "Just this. I've learned over the years to pack efficiently. Too many lost bags when you travel on the spur of the moment."

"Well." Nicco thought that was the longest conversation he'd ever had with Amir. Things were looking up. Maybe there was hope for them yet. Nicco motioned toward the front of the airport. "My friend Remy's going to be picking us up any time. His new wife's the one you'll be protecting. As a matter of fact she was on her honeymoon when some whack job poisoned her."

"Why was a woman left alone on her honeymoon?" Amir honestly looked confused.

"Well, from what I gather Remy kept her up the night before, if you know what I mean. She asked to go back to the room alone to get some sleep. Remy agreed and went to the casino. When Cory woke from her nap a rose was on the pillow beside her. She picked it up and got pricked by thorns laced with some sort of toxin."

Amir shook his head slightly. They stood in silence at the curb waiting for Remy to arrive. When he finally pulled up in Jake's big dual-cab, four-door truck, Nicco got in the front seat and Amir sat quietly in the back.

Amir noticed the way Remy kept eyeing him in the rearview mirror. Typical alpha husband, he thought. Always afraid some other male is going to go sniffing around their mate. If he only knew Amir had already found his mate he was sure it would put the other man at ease. But it wasn't his secret to share. Instead, he decided to keep his distance from these friends of Nicco and Mac's.

When they arrived at the hospital he was ushered into a private room. Nicco went immediately over to the bed and kissed the woman Amir guessed to be Cory. He rolled his eyes at the growl emanating from Remy.

Cory spotted him and asked who he was. Nicco informed her that Amir was her bodyguard. Remy of course threw a fit about this but it was just as Amir had expected. No man wanted to think he couldn't take care of those he loved.

He bowed and kissed Cory's hand. At the continued growl from behind him, Amir knew this was going to be a long assignment.

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Once Cory was released from the hospital Amir put himself in charge of guarding her bedroom door. Remy told him not to let anyone bother her unless he checked to make sure she was awake.

At least Nicco had been kind enough to find a nice comfortable wing chair from one of the spare bedrooms for him. He sat outside Cory's room for several days. He met Jake's husband Cree and his wife Jenny. Jenny had just given birth to twins so people were in and out of Cory's room quite a bit. He watched Nicco's byplay with his friends. He had a quick wit, Amir soon discovered. His friends respected his knowledge and judgment as did Mac. Sadly for him, he was beginning to see what Mac saw in Nicco. He was a completely different person outside the office. Or maybe it was just that whenever he had been around Nicco in the past, Mac had also been in the room? Regardless, Amir had felt the twitch of his long-ignored cock several times in the last few days when Nicco came around.

Finally on Sunday morning Amir dressed and went downstairs to eat breakfast with the rest of the group before heading off to Oklahoma. Amir had mixed feelings the

entire ride to Gabe's. He was looking forward to seeing Mac but knew Nicco would surely take most of his time. The little green-eyed monster once again raised its ugly head.

What made things even worse was sitting next to Nicco on the long drive. Every time Nicco's thigh accidentally brushed against his, he felt his cock give a little tingle of recognition. He wasn't sure, but he could almost swear Nicco started bumping his leg on purpose after a while. Amir even caught Nicco looking at his jean-covered cock once or twice. The more glances Nicco stole, the more Amir's cock responded.

When they arrived at the Double B, he and Nicco started unloading everyone's overnight bags. The twins had so much equipment it took a couple trips into the main ranch house. They'd both seen the looks passed between Remy and Cory and Jake, Jenny and Cree to know to stay away from their cabins for a while.

Nicco showed Amir which cabin he would be using. "Sorry but I told Gabe we could share this one. It has two single beds. I figured the less cleaning we'd all have to do in the morning the better. I think the guests are due to arrive sometime in the afternoon." Nicco went on to give him a quick explanation as to why Gabe, Rex and Boone were turning the Double B into an equestrian rehabilitation center.

When he was finished Amir nodded his head and threw his bag on the small twin bed. Since being out of the car, Amir's cock had finally started to deflate. The last thing he wanted was to walk around Mac and Nicco's friends with a perpetual hard-on. "Sounds like a good cause."

Nicco sat on the edge of his bed and smiled at Amir. "Yeah. I think it's a damn good cause." He stretched out on the bed, mindful to keep his dusty boots off the bedspread, Amir noticed. His gaze skirted over the heavily muscled body. "You love him, don't you?" Nicco asked, throwing Amir's lust to a screeching halt.

He looked down at Nicco and walked toward the cabin door. Just before he left he looked back. "Yeah. I love him, and I always will." Amir walked out onto the tiny porch and shut the door behind him. He stood for several minutes with his eyes closed, wishing he hadn't just confirmed what Nicco seemed to already know.

Tired of sitting still, Amir walked around the ranch and finally found someone who looked busy. "Can I do something to help?"

The stranger looked at him and held out his hand. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Boone Fowler."

Amir recognized the name. "Nice to meet you, Boone. My name is Amir. I'm Cory's bodyguard."

When he didn't say anything else Boone nodded and looked around. "We've got some whiskey barrels that could use flowers planted in them. You'll find everything you need right there on the side of the house. The local nursery donated all kinds of pretty flowers to spruce the place up."

Amir nodded and started gathering the supplies he'd need for the job. He smiled as a trickle of sweat rolled down the side of his face. It had been a long time since he'd

worked outside. His job as bodyguard usually consisted of following rich celebrities around in limousines and hotels. This was nice for a change. After filling the barrels with dirt, Amir began selecting the flowers from the wide assortment he'd found at the side of the house. Soon he was joined by a happy and smiling Cory. He rolled his eyes at the obviously sated woman. They worked in silence until Cory turned to him. "So tell me a little about yourself?" When he just looked at her, Cory shrugged. "I mean, you've been with me close to a week now and I know absolutely nothing about you. It just seems strange."

He exhaled audibly. These people were not making it easy for him to keep his distance. They were just too damn friendly. And getting close to people left you vulnerable. "No one but Mac knows anything about me. It's the way I like it."

Cory rolled her eyes and said something like "typical" under her breath. "Well, at least tell me whether you have a family back in New York? A wife? Kids?"

A vision of his family came to mind, his nephews running in and out of the house. His mother holding court, as his father liked to say, with the women in their social circles. Amir felt a slight sting to his eyes as he thought about all he'd lost, but he quickly shoved it away. Amir schooled his features, reconstructing the warrior mask he always wore.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Once. Back in Saudi but they're all dead now." He turned away from her and started potting more containers.

* * * * *

Pushing the speed limit, Nicco drove to the airport the next morning. It had been a long two weeks since he'd seen his lover. Nicco chuckled at his giddiness. "Get a grip, man. You're acting like some damn high-school girl with her first crush."

He parked Remy's rented SUV and went in the airport to wait for Mac. His plane was a little early and Mac was just walking out of the arrival gate when Nicco walked up. His breath stuttered in his chest. Damn, Mac was gorgeous. Mac smiled and flashed that one perfect dimple at Nicco. Mac further surprised Nicco by taking him in his arms and kissing him right there in front of everyone.

Nicco pulled away, a little red-faced. He quickly looked around and spotted an older couple giving them a strange look. "Um...don't forget, this is the Midwest not New York. I think you might just have given a couple of the good folks of Oklahoma heart attacks."

Mac smiled again and walked Nicco to the exit with his arm wrapped around him. "Don't care right now. The only thing I care about is tasting those sweet sugar lips of yours again."

Before they made it to the SUV, Mac spun Nicco into his arms and kissed him. He pushed his tongue so far back into Nicco's throat Nicco thought maybe he was checking to make sure he still had his tonsils. Pulling back slightly, Nicco rubbed his nose against Mac's. "I've missed you. Now get in the SUV. I've a lot to tell you."

Mac reluctantly followed him to Remy's SUV. As Nicco pulled out of the parking lot, Mac put his hand on Nicco's thigh. "So what's happened now?"

As he filled Mac in on Remy and Cory's wedding, Mac continued to rub. When he finished the story he looked over at Mac and then quickly down at his erection trying to pop the buttons on his jeans.

"You see what you've done? Are you happy now?" He tried to look indignant but ruined it with a small smile.

As Mac watched Oklahoma City grow smaller in the side mirror he looked from Nicco's face back down to the bulge in his jeans. "Not quite." He started unbuttoning Nicco's button-fly as he kissed the side of his neck. "I wanna taste." *God, he'd missed this man. He'd been away from Nicco before but it seemed to hurt more this time.*

The SUV swerved and Nicco groaned but he obligingly spread his thighs farther apart. "Can you at least wait for me to find a country road or something? Damn, I'll kill us both if you latch on to me while I'm trying to drive."

Giving a small nod as he continued to lick and nibble the side of Nicco's face, he finished unbuttoning. He pushed his hand down inside Nicco's underwear as Nicco pulled off the main road onto a dirt one. Fishing Nicco's shaft out of his jeans, Mac licked his lips. The tip of Nicco's cock glistened in the sunlight. "Better find a place quick."

Two more turns and Nicco slammed on the brake and threw the SUV into park. He turned his head and devoured Mac's mouth. He began pulling at Nicco's clothes.

"Lift up for me, baby." Nicco lifted his ass and Mac pushed his jeans down to his ankles. Two seconds later Mac had his lips wrapped around Nicco's length. Mac licked down to the base and then back up the heavily veined cock. He looked up at Nicco and grinned before slipping his lips over the top to capture the crown in his throat.

Nicco fisted his hands in Mac's hair and thrust up. "Oh, fuck," Nicco growled as he took one hand out of his hair to run down Mac's back. When Mac's tongue really got into the game, Nicco panted, "Gonna come."

Moaning, Mac took Nicco down as far as he could. The low vibrations against his cock must have set Nicco off. He came down Mac's throat in pulse after pulse of ecstasy. Nicco screamed Mac's name so loudly his ears began ringing in the confined space of the vehicle. That was okay with Mac, he loved the sound of his name on Nicco's lips.

After licking him clean, Mac sat up and took Nicco's mouth, sharing the earthy flavors with his love. Breaking the kiss, Nicco began unfastening Mac's jeans. "My turn."

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Fifteen minutes later they were back on the main road heading for the Double B. Both men rode in silence for a while, their mutually sated faces reflecting their present mood. Finally, Mac ran his fingers through Nicco's thick hair. "So tell me what's been happening since I last talked to you?"

"Well, Cory swears someone was watching her through the kitchen window last night. We looked around with flashlights but didn't see anything. The rest of the guys were going out this morning to do a more thorough search. I lucked out and got to *come* and get you." Nicco reached over and squeezed Mac's thigh. "I've missed you. Probably more than I ever have before."

"I know what you're saying. So I hate to bring it up, but how's Amir been getting along with the fellas?"

Looking over at Mac, Nicco could see the tension in his jaw. He could tell his answer meant a lot to Mac. He'd been doing a lot of thinking lately, about Mac and Amir. Sure, he found Amir attractive, Nicco even found himself hard a time or two just looking at the man. Hell, who wouldn't? Amir was gorgeous. Lately though, he'd tried picturing Amir with the two of them in bed. Although he usually ended up coming just from the picture the three of them made, Nicco just didn't know if he could share Mac without jealousy taking up permanent residence. Who could compete with a man who looked like Amir? He looked at the road and then back at Mac.

"We're all trying to get to know him. He hasn't been very open with Cory or the rest of the guys, but I have to give him credit for opening up a little to me. He's not being overly friendly or anything, but he's at least talked to me more than the others." Nicco squeezed Mac's thigh a little tighter. "I asked him if he loved you."

Mac ran his hand down his face and scrubbed at his jaw. "What did he tell you?"

"He told me yes. Of course it's what I expected, but I won't lie and say it didn't still hurt a little." Nicco glanced at Mac. He looked completely torn. That wasn't the look Nicco wanted to see on Mac's beautiful face.

They drove for a while in silence. "Mac?"

"Yeah, baby?"

"I've thought of the three of us being together." He chewed on his lip, refusing to look over at Mac. "I'm afraid."

"What exactly are you afraid of?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Nicco turned onto the county road where the Double B was located. "Afraid of being jealous. Afraid of losing you to him. Afraid I won't measure up next to him and you'll see that he's the one you really wanted all along."

"Stop the car," Mac growled. Nicco looked over at Mac. His nostrils were flared and his face was set in stone. *Oh shit, he hadn't seen Mac this pissed in years.*

He pulled the car to the side of the road, and put it into park but refused to look back over at Mac. If Mac was going to scream at him, he could damn well do it to his profile.

Mac jumped out of the SUV and slammed the door shut. He paced back and forth in front of the vehicle, cussing a blue streak. Nicco didn't know what he should do so he just sat there.

After several minutes, Mac climbed back into the SUV and turned toward Nicco. "Do you have any idea what I've gone through since falling in love with you? Do you even know what it was like for me to come home from the service and be in your presence every damn day and not be able to touch you?"

Mac hit the dashboard with his fist. "Fuck, baby. I told you all this before. I gave up Amir because of my love for *you*. I don't want him without you. I *want* both of you, yes, but I *need* you. How can you both be so jealous of each other? Am I just a complete bastard for loving two men? Is that what I'm not seeing here?"

Nicco gripped the steering wheel. "I'm sorry. I know what you've given up for me. I guess I just don't understand it. How can I, when my own mother didn't love me enough to take me with her when she left? How can I, when my own father has told me a queer has no place in his life? People only seem to love me conditionally. What if I do something...?" Nicco waved his hand around the car. "Something like this and you suddenly decide I'm more trouble than I'm worth?" There, he'd opened his soul and laid it all out on the table, all the fears and worries that had kept him in a constant state of denial.

Mac pulled Nicco across the console and into his arms. "Believe me, if I haven't walked away from you yet, I won't be walking at all. I love you more than my own life. Until you get past this jealousy thing you'll never understand how perfect the three of us are for each other. I have taken your personality into account. Believe it or not, Amir can be quite funny and spontaneous."

Nicco leaned in and pressed his lips to Mac's. He put all the love he felt into that one kiss. When he pulled away to look into Mac's beautiful eyes he nodded. "I'll try harder. I promise."

"That's all I can ask."

Mac let go of him, and he moved back to his side of the SUV. "We'd better get back before they send a search party." Nicco had a lot of thinking to do.

Chapter Four

On a plane bound for Miami, Nicco openly held Mac's hand. It was nice knowing he could show even this much affection in public. He leaned closer to Mac's ear and whispered. "You think this plan's going to work?"

Mac turned his head and gave Nicco a quick kiss on the lips. "I sure as hell hope so. Cory was right. If the person tormenting her is Anton he won't give up until he gets what he's after. I just hope he waits until everyone is in place tomorrow night. No doubt he followed her back to Key West."

"Was Amir okay with going back to Santa Fe and flying out with Jake?" Nicco felt bad after the way he'd acted earlier in the day. The look on Amir's face when Mac got out of the SUV broke Nicco's heart. For just a split second Amir let his mask of cool confidence slip and the love he felt for Mac was right there. He knew that look. It was the same one he'd given Mac often over the years when it was just the two of them alone in a room. He decided on the spot to try to bridge the gap between him and Amir, for Mac's sake if nothing else.

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They arrived in Miami around eleven o'clock that night. They would fly out in the morning and meet up with Amir and Jake at the tiny airport in Key West. Mac obtained a room at one of the hotels close to the airport and they took a cab.

Letting themselves into their room, Nicco suddenly felt nervous. He'd decided tonight was the night. He had been stretching himself quite regularly with butt plugs of varying widths and lengths. After the first few times of playing with the plugs, Nicco felt confident he was ready to accept Mac's cock inside him.

As soon as Mac closed the door and threw the deadbolt Nicco was on him. He ate at Mac's lips, only breaking their lip lock to pull the tight t-shirt over his head. Mac reciprocated and took off Nicco's shirt.

Tweaking Nicco's sensitive nipples, Mac leaned in and kissed him again. "Want you."

"Yeah. Been getting my ass ready for you for two damn weeks." He unfastened his fly before sitting on the bed to unlace his boots. Throwing them into the corner of the room, he pushed his jeans and underwear down and off. He went to his duffel and extracted a tube of lube and his favorite butt plug. He held them up for Mac to see.

Mac was just stepping out of his jeans when Nicco held up the plug. "Oh, fuck. You been using that? When?"

Smiling, he walked over to the bed and pulled down the bedspread and top sheet. He climbed onto the mattress and spread his thighs. He figured Mac had been such a good boy he deserved a little show.

Mac held up his finger. "Hold that position. I'm gonna get a wet washcloth so we don't have to get up later."

By the time Mac returned, Nicco already had his hole and the plug well lubed. "Do you want to put it in or shall I?"

Licking his lips, Mac shook his head. "I want to watch. Did you have this in while on the phone with me?"

Nodding, he slipped the tip of the plug into his hole, feeling the initial stretch. Nicco gave the plug a little twist, remembering their nightly phone calls. "Every time after that first night. Why do you think I always came so damn fast? Just imagining the plug was you was enough to set me off. You talking dirty to me and telling me to touch myself while you did the same was heaven." He smiled at Mac and pushed the entire length of the plug inside him.

"Oh, Christ, that's beautiful." Mac grabbed the bottle of lube and slicked his own cock while he watched Nicco manipulate the plug. "I want in."

Pulling the plug out of him, Mac groaned. He lined up his rigid cock and pushed slowly through the tight ring of muscles. Nicco was surprised that it didn't hurt. His hours of play must've really prepared him. He looked into Mac's eyes and smiled. "Do it."

In one grunted thrust Mac was buried balls-deep in his ass. "Oh, baby. Oh God. You feel like everything I've always dreamed about and more."

Hooking his legs over Mac's shoulders, he thrust up, needing more. "Move. I need to feel you move." He fisted his cock as Mac set up a pounding rhythm in and out of his ass. He leaned up on one elbow so he could see what Mac was looking at.

The sight of Mac's long thick cock disappearing into his body was overwhelming. "Fuck. That's amazing."

Nicco let himself go as he felt every inch of Mac's cock withdraw before pushing back in even harder. Nicco knew if he were lighter, Mac would have been moving him up the length of the bed with every thrust. But he was solid, and thank God, Mac was solid, strong, energetic and his.

Groaning, Mac wrapped his hand around Nicco's cock over the top of his own. Nicco picked up his rhythm and the sounds their bodies made slapping against each other were enough for him to shoot all over his and Mac's hand. "Uhh...fuck."

Mac continued his assault on Nicco's ass, but raised his cum-covered hand and licked Nicco's seed off. "I love you." Mac's face screwed up a bit as he slammed into Nicco one more time.

Nicco watched as Mac's stomach muscles flexed and tightened. He was breathtaking. Who wouldn't want this man in their bed? Surprisingly, he suddenly

thought of Amir. At the thought of Amir in bed with the two of them Nicco's cock gave a little jump. Shocked, he looked from his cock to Mac. "Did you see that?"

Mac opened his eyes and fell to Nicco's side. "See what? Your pretty ass with my cock buried in it? Yeah. I caught that."

Nicco poked Mac's stomach playfully. "Not that, smartass. I suddenly pictured Amir in bed with us and my cock actually jumped. I think he's starting to get used to the idea. Now I just have to get my mind wrapped around it."

Mac reached for the washcloth and cleaned them both up. "Thank you. That was some of the best sex of my life."

Snuggling in against Mac, Nicco sighed. "I'm glad you were the one to pop my cherry," he giggled, imitating a girl. "This is a night I'll never forget."

* * * * *

The following morning, they met up with Amir and Jake at the Key West airport. After hugging Jake, Mac looked over at Nicco. He smiled and nodded and Mac hugged Amir, whose eyes went wide and snapped toward Nicco.

Following suit, he hugged Jake and then approached Amir. He held out his arms and waited. Amir looked at him and bit his lip, finally giving in and giving him a quick hug. Nicco nodded and gestured toward the door. *Well, that went well.* "We need to get going. I thought we'd stagger into the bar one at a time among the rest of the crowd. We'll stay hidden upstairs until the bar closes and then sneak down and cover Cory while she's alone doing the dishes. That is, if she can get their kitchen help to let her do them. He's a tough old bird, I understand."

The other men nodded and followed Nicco out of the airport, he had to walk a little slower due to the previous night's activities, but—he smiled to himself—it was worth it. They decided to just catch a cab to the street where the bar was located. Getting out, Mac turned to Amir. "Why don't you filter in with the lunch crowd? Remy said he'd leave the upstairs door unlocked. It'll be the door across from the men's restroom. Go up and wait in Cory's apartment. One of us will be joining you in about an hour."

Amir gave Mac a quick nod and headed toward the bar. It wasn't hard to miss with the words "Crazy Cajun" written in pink and green neon in the window.

Once Amir was out of sight, Mac turned to Nicco and Jake. "Shall we go get a bite to eat?"

Jake nodded and smiled. "Yeah. I think I need a few words with the two of you anyway."

The three friends walked down another side street until they came to a tropical-looking bar. "Let's duck in here and grab a hamburger and a beer," Mac said as his hand landed on Nicco's lower back.

Nicco didn't miss the way Jake shook his head and smiled. As soon as they were seated and the waitress took their order Jake leaned over the table. "So when did the two of you realize you were perfect together?"

Choking on the mouthful of beer he'd just swallowed, Nicco was saved by Mac, who patted his back until his breathing was once again under control. "Dammit, Jake. You trying to kill me?"

Laughing, Jake sat back in the booth and crossed his arms. "Well?"

Scrubbing a nonexistent spot on the table with his thumb, he shook his head. "We've always known, but you know what my father's like. I just refused to do anything to go against his orders until about two weeks ago when he told me not to bother coming home to his sixtieth birthday party unless I brought a woman with me." He shrugged. "I think I finally figured out that the colonel put too many stipulations on his love. Mac and I got together the night Cory called to tell me Remy'd been in the explosion."

"Damn. Together one night and then separated for the next two weeks? I'm surprised either of you can even walk today." Jake winked and Mac chuckled.

"It is amazing considering we did our damndest to make up for lost time last night." Mac put his hand on Nicco's leg under the table.

"Well, I've got a little confession of my own. I hope it doesn't shock the two of you and I hope it doesn't change our friendship, but Cree, Jenny and I have formed a relationship with Cory and Remy."

At Nicco's and Mac's confused looks, Jake continued. "We all love each other. It started out as sex between a group of people who cared for each other but it's grown into real honest-to-God love."

Mac whistled. "Wow. And I thought you might think I was odd for wanting Amir with Nicco and me."

Jake's eyebrows rose at the mention of the silent bodyguard. "Amir? Really?" Jake ran his hand through his unruly brown hair. "I mean, don't get me wrong. The guy's hotter than hell, but I'd never have pictured him being gay. Damn. My gaydar must be off. So if that's the way you all feel, what's the holdup?"

"Me," Nicco said and took another drink of his beer. "I'm afraid of the whole jealousy thing."

Reaching out across the table, Jake took his hand. "Answer a couple questions for me. Do you think that Mac will love you less if he loves Amir too?"

"I did at first but not anymore. Mac's assured me that he'll always love me."

"Do you think it would be possible for you to love Amir eventually?"

"If we're intimate with each other, definitely. It's just the way I'm wired."

"If you did fall in love with Amir would it lessen your feelings for Mac?"

"No way in hell." He thought about what he'd just said. He looked over at Mac then back at Jake. "Is that the way it is with the three of you and Remy and Cory?"

"Yep. I love them all. What could be better in life than to be surrounded by sexy, sexual people that you love?" Jake sat back in his seat and gloated. He knew he'd made his point and he was looking quite full of himself.

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When an hour had passed, Mac was the next to infiltrate the bar. He walked in with a crowd of tourists and gave Remy a slight nod as he made his way to the hall. He climbed the stairs two at a time and opened the door to Cory's apartment. Amir was seated at the small kitchen table eating a sandwich. Mac walked into the room and motioned toward the food. "Cory bring that up for you?"

Amir nodded and wiped his mouth on a napkin. "Yes. And it's one of the best sandwiches I think I've ever eaten. Either that or I was about to starve to death." Amir smiled and took another big bite.

Mac watched him eat, studying the chiseled facial features. Almost absently, Mac said, "I've missed your smile." When Amir wiped his mouth again and turned his head down, Mac lifted Amir's chin with his hand. "Look at me."

Reluctantly, Amir turned his eyes toward him. He leaned over and brushed his lips over Amir's, the touch so natural. "I'm sorry you're going through this. I truly believe that we'll all be together soon."

Amir looked into Mac's eyes. "I need you so much. I feel so alone."

Mac was a little taken back. It wasn't like Amir to put his feelings out there like that. Mac figured Amir must be hurting even more than he'd ever realized. Leaning in again, Mac kissed Amir's moist eyes. "We have to be patient and do this thing right if it's going to last, just a little more time, honey. That's all I ask."

Gathering his napkin and empty plate, Amir stood and went to the sink. He spoke to Mac without turning around. "I know what you see in him. He's different when he's around his friends. Make sure that he's sure, because I could easily fall in love with him too and I won't be deprived of two people I care about. One has been hard enough to live with."

Smiling, Mac was happy Amir had obviously been giving a relationship between the three of them a lot of thought. Mac stood and walked up behind Amir. Wrapping his arms around Amir, Mac felt the strong muscles of Amir's lean frame. Needing to feel closer, Mac nuzzled and kissed Amir's neck. "I love you."

Amir didn't turn around but he did lean back into Mac's arms. "And I love you."

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As the last of the patrons stumbled out of the bar, Mac, Nicco, Amir and Jake took up their positions. Mac and Nicco hid behind the bar and Jake and Amir hid inside the women's restroom. Remy went up to the apartment with a lot of noise and great fanfare. Nicco looked at Mac and rolled his eyes.

After sitting in a squat position for an hour, Nicco's legs were getting stiff. He started to stand and stretch when Mac pulled him back down and pointed to the kitchen. He strained his ears and that's when he heard a man talking to Cory.

Mac and Nicco crept toward the door after Mac signaled Amir, Jake and Remy over the headset. The door stood open and he watched in horror as Anton held a gun under Cory's chin. Anton was spouting something about Cory betraying him in the thickest Cajun accent he'd ever heard.

Nicco watched as everything seemed to happen at once. He saw Anton grab Cory's hair and pull her head back with the gun still firmly held under her chin. Nicco watched as Cory pulled a knife out of her apron and Mac moved through the doorway. Nicco's first instinct was to pull Mac back, out of danger. Nicco reached out but managed to grab only air. Shots rang out and Mac spun around and was shot again. Nicco's world seemed to narrow to only Mac as he saw him falling to the floor, blood already soaking through his shirt. Another shot was fired from the opposite doorway and Anton fell forward with a bullet hole between his eyes. Nicco looked up at the doorway and saw Amir still aiming his gun at Anton. The look on Amir's face said it all. For a split second they held each other's gaze, both silently agreeing they'd like to stand Anton up and shoot him again.

All hell broke loose as Nicco fell on his knees at Mac's side. Mac's face was slack and drawn. "Someone call nine-one-one. Now, goddammit!" He hovered over Mac's unconscious body as he watched the blood pool on the floor beneath him. Mac had been shot in the shoulder and then in the side as he spun from the first impact. Nicco knew he'd replay the entire scene over and over for the rest of his life.

Nicco felt the tears falling from his eyes and watched as they dripped onto Mac's dark gray t-shirt. Nicco shook his head. No, this couldn't be happening. Damn, he'd wasted so much time trying to be someone he wasn't. He felt like God was punishing him for denying Mac's love for so long. "Come on, sweetheart. Hold on for me. Come on. Just a little longer." He didn't know how long it took for the ambulance to arrive but as soon as they did Amir started barking orders like a regular drill sergeant, the anger and hurt evident in his voice. The EMTs loaded Mac and Nicco pleaded with the driver for a ride. After a brief discussion the driver told him he could ride up front with the driver. It wasn't what he'd been hoping for, but at least he'd be in the same vehicle with Mac.

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Nicco sat in the waiting room by himself for almost an hour before Amir came rushing in, and sat down beside him. "Any word?"

"No." He didn't look up from his hands even though he was glad he wasn't alone anymore. No way could he look into Amir's face, knowing the pain he'd see there. Nicco felt Amir's hand land on his back as he rubbed circles against Nicco's t-shirt. Amir talked to him in a soothing tone, telling him over and over that Mac would be

okay. That he'd been through worse and survived. Nicco knew Mac had been through worse, but this was harder because it had happened in front of him. If he'd just gone in first ahead of Mac...

When Jake, Remy and Cory arrived they all moved to a more secluded corner of the waiting area. All they knew was that Mac was still in surgery. They sat with him for several hours until a doctor finally came out to talk to Nicco. He took him into a private room and explained everything. After the doctor left, Nicco felt dazed. He looked up as his friends came into the room to surround him with support.

Nicco looked at them and shook his head. "The shoulder injury should heal just fine. He'll need to wear a sling for a week or so but there wasn't any severe damage. The other shot did most of the damage. They've repaired the internal injuries but the bullet passed close to his spinal cord. There's too much swelling to know for sure, but they think they'll know more in a couple of days. Right now, the surgeons hope his condition is only temporary but at least for a while he won't have the use of his legs. They think his condition is due to trauma to the spinal cord. Given time he should regain the full use of his legs but he'll be wheelchair-bound for several months, most likely."

Nicco stopped and looked at the group. He knew he'd recited the surgeon's words like a speech you'd give to a room full of strangers. Nicco just couldn't wrap his mind around the fact that although alive, Mac would be hurting for a long time. "He's been asking for me. He knows the extent of his injuries, but I'm not sure he understands them yet. He's still sedated so I might have to tell him all this again later today. He should be in a private room in a couple hours. They said I could see him then."

Nicco felt the sting of tears seconds before a whoosh of breath left his chest and he finally broke down. Amir pulled him into his arms. "It'll be okay. We'll take care of him." Nicco felt Amir's body trembling under his hands, trying to be the stronger one of the two of them. No wonder Mac clung to Amir after Nicco had broken his heart so many years ago.

Jealousy put aside, Nicco was glad he had a man as strong as Amir by his side. The feel of being held by someone who also loved Mac seemed to help. Nicco looked into Amir's eyes and they both seemed to share the same thoughts. *What would they do without Mac?*

Amir continued to support him as both of them started to cry. He held Nicco even tighter. "Shh. It's all right now. He's still alive. You know Mac. He'll be up and kicking our butts in no time."

Nicco embraced Amir like a lifeline. He buried his face in Amir's neck and continued to weep until he didn't have any tears left. When he finally pulled back he looked at Amir and gave him a nod. However small, something between them had shifted. Nicco still wasn't ready to share Mac's bed with Amir, but it was a start. Nicco pointed toward Amir's black polo shirt, now stained with his tears.

"Sorry about that." He walked over and pulled several tissues out of the box on the little table and blew his nose. He retrieved another tissue and handed it to Amir, who looked as bad as he felt.

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They were allowed into Mac's room a little over an hour later. Jake, Cory and Remy took off, saying they'd be back in the morning. Nicco sat in one of the chairs at Mac's bedside and touched his arm, well aware that Amir sat on Mac's other side. Amir looked just as bad as Nicco knew he did, but unable to focus on anything but the man he loved. Mac slowly opened his eyes.

"Hey, baby," Mac croaked.

"Shh. Don't talk, just get some sleep. Amir and I are here to watch over you. I saw a couple of the nurses fighting over who got to take care of the hunk with long hair. I'm thinking you'll need two bodyguards to keep them at bay."

Mac opened his eyes again and managed a smile.

"Yeah. None of that dimple flashing, sweetheart. It gets you into trouble every time." Nicco watched as Mac's eyes closed and he fell back to sleep. It wasn't until he looked over at Amir that Nicco felt guilty. Mac hadn't even acknowledged that he was there. Nicco decided to help Mac out of this one. He gestured to Mac. "He's still so drugged up he doesn't even know where he is. Hopefully he'll be more clearheaded in the morning."

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The next morning Mac woke to find both his men sleeping in chairs beside his bed. He looked from one to the other. When the door opened he smiled as Jake, Remy and Cory entered the room. Cory bent and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.

They talked for a while about what the doctors had said and Mac told them he regretted that once again Nicco would have to take care of him until he got back on his feet. Jake suggested Mac go to Gabe's ranch for his rehabilitation therapy. Even though the idea appealed to him he shook his head. "I've got a business to run. I can't just take off for a couple months to Oklahoma. Nicco doesn't like the whole office thing so I could never ask him to do that."

"You wouldn't get that far away from me anyway." Nicco sat up and stretched. He took Mac's other hand. "Why can't you do some of the work you do now via the Internet? You can appoint Bram to take your place at the office and back him up from a computer at Gabe's."

When he started to argue Nicco held up his hand. "Mac, we both know we've got competent men working for us. We've got enough money in the bank regardless of whether the business goes down or not. Right now, you need a break from Manhattan and I need to be with you. Hell, who knows, maybe I'll even become a cowboy."

Mac started to laugh but stopped and held his stomach. "I'd pay good money to see you in a cowboy hat." He looked over at Amir, who was now awake and sitting quietly. "What about you? You going back to New York or do you feel like some more time in the country?"

Amir looked at him for a long time. Finally, he shook his head. "I think it would be better if I went back to New York, at least for a while. I can get things lined out at the office for you and see about shipping some of your stuff to Oklahoma." Mac looked at Amir for a couple of seconds then nodded. "If that's what you really want." He couldn't help but feel he'd somehow let Amir down although the man was giving nothing away with his facial expression. Turning from Amir, he looked at Nicco. "That sound okay to you, Nicco?"

Nicco looked at Amir. "Yeah. That sounds fine." Amir looked back up and Nicco cleared his throat. "You'll come out after that though, won't you? I mean...I know Mac would like it if you were there too."

The three of them stared at each other for several minutes. The room was so full of tension Mac wasn't surprised when Cory came over and kissed him goodbye despite the growls from both Jake and Remy. She smiled and winked and then went over and gave Nicco a kiss. She spoke to Amir for a minute and waved as the threesome headed out the door. When they were gone Mac looked from Amir to Nicco.

"So go find me a doctor and find out when I'm getting out of this place."

Chapter Five

Two months later

Mac struggled with the exercise bars one more time. His shoulder was finally well enough to hold his weight, but his legs still weren't cooperating. "Get me the damn chair."

Dr. Declan O'Malley shook his head and pushed the wheelchair over to him. "I know it feels like you're failing, but you've already made such good progress. Don't slide back now."

Growling, Mac wheeled himself out of the therapy building and into the sunshine. How could he hope to hold on to Nicco like he was? Not only did Mac's legs not work, but his cock as well. He ran his hands through his hair and yanked out the piece of rawhide that held it back. He loved the way the wind played in his hair. He spotted Nicco over by the corral talking to Rex. *The two of them have gotten awfully chummy lately.* Mac watched as Nicco threw back his head and laughed at something Rex said, the gesture tearing at his heart.

"Damn." He wheeled himself over to the fence where Nicco stood. "Something funny?"

Nicco looked over and smiled. He walked closer to Mac and bent down to kiss him. "Hey. How was therapy?"

"Waste of time. I can barely get these damn legs of mine to move, let alone walk." Nicco looked over at Rex. For an older man, Rex Cotton was still damn good-looking and to hear Gabe talk, damn good in bed.

"We'll see you later, Rex. I'm gonna get Mac a shower." Nicco pushed Mac toward their cabin.

They'd gone ahead and had another one built just for them. They realized after the first week they'd not only be here for a while but they needed more room. It wasn't hard with Mac's and Nicco's money to flash around. Now at the end of the little line of small one-room cabins stood a four-room log cabin, which they told Boone, Rex and Gabe they'd donate to the center when they were finished with it. Gabe agreed, saying it would be a nice place for long-term rehab patients.

As Nicco pushed Mac up the ramp and through the doorway he sighed to himself. Mac's mood was getting worse. The doctor said he should be getting better by now, but it was like Mac was just giving up. He hadn't told Mac but he'd been in almost constant contact with Amir.

Strange as it seemed, Amir had become his crutch lately. After a day of getting snipped at by Mac, Nicco would take his cell phone and go out on the porch and call Amir. The two of them were starting to form a nice bond, talking at length about Mac. Nicco knew part of Mac's problem was that he hadn't been able to sustain an erection since the shooting. According to his doctor, Mac's penis shouldn't have been affected though.

Talking to the doctor on his own, he'd learned that Mac's penile dysfunction was most likely mentally induced. That's when Nicco came up with a brilliant plan. He couldn't wait to talk to Amir that night to see what he thought.

Coming back to the here and now, he wheeled Mac into the large handicapped-accessible bathroom. Mac took off his shirt and threw it *toward* the hamper. Nicco sighed and picked up the shirt and placed it *in* the hamper. He knelt down and unlaced Mac's athletic shoes and pulled them off along with his socks. When Mac tried to take off his sweats he struggled a bit and Nicco was right there, ready to lend a hand. He helped Mac pull the sweats off and put them in the hamper.

He heard Mac start grumbling under his breath and took a deep breath. It seemed no matter what he did anymore it pissed Mac off.

He turned the water on to warm it up. "Would you like me to take a shower with you, sweetheart? That way I could help hold you up and you could get to all your private places easier."

Mac shook Nicco's hand off his arm. "Why don't you go ask Rex if he'd like to shower with you? You two seemed pretty cozy a few minutes ago."

That was it. He'd had all the bullshit he was going to take from this man. He kicked Mac's shoes across the bathroom. "Fuck you, Mac. Fuck you." Nicco started to storm out of the room and stopped. He was tired of coddling Mac, sick to death of continually trying to please him only to have shit like this come up. "I'm so damn tired of your little pity party. Maybe it's nice to talk to someone once in a while who isn't so fucking angry at the world. I love you, but right this minute I don't like you much." He left the cabin in a huff, slamming the door on his way out.

Mac looked around at the mess created by the flying shoes. Nicco had knocked over a big bottle of talcum powder along with the toothbrush holder. Shaking his head, he wheeled himself to the shower. Using the grab bars along the shower wall, he stood and pushed his chair back. Sliding his hands along the bars, he slowly dragged his legs and therefore his body into the shower.

When he was finally under the spray of water, Mac let go with one hand and retrieved the soap off the shelf. One-handed he began to wash his body. He was still pissed and he didn't even know why. Sure, he'd acted like an ass to Nicco about Rex, but he was smart enough to know Nicco would never cheat on him. No, his real problem was himself. He had taken a giant step backward. Once again, he was dependent on Nicco for almost everything.

He dropped the soap while trying to wash his flaccid cock. "Fuck." Knowing there was no way for him to get the bar of soap, he reached for the shampoo bottle. He managed to hold the bottle under his chin so he could pour some into his hand without letting go of the bar. The shampoo bottle slipped from under his chin and fell on his foot. The weight of the large bottle struck his big toe with a thud. Not thinking, Mac yelled and lifted his hurt foot.

Raising his foot like that not only amazed him, but put him so off balance he crashed to the floor, hitting his head on the tiled shower wall on the way down.

He must have blacked out because when he came to, the shower water was ice-cold. Trying to sit up, he grabbed the back of his head and felt the warm stickiness of blood. Bringing his hand back around, he looked at it. *Yep. He'd cracked his skull but good.*

Struggling to focus his eyes, he dragged himself out of the shower and to his chair. He pulled himself up and reached for a towel. After quickly drying himself, he put the towel against the back of his head. With the shower still running, he wheeled himself one-handed toward the bed. Getting in bed took more strength than he seemed to have. He was worn out by the time he got to the bed. Mac barely had the strength to partially stretch out before falling into a dead sleep.

* * * * *

Nicco walked around the barn and the other outbuildings until his temper cooled. He pulled out the phone and called Amir.

"Hello."

"Hey, it's me." Just the sound of Amir's voice started to calm him significantly.

"It's the middle of the day. What's wrong?"

"Everything." He squatted against a tree, thinking about the fit he'd thrown earlier. "I fought with Mac. Again."

"What happened this time?"

Nicco couldn't get over the sincerity in Amir's voice. "I guess he must have had another bad day in therapy. When he was finished he found me beside the corral, joking around with Rex. When I took him home for a shower he accused me of wanting Rex. And well, blah, blah, blah. I screamed at him and told him to stop with the whole pity party thing and I stormed out. I know I'm an ass. You don't have to say it."

"I wasn't going to. What I was going to suggest is that maybe Mac's just feeling insecure. I've absolutely no doubt he's taking it out on you. I thought maybe I'd come down for a bit. Maybe take some of the pressure off you."

"Oh God. I could kiss your feet right now." Nicco decided now was as good a time as any to let Amir in on his plan to get Mac back to being Mac. "I was going to call you tonight and suggest that very thing. I talked to Mac's doctor and he thinks his erection problem is all mental. I was thinking maybe if the two of us put our *heads* together maybe we could snap him out of it."

Amir was silent for a few seconds. "Do you mean what I think you mean?"

"Yeah, I think I'm ready. I mean, lately, I've felt closer to you than to Mac. Don't get me wrong. I need the man like I need air, but his whole attitude is starting to take me down with him. We both need you, Amir." Nicco looked down and realized his fingers were crossed in his lap.

"Thank you. You have no idea how much it means to me to hear you say that. I'll make arrangements today and fly out first thing in the morning."

The two men said their goodbyes and Nicco was in a much better mood when he opened the cabin door. He didn't see Mac but he heard the shower still running. That's weird, he thought. Nicco crossed the living room to the little hallway. He entered the bathroom, calling Mac's name.

When he saw the bloody towel on the floor he quickly looked into the shower. Although the water was still on he could see traces of blood against the edge of the wall. He turned the shower off and ran to the bedroom. He found Mac half on the bed still naked. Blood was evident under his head. "Oh, fuck. Mac?" Nicco knelt down and, using his strength, he lifted the big man in his arms and placed him in the center of the bed. He picked up the phone and called the rehab building. He watched as Mac's eyes fluttered a moment before closing again.

"Hello."

"Hi, Sheila, it's Nicco. Mac's fallen in the shower and cut the back of his head. Could you send the doc over here?"

"Right away."

He hung up and pulled a sheet over Mac's bottom half, hoping to give him a little privacy. Nicco crawled up on the bed beside him and kissed his cheek. "Come on, sweetheart. Wake up." Nicco lightly tapped Mac's cheeks.

Mac opened his eyes a bit and grimaced at the pain in his head. "Sorry. Fell in the shower," Mac slurred a little. His eyes started to droop but he opened them again and yawned. "Sorry I was being stupid with you. Just don't want you to leave me for someone who can walk and fuck."

Nicco kissed him. "You stupid ass. If you never walked again it wouldn't make me leave you. And as for fuckin', well, that's your problem according to the doc. He says it's a mental condition not a physical one. Either way, I've loved you for years without fucking you. I suppose loving you for the rest of my life without it would be doable."

The door opened and the doc came into the bedroom. He perched his stereotypical black bag on the edge of the bed and crossed his arms. "Up, Nicco. You can coddle him some more later. Right now we need to get him to the hospital."

"No. I'm not going to any damn hospital. Just stitch me up." Mac narrowed his eyes at Doc. "You do know how to do that, don't you? I'm not mistaken in my assumption that you're an actual medical doctor, am I?" Mac asked.

Nicco grinned, knowing Mac was just trying to challenge Declan into stitching him up.

It must have worked too because Declan rolled up the sleeves on his dress shirt and looked at Nicco. "I need you to get me a wet washcloth. We'll need to clean as much blood as we can out of his hair so I can see to stitch him up. Unless of course you think we should just shave a nice little patch of his hair off?"

Nicco shot out of bed and headed for the bathroom. "Don't touch his hair, Doc."

Coming back into the room, he saw Declan checking Mac's vital signs, reflexes and pupils for correct dilation. Declan sighed and shook his head. "You're a stubborn fool, Mac. You need to get your sorry ass to a hospital. How long were you out?"

Mac looked at Declan and shrugged. "A couple minutes at most in the shower."

Nicco interrupted, "What about when I walked in here and found you unconscious on the bed?"

"I wasn't unconscious, I was asleep. Both ya'll need to stop. After dragging my sorry ass out of the shower, drying off, getting back into the wheelchair and making my way in here, I was damned exhausted. I'm a man, goddammit, treat me like one. If I said I'm not going to the hospital, I'm not going."

Declan looked at Nicco, who held up his hands in surrender. He'd known Mac long enough to know it was no use trying to change his mind. Besides, he didn't act like he was out of his head or anything.

With a loud sigh, Doc tried to look at the back of Mac's head but there was just too much blood. "How can you stand all this hair?"

Nicco didn't want to hear about cutting Mac's hair again so he knelt on the bed and started cleaning Mac's head. Mac looked at Declan. "You should see our friend who's running our company while we're here. Bram's got hair down to his ass. The prettiest hair you've ever seen too, black as a raven's wing. Ouch! Watch it there, Nicco."

"Shut up, you big baby. I've got to get the blood out so Doc can see the cut to stitch it up or I've no doubt he'd be happy as hell to cut it all." Mac grunted and he continued. He went back to the sink two more times to rinse his cloth before Declan said it was clean enough. He did end up snipping a small patch of hair but the location was underneath so the rest of his long hair covered the stitched bit of skin.

Doc washed his hands and came back into the room. "I'd like to see you go over to the hospital and get yourself a CT scan, but I know you're a stubborn fool and won't go. You ever had a concussion before, Mac?"

"Of course, a half-dozen times and I don't need an expensive test to tell me I have one." Mac straightened the sheet over his naked groin.

"Then you already know the drill. Call me if you start throwing up, start seeing double or become unusually forgetful. Nicco, wake him every so often and make him recite a love poem."

Mac narrowed his eyes at Declan. "There's no love poems involved in a concussion."

Declan snapped his bag closed and winked at Nicco. "Yeah. But the way I see it, you must have been quite the jerk for Nicco to leave you alone in the shower. The poem's for him." He winked at Nicco again as he turned to leave.

"Ha-ha. You're real funny. And you'd better stop winking at my man. Get your own."

"Oh, if only they grew on trees. You just make sure you wake him every hour and get his ass to the ER if he starts throwing up or is hard to rouse." Doc left and Nicco cracked up.

Nicco sat on the edge of the bed and brushed his hand down Mac's chest. "I'm sorry I left you like that. I should have known better, but you just piss me off sometimes and it's better for me to get away than to stay and say things out of anger."

Mac held out his arms. "Would you get undressed and get in bed with this grouchy old man?"

Standing, Nicco stripped so fast it probably made Mac's head spin. "Damn, baby. I should have timed that. That was like some kind of record or something."

Lifting the sheet, he slid in and snuggled up to Mac. "Just been waiting for you to ask for a long time. Sometimes I feel like you don't want me in bed with you anymore."

Kissing the top of his head, Mac sighed. "It's not that I don't want you, it's that I can't do what I want."

"Sometimes it's just nice to be held, Mac. I don't want our relationship to always just be about sex. What happens when we're ninety and can't get it up anymore? You're my best friend, and I've needed you lately and you haven't been there." Nicco felt a little guilty, saying these things to Mac, but he deserved the truth. Nicco played with Mac's dark chest hair. "I've taken to calling Amir in the evenings once you go to bed. Just to talk. It helps if I can unload on him sometimes. Besides, he makes me give him a daily report of your progress." He smiled just thinking about Amir's barrage of questions regarding Mac every night.

"Really? Why didn't you tell me before that you did that?" Mac ran his hand down Nicco's back.

Shrugging, he plucked idly at Mac's nipples. "I didn't want you to get jealous."

"Jealous? Are you serious? I'm not jealous. I'm ecstatic. I love that you've opened yourself to Amir."

"Good, because he's flying in tomorrow. We're planning on ganging up on you about this whole sex thing. I've got a few ideas about how to bring that big fat cock of yours around to our way of thinking."

"You do? What if I'm a disappointment to you both? What then?" Mac ran his hand down the crack of Nicco's ass. He was disappointed Mac didn't go any further.

Nicco squirmed a bit under Mac's hand. "If that fails we'll just come up with something else. We're not giving up on you, no matter what. If for some reason your cock never works again I figure you can just be our bottom. You may not be able to fuck but you can sure as hell get fucked." Nicco hoped he hadn't stepped over the line. "I mean, if that's what you want? We'd never make you do anything you didn't want."

"Right now what I really want is to take a little nap with the man I love. So close those pretty eyes of yours and go to sleep."

"Just be prepared for me to wake you in an hour." Nicco smiled and kissed Mac's chest as he laid his head down.

Chapter Six

Nicco left the next morning to drive into Oklahoma City to pick up Amir. They'd decided it would be better if Mac did his therapy that morning before they came back to the ranch. That way, the three of them could spend the day together, and they had planned a surprise for Amir. They were going to take him horseback riding.

Neither of them knew whether Amir had ever been on a horse but it was something Mac could do so they figured Amir wouldn't mind trying it.

He entered the airport and sat in one of the uncomfortable chairs just outside the security gate. His nerves were starting to get the best of him. He'd asked himself over and over if he was ready to take this next step, and every time the answer came back *yes*. The attraction had always been there for him. Hell, who wouldn't be attracted to Amir, the man was flawlessly beautiful. But he'd always been so aloof that Nicco thought he was simply stuck-up. Now he'd heard about Amir's past and talked for hours to the man over the phone he definitely saw why Mac was in love with him.

Paying no attention to the people milling around him, he let his mind wander to what it would be like to make love with Amir. He'd already observed Amir's nice-sized cock through the jeans he wore at the ranch. What would it feel like to have that shaft inside him? Before he knew it, Amir was standing in front of him and Nicco had a hard-on the size of an oak tree.

"Nicco?" Amir's luscious cock right there in front of him begged to be touched.

Looking into Amir's eyes, he snapped out of his musings. Standing, he embraced Amir for the first time since they were at the hospital right after Mac had been shot. This hug felt entirely different, more lust-driven than sorrowful. Nicco held him tight and kissed his cheek, feeling the heavy stubble of Amir's five o'clock shadow even though it was still early in the day. "I'm glad you're here."

Amir pulled back a little and looked into his eyes. "Me, too." He wrapped his arm around Nicco and they walked toward the baggage claim area. "I brought a couple of bags this time, one with my clothes and one with some things from New York for you and Mac." He held up the plastic sack in his hand. "I even brought you pastrami on rye bread from your favorite deli, although I think half the passengers on the plane weren't too happy with the smell the entire trip." He winked at Nicco, and Nicco's heart surged.

They retrieved Amir's luggage and made their way out to the parking lot. He stopped behind their shiny red four-door pickup and put the bags in the back while motioning for Amir to get in.

Amir ran his hand over the smooth gray leather seats. "This new?"

Nicco pulled Amir over closer to him on the bench seat. "Yeah. Mac and I decided to go ahead and buy it." He leaned in and took his first kiss from Amir.

Wrapping his arms around Nicco's neck, Amir took the kiss to the next level and soon the two men were lost in sensation. Their tongues battled and stroked, delving deeper and deeper into each other's mouth. When they broke apart Nicco leaned his forehead against Amir's. "Damn." The kiss had been the kind people fantasize about. Nicco swore at one point he'd wanted to break out in song as the fireworks exploded behind his eyelids.

Running his hand down Nicco's chest to land on his obvious erection, Amir sighed. "I think we'd better get to the ranch, fast. The first time I make love to you I want Mac with us."

Nicco nodded his head and gave Amir another quick but sensual kiss. "Yeah." Now if he could manage to concentrate on the road enough to get them home in one piece it would be a miracle. After buckling his seat belt, Nicco sat back up and started the truck. They drove back to the ranch discussing the best way to proceed with their burgeoning relationship.

"I think we should tease Mac a bit. You know give each other sly little touches and then blatant ones. Build up the suspense a bit for him. Hopefully rev his engines a little." Nicco looked over at Amir, who nodded and put his hand on Nicco's thigh. Yep, his cock sprang to life again after a simple touch from Amir. He was definitely ready for this.

"I can do that. When is it okay for me to touch Mac?" Amir asked, drawing circles with his finger on Nicco's thigh.

"I think you'd better do it right away. Let him see that it isn't going to bother me to see him touch and kiss you. Otherwise I'm afraid he might think the two of us are going to get together and leave him in the dust. He's very depressed right now as it is. It wouldn't take much for him to make that leap in his mind." Stepping a little harder on the gas pedal, Nicco pushed the truck past the speed limit. His cock was actually throbbing, thinking about Amir kissing Mac. He shook his head slightly. *Wow, this was a new development.*

Forty minutes later they pulled into the ranch yard and he parked the truck in the parking lot. He got out and grabbed one of the bags from the back. "Mac's probably at home." Nicco led Amir to their little log cabin tucked just in front of the tree line.

"Nice place." Amir nodded his approval as he walked up the ramp to the front door. He took a deep breath and Nicco could tell he was nervous about seeing Mac after so long. Nicco stopped Amir, and gave him a reassuring hug.

Opening the door, they found Mac stretched out on the couch taking an after-therapy nap. Nicco smiled and looked at Amir. "Therapy wears him out."

When Nicco started to go over to him, Amir put a hand on his arm. "Let me. Please." Nodding, he watched as Amir went over to the black leather couch and knelt down. He brushed Mac's hair away from his face and kissed his lips. "Wake up."

Amir kissed him again and Mac kissed back. When Mac opened his eyes he started for a minute. "Amir?" He looked over at Nicco. Grinning, Nicco nodded his okay.

Mac smiled back and looked at Amir. He pulled him closer and kissed him again. This time the two men used more tongue and there was a lot of moaning and groaning involved. Nicco observed the way Amir humped the side of the couch a few times before they broke the kiss.

Running his hands through Amir's short black hair, Mac looked into his eyes. "It's been a long time. It's good to have you back in my arms again." He looked over Amir's shoulder to Nicco. "You sure you're okay with this?"

Nicco went and sat on the arm of the couch next to Mac's head. He leaned down and kissed him, tasting Amir's now-familiar flavor on Mac's tongue. "More than okay. I think I understand now. You were right about not feeling jealous." He looked down toward his erection. "And if my cock is any indicator it doesn't affect my desire for you."

"I love you. You know that, right?" Mac still looked a little overwhelmed with the new development.

"I know. I love you too." He stood and ran his hand over the top of Amir's head. "Let's get you changed into jeans and do a little riding this afternoon."

Amir's head snapped toward him. "We're going riding?"

Nodding, he smiled. "It's good exercise for Mac's legs. Do you mind giving it a go?"

"Mind? I love to ride. I was on the polo team in boarding school." Amir was almost giddy with joy.

"Well, then let's get Mac changed out of those sweats and into some jeans."

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They rode along the pasture in leisurely silence, Amir taking off with his horse every now and then for a good run. He seemed happier than Nicco had ever seen him. Amir rode back after one such run grinning. "I love this. New York is okay for business but it does little for the soul."

Smiling, Mac took a deep breath. "It is nice to breathe real air for a change, isn't it?"

Nicco smiled at them and pointed toward a small grove of trees. The hard ridge behind his fly told him it was past time to stop. "Let's race over there and take a break." No sooner was it out of his mouth than the other two men took off. Laughing, he took off after them. When they arrived at the nice shaded area, Nicco took a large blanket out of his saddlebag and loosened the cinch on his horse. He spread the blanket out and helped Amir get Mac down from his saddle.

The two of them carried Mac's large body easily and set him on the blanket, leaning him against a smooth round rock that protruded from the ground. Before he went back to his saddlebag he gave Amir's ass a quick stroke. He smiled to himself as he retrieved

the bottles of water he'd brought along. Mac's mouth was still open when Nicco sat beside the two men on the blanket.

Leaning forward, he kissed Mac's open mouth. "Close your mouth, you'll draw flies."

Snapping his mouth shut, Mac looked from Amir to Nicco. "What was that?"

Looking totally clueless, he tilted his head. "What was what, sweetheart?"

"You touched Amir's ass. I saw you. What does that mean?"

"It means that Amir has a nice ass. Wouldn't you agree?" he replied in all seriousness.

"Well, sure, I agree, but why were you touching it?"

Nicco looked affronted. "Are you telling me you're the only one allowed to touch it?" He looked over at a grinning Amir.

"No, that's not what I'm saying at all. It just surprised me. I mean, you're really coming around to the idea of us all being together?"

Rubbing his chin in thought, he leaned toward Amir. "I'm not sure. Maybe I need a little sample of what I'll be getting." His lips closed over Amir's and the two of them engaged in a deep kiss. Nicco felt Mac's eyes on them as Nicco plundered Amir's mouth. He pushed farther into Amir's arms and they toppled backward onto the blanket. Amir's hands found their way to Nicco's ass and he began dry-humping him. When Nicco started panting, and thrusting back, they heard a moan coming from Mac.

They broke their kiss and looked over at Mac. He had his jeans open and a semi-hard cock in his hand. "Fuck, that's sexy. More." Mac licked his lips and Nicco looked down at Amir with a question in his eyes. Amir nodded and pulled Nicco's t-shirt over his head, flinging it aside and removing his own.

He immediately latched on to one of Amir's dark brown pebbled nipples. Nicco lapped at the swollen nub before latching on. He sucked so forcefully that his cheeks hollowed. He knew he was giving Amir quite a hickey, but he also knew Mac loved it. Nicco leaned up just enough to get his hands between them and started working on Amir's fly. As soon as the zipper was open, he nipped and licked his way down Amir's chiseled abdomen, separating Amir's waistband, Nicco pushed the jeans down as far as he could. Following Amir's black happy trail, he licked around the base of Amir's cock, taking the man's sac into his mouth. Nicco loved the texture of the soft wrinkled skin under his tongue. Amir pushed up into Nicco's face. "Suck me."

Releasing the suction on Amir's sac, Nicco worked his way up the steel-hard erection. When he reached Amir's crown he delved his tongue into the wide slit at the top, coming away with a pearly drop of pre-cum. Leaning over, Nicco shared the flavor of Amir with Mac. Mac opened his mouth willingly for the offering. Moaning, Mac tasted every drop of Amir's pre-cum.

Pulling back, Mac looked down at the cock in his hand. "By George, I think you've done it." Mac's cock was at full staff. Nicco smiled and gestured to Amir.

"Wanna help me finish him off? He's been waiting so patiently." At Mac's nod, he helped Mac maneuver over to Amir, who had taken matters into his own hands, literally. He was pumping his cock like crazy. Evidently the sight of Nicco sharing his gift with Mac was too much for Amir to sit idly by.

Nicco watched as Mac gave Amir a deep, tongue-thrusting kiss before moving down to circle the hickey Nicco had given him earlier. As he scooted down to take Amir's massive cock into his mouth, he watched as Mac nipped the pebbled nipple with his teeth. The next thing he knew, Mac was beside him, looking at Amir's cock. Mac licked around Amir's base while Nicco did his best to fit the tip and the first couple of inches into his mouth. Nicco's lips were stretched tight and a small split occurred at the corner of his mouth. Mac noticed and wiped away the tiny drop of blood.

"He's fantastic, isn't he? Wait until you feel him deep inside you."

Nicco moaned at the visual and unbuttoned his own jeans. He pulled his throbbing cock out and stroked himself as he worked his mouth up and down on Amir's shaft. Mac began licking and sucking Amir's balls. While Amir began thrusting up into Nicco's mouth, Mac took off Amir's boots and pulled his jeans and underwear completely off. He lifted Amir's ass and began licking his way around his rosette. Nicco watched the pair out of the corner of his eye. *Damn, they were sexy together.*

"Oh, yes." Amir was delirious with pleasure, as Mac attacked his hole with his tongue. Nicco could tell Amir wasn't going to last much longer so he worked quickly, climbing over the top of Amir's head and down to his cock. His cock was now in position for Amir to capture it with his mouth. Nicco's eyes closed in sheer bliss as Amir began sucking on Nicco's cock, taking it all the way to the back of his throat. He went back to work on the head of Amir's cock as he noticed Mac open Amir's hole with his thumbs so he could stab his tongue inside. Nicco braced himself for what he was sure to come.

Amir's cock erupted first, shooting thick globs of cum down Nicco's throat. He barely kept himself from choking as spurt after spurt filled his mouth and throat. In Amir's apparent ecstasy he actually nipped Nicco's cock. The sensation took him off guard and he shot down Amir's throat. When they were once again in control of their bodies they looked up at Mac.

Nicco noticed Mac had taken his tongue out of Amir's ass to watch the two men come. Now he managed to roll himself over onto his back. "Someone better get their ass over here and ride me before I explode."

Nicco got off Amir and motioned to Mac. "It's been longer for you. You take the first ride on our newly fixed toy." Amir nodded and Mac spat in his hand. He slicked his cock up and positioned Amir over the top of him. "You should still have plenty of my spit in that pretty hole of yours."

Amir lowered himself on Mac's shaft and they all three groaned in unison. Nicco felt quite content to watch as Amir raised and lowered himself on Mac's erection. Well, a little more than content actually, as a matter of fact, the sight was incredibly erotic.

When Nicco saw Amir's shaft begin to fill again he seized the opportunity to get in on the act and devoured the head of the quickly filling cock. Amir buried his hands in Nicco's curls as he squatted over Mac. Nicco was amazed at the strength in Amir's legs. He not only managed a quick up-and-down rhythm but also thrust his cock into Nicco's mouth over and over.

Mac seemed to enjoy his view because he growled out a warning just before he pulled Amir down fully onto his cock. Nicco put his hand on Mac's abdomen and felt the ripples and shivers run through his body as he came. Amir came once again deep in Nicco's throat.

The threesome collapsed in a pile of hugs and kisses. He snuggled up to one side of Mac while Amir snuggled against the other side. They held hands and shared kisses between themselves and Mac.

Pulling back a little from the kiss, Mac looked at Nicco's still-bleeding lip. He wiped away the blood with his thumb. "We're gonna have to start lubing your lips before you do that, baby."

He grunted his reply and the threesome fell into a nice afternoon nap.

* * * * *

The next day Mac was up and ready for his therapy session. He wheeled himself into the rehab center. "Hey, Doc. Let's get this show on the road. I've got a couple of horny men waiting for me at home."

Dr. Declan O'Malley walked into the workout area with raised brows. "Men? You mean to tell me that stud Nicco isn't enough man for you? Greedy sonofabitch."

Laughing, Mac wheeled over to the weight machine he was to start on. "Wait until you meet Amir. Then you'll really be jealous." He did a couple of reps on the machine. "So tell me why you don't have anyone, Doc?"

Declan appeared unfazed by Mac's question but Mac could see the strong man's jaw tighten. "I had someone. He died of cancer a couple years ago. Haven't met anyone I was willing to open myself up to since." He gestured to the machine. "Now stop stalling and get back to work."

* * * * *

The threesome ate dinner that night in the newly finished main house with Boone, Gabe and Rex. They grilled steaks and sat out on the back patio. After dinner they all decided to stay outside and have a couple of beers. Rex pushed Mac over to one of the bed-type loungers. "Here you go, buddy. These things are heavenly." He helped Mac onto the large square piece of outdoor furniture. It was as big as a full-size bed and deeply padded in a bright blue weather-resistant fabric.

Mac positioned himself in the center and watched as the rest of the men cleaned up after dinner. Rex came back out with a big cooler of beer, setting it where Mac could reach it. "So how's therapy been going? Doc O'Malley doing you right?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Mac took a long pull off his beer. "It's slow going, but Doc's good. At least my guys have brought my cock back to life. That helped more than all the physical therapy put together."

Laughing, Rex stretched out in the lounge that was a twin to the one Mac was in. "A man can always get by without walking but life wouldn't be worth living if his willy didn't work." Mac started laughing just as Amir and Nicco came out of the house holding hands.

"What's so funny?" Amir said as he pulled two beers out of the cooler. He handed one to Nicco and they stretched out on either side of Mac.

"Nothing. Rex is just being a little too truthful again." Mac looked around. "Where did Boone and Gabe disappear to?"

Nicco coughed while Amir smiled. Amir looked over at Rex and winked. "I think they got a little distracted while Boone was bending over in the fridge putting the salad dressings away."

Rex sat straight up. "Uh. Excuse me for a minute, guys. I need to go check things out in the kitchen. See if Gabe needs any help." He strode into the house as quick as his legs would carry him.

All three of them started laughing as soon as Rex shut the door. Nicco turned sideways on the lounge and rubbed Mac's stomach. "You full, sweetheart?" He handed his beer bottle to Amir who put it on the little table beside him.

Mac groaned and reached behind Nicco to squeeze his butt. "Not that full. Come closer and give me some sugar." Mac puckered his lips at Nicco.

Scooting up a little on the lounge, Nicco took Mac's mouth in a soul-searing kiss. Soon another mouth joined them and the men engaged in an erotic three-way tongue tangle. Just when things were starting to really get going they heard the French doors open and Gabe, Rex and Boone shuffled out onto the patio.

The threesome ended their kiss and picked up their beers again. Mac finished his, and asked Amir to hand him another. After taking a drink he asked Boone about Doc O'Malley. "So what's the story with the doc? He seems hornier than hell. He told me his partner died a couple years ago from cancer. He's a hot-looking guy so why hasn't he found someone else?"

Boone swallowed his beer. "Declan was my student instructor in college. His partner, Scott, had brain cancer. I guess they'd been together since they shared the same foster home in high school. From what I remember his death was long and painful. I think it hurt Declan so much he hasn't been interested in opening himself up to anyone new. Why? You have someone in mind for him?"

"Actually I do." Mac looked thoughtful for a minute. "A good friend of ours. He's the lead investigator for our company. His name's Bram Blackstone. He grew up on an

Indian reservation in Arizona. Bram has a brother that's paralyzed from the waist down. His brother gets on really well. Other than not walking, Thor leads a completely normal life."

Amir stroked Mac's stomach thoughtfully. "How could we get Bram down here though? It's not like Thor needs any therapy."

Mac kissed Amir. "Who says Thor has to come for therapy? Maybe he'd just like a nice vacation on a ranch that's designed so he could get around on it easily. I bet he'd love the chance to go horseback riding. I could call Bram and tell him to come down here for a meeting and bring Thor along."

Boone's eyebrow rose. "And just like that he'd come running?"

"Hell, no. I'm sure Bram would pitch a fit but if I used the angle of giving Thor a nice vacation I might be able to talk him into it."

* * * * *

The next morning Mac called Bram at the office. "Hello."

"Hey, Bram, it's Mac."

"How the hell are you?" Bram's deep voice vibrated Mac's chest even through the phone.

"I don't know. I can take about two steps on my own but that's it. It wears me out so badly I have to take a nap like an old man when I'm done."

"Just keep working at it. You don't realize how lucky you are that you can even do that much."

"Well, that's one of the reasons I'm calling. I was hoping I could get you and Thor to come out for a week or so. I've got a lot of ideas swimming around in my head about the company that I want to talk with you about. I thought you could bring Thor with you. This place is beautiful and set up perfectly for the wheelchair-bound. I think Thor would really love it. The horseback riding alone is worth the trip from New York."

"I can't right now. You know how crazy it is here with the three of you gone. How the hell am I supposed to just take off for a week? Who's gonna take care of the new clients that come in?"

"If you have to, just close down. Give everyone who's not already on assignment a week of vacation. I don't know how you're going to do it. Just do it."

"Mac." Mac could tell Bram was trying to keep his temper in check. "I can try to clear some time later in the month but it's just not possible right now. I'm putting out fires everywhere. Which reminds me. Nicco's father's been calling every day for the last two weeks. I'm getting sick of putting the man off. You need to tell Nicco to deal with him."

"Why's the colonel calling there?" Mac scratched his healing stitches. He felt a sense of dread at the thought of the colonel trying to get his hooks into Nicco again.

"He says that Nicco won't return his calls when he leaves messages on his cell phone. He said it's very important that he speak with him right away."

"I'll tell Nicco to deal with him. See what you can do about getting down here though, I mean it. Give everyone an extra week of paid vacation if you have to. I don't care. Lord knows we can afford it."

Sighing into the phone, Bram finally gave up the fight. "I'll see what I can do about the office and I'll talk to Thor about what day exactly school gets out for the summer."

"Thanks. Talk to you later." Mac hung up and went to find Nicco. He found him in the barn brushing down the horse he'd been riding. "Hey." Mac took in Nicco's tight t-shirt and flexing muscles, unconsciously licking his lips.

"Hey." Nicco looked over and nodded toward his far side. Mac looked over and spotted a boy of about seven watching Nicco groom the horse.

"Hi, Billy. You go out riding with Nicco?" Mac wheeled his chair toward Billy.

"Yeah. He even let me run. Boone never does that." Billy grinned from ear to ear.

Nicco looked at the boy and frowned. "Hey. That's supposed to be our secret."

"Sorry. I thought I could trust Mac not to spill the beans to Boone." Billy looked down at his hands.

Putting down the currycomb, Nicco went over and knelt in front of Billy. He tipped his chin back up. "That's okay. You were right. You can trust Mac. What do you say the three of us go riding tomorrow and you can show Mac how well you handle a horse?"

Billy's eyes lit up. "Really?"

"Of course really. I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it. Why don't you go on and get to the mess hall. We'll be in shortly."

Billy nodded enthusiastically and wheeled himself out of the barn. Mac was chuckling when Nicco stood up. "What?"

"It's cute, that's all. I bet sometimes you wish you liked women just so you could be a dad." Mac raised his head toward Nicco. He tapped his lips and Nicco gave him a kiss.

"I love kids. Billy more so. His parents died in the same accident that paralyzed him. I think Boone's thinking about keeping him here permanently. I heard him talking to his social worker about getting temporary custody until he can deal with adoption proceedings."

"Wow. That's a big responsibility. What do Gabe and Rex think about it?" Mac adjusted the hard-on in his jeans. Since the feeling had come back to his cock he couldn't keep the randy thing down.

"They think whatever makes Boone happy they'll gladly do. They like the kid too. He has that effect on everyone he meets. He's just an all-around good kid who's completely in love with this place. It would be a shame to send him back to a foster home in the city." Nicco took his horse, Star Dancer, back out to the pasture. He met up with Mac outside the barn and pushed him to the dining hall.

"Before we go in to lunch I need to talk to you. Why don't we pull over in the shade a minute?" Nicco pushed him over under a tree and took a seat on the bench provided.

"Okay. Talk."

Mac really hated to have this conversation. Nicco had seemed so happy lately and Mac knew the subject of the colonel was sure to bring Nicco down. "I talked to Bram a little while ago. He said the colonel has called every day for the past two weeks begging to talk to you. He said he's left messages on your cell phone, but you haven't returned any of his calls. I don't blame you for not wanting to talk with him, baby, but you need to deal with him before Bram goes over there and does it for you." He put his hand on Nicco's thigh to soften his words.

Nicco stood up and paced around the tree. "The last time I talked to him was to tell him I wouldn't be at his birthday party. I told him I loved you and was willing to give him up for you. He called me every derogatory name in the book. Why the hell would I subject myself to that again?"

Mac grabbed his hand as he walked by. He pulled Nicco into his lap and kissed him, positive Nicco could feel the hard-on under his ass. "I'm not asking you to have a heart-to-heart with the man. Just tell him to stop calling the office."

Nicco closed his eyes. "All right. I'll call him after lunch." He rose off Mac's lap. Looking down at Mac, Nicco smiled and gave Mac's cock a quick stroke. *Yep, he'd felt it.* "Let's eat, I'm starving."

* * * * *

After lunch, Nicco sat on his bed and punched in his father's number. He wasn't sure what he was going to say to the man but Mac was right. It was his problem to deal with.

"Hello."

"Hello, Colonel." Nicco noticed his posture straightened just with his father's commanding tone of voice.

"It's about time you called, Niccolo. I've been trying to reach you for weeks. I need you to come home."

Nicco couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Really. That's not what you said a month and a half ago. What happened to 'Stay out of my home, you fucking fag'? Am I mistaken or did you not say that?" Nicco jumped off the bed and started pacing around the room. He was so pissed he didn't know whether to scream or throw the damn phone.

"I was hoping you'd gotten over that foolishness. Well, we just won't talk about that while you're home. I'm going to have surgery Friday and I need you here to help me around the house for a while when they release me from the hospital."

"What kind of surgery?" Nicco ran his fingers through his nest of lengthening curls. A sudden feeling of sympathy had him cussing himself. *What the hell are you thinking? This is the man who's made your life hell for over thirty years.*

"I'm having my knee replaced. Uncle Sam has finally agreed to foot the bill. So I will expect you by Friday."

A knee replacement? Is he kidding? "No can do, Colonel. I'm busy taking care of Mac right now. I told you he's temporarily paralyzed. He needs me more than a father who puts stipulations on his love. You'll have to find another son. Oh, right. You don't have another son." Nicco tsked. "Well, it's too damn bad you threw the one you had away, isn't it? And don't call the office anymore. I'm not there. I'm in Oklahoma at a rehab facility for Mac. Goodbye, Daddy dear."

Nicco hung up without giving his father a chance to say a word. He felt so sick to his stomach he lay on the bed and curled into a ball. He refused to shed tears for his father. He had made his own bed with his narrow-minded mentality. He could damn well lie in it.

* * * * *

Amir found Nicco curled into a ball, sound asleep. Mac told him when he came in from helping Gabe check the cows that Nicco was going to call his father. Toeing off his boots, he climbed into bed and wrapped himself around Nicco's back. Amir didn't quite understand the complexities of Nicco's relationship with his father, but he knew enough. For now, Amir thought the best thing he could do was just hold Nicco, let him know there were others who cared about him. He wondered whether he should get Mac but knew the kids Mac was playing wheelchair basketball with would be heartbroken. Besides, he needed more alone time with Nicco. His feelings for the man were growing by leaps and bounds. He'd half fallen in love with him just by talking to him over the phone those two months. Once he'd held Nicco in his arms, he fell the rest of the way.

He kissed the back of Nicco's neck, smelling his woodsy aftershave, and rubbed his rock-hard ass. Nicco stirred and pushed his back against Amir's lengthening cock. He ran his hand up under Nicco's t-shirt and plucked at his nipples. "Bad talk with your dad?"

"Not my dad. He never allowed me to call him that. I was always to address him as colonel, except if I was really hurt or sick or something. Then I could call him Father but never Dad." Nicco turned in Amir's arms until he was facing him. "He ordered me to come home and take care of him. He's having his knee replaced and says he needs my help."

Amir couldn't believe the colonel would ask something like that after the way he'd treated Nicco. Amir hugged Nicco and pulled his shirt off. "Are you going?"

Nicco tugged Amir's shirt over his head. "Hell, no. The last time I talked to the colonel he told me he no longer had a son. He called me every cuss word in the English

language and about half the ones in Italian. Then the colonel told me he hoped I rotted in hell for the blasphemy I was committing. He then hung up in my ear. Now suddenly, he needs me, and ordered me to return home. He said we wouldn't speak of my sexuality while I was there."

"What an asshole. Sorry, but wow. I don't blame you for not going." Amir unbuttoned Nicco's jeans. "Would you like me to take your mind off your phone call?" he said as he fished Nicco's erection out into his hand.

Thrusting against his hand, Nicco smiled. "What do you think?" Nicco started unzipping Amir's jeans.

When both men were naked, Amir rubbed his stiff shaft against Nicco's as Amir kissed his way around Nicco's face and neck. Nicco held on to his ass and ground his cock against Amir's. "I want you. I want to feel you inside me."

He stopped sucking on Nicco's neck, almost afraid to voice his concerns. "Are you sure you're ready?"

"No, but I will be once you stretch me."

Smiling, he leaned over to the bedside table and picked up Nicco's cell phone. "I've got a great idea how to get you stretched." He punched a button and waited.

"Hey."

"Hey, Nicco's in need of some TLC and he's wanting me to fuck his ass. I thought you could wheel yourself on home and get him stretched for me." Winking, he looked at Nicco and pinched his nipple hard enough to leave a mark.

"I'll be there as fast as my arms will wheel me. Don't start without me."

Amir put the phone back on the table and slid back into Nicco's arms, laving his sore nipple. "Mac will be here as soon as he can. We're not supposed to start without him so I guess that just leaves kissing on the menu." He closed his mouth over Nicco's and pushed his tongue inside.

Mac wheeled into the room with a bang. The two men looked toward the door and Nicco shook his head. "Damn. You almost knocked the door off its hinges."

"Yeah, well, that's what you get for making me lust-crazed when I'm surrounded by children. I was damn near blinded when my cock sprang to attention in my sweats. Hopefully none of the kids witnessed my condition before I threw the ball back to Billy and told him I was needed at home." Mac pulled his sweats down as he was giving Amir and Nicco his little speech. He whipped off his shirt and took the three steps he needed to get to the bed.

Nicco's jaw dropped. "You just walked on your own."

"What?" Mac said, coming down on top of both men.

"You just walked on your own without holding on to anything. Have you done that before?"

Mac looked puzzled for a minute and then smiled. "No. I've taken a couple steps before but always using the handrails at the center. I'm gonna have to tell Doc about

this. Maybe he needs to start standing across the room naked and making me walk toward him."

Amir and Nicco both gave Mac a low growl at the thought of Mac walking toward a naked Declan. "You can tell him about it but he sure as hell can't practice the therapy on you. Make him wait for Bram." Nicco punctuated the statement with a kiss. "I've been thinking about that anyway. Doesn't Declan hate your long hair? Bram's is three times longer than yours. Why do you think they'll be a good match?"

Grabbing the lube off the table, Mac looked at Nicco. "Can we talk about this some other time? I'd hate to waste this erection talking about the doc. Now get that sweet ass of yours over here so I can stretch you out enough for Amir's monster."

Rolling his eyes at Mac's gruff voice, Nicco presented himself to Mac. Amir slicked his fingers and began stretching Nicco. Feeling his heat surround his fingers, Amir wasn't sure he could last until Mac was finished. Nicco looked like he was almost out of his mind when Mac smacked him on the ass. "Okay, climb aboard."

Amir removed his fingers, wiping them on the always handy washcloth and helped Nicco get into position. Wrapping his fingers around his own cock, Amir watched Nicco slide down Mac's cock a little at a time. Amir knew he still wasn't very experienced but his ass didn't seem to realize it. As Amir watched, Nicco's body swallowed Mac's cock to the root. When Nicco was fully seated he held up his hand. "Give me a second."

Amir put a comforting hand to Nicco's quivering back as Mac began stroking Nicco's cock. That seemed to relax him and before long Nicco was moving up and down on Mac's shaft. Nicco reached down and tweaked both of Mac's nipples. Groaning, Mac wrapped his hands around Nicco's hips and moved him up and down even faster. Nicco looked over at Amir. He smiled at Nicco and continued lubing his cock, watching the two men make love.

"You're next." Nicco winked and squeezed his butt cheeks together. Mac groaned.

"Gonna come." Nicco swiveled his hips a little and ground his ass against Mac's cock. Mac came in a rush, yelling for God at the top of his lungs.

Laughing, Amir put his hand over Mac's lips. "Shh. Everyone will think we're having some kind of prayer meeting in here." Amir felt Mac's teeth as he nipped Amir's palm.

Nicco fell over onto the bed. "Okay, big guy. Make sure you're lubed up."

Reaching over to rub Nicco's back, Mac whispered in his ear. "It'll be easier on you if you do this on your hands and knees, baby."

Nodding, Nicco rolled over and rose to his knees. Amir knelt behind him and kissed his way down Nicco's spine, licking the salty skin in between kisses. "Are you ready?"

"Go ahead." Nicco braced himself as Amir put the head of his cock to Nicco's well stretched hole. Amir grinned when he realized his hands were shaking as he slowly

thrust into Nicco's hot depths. Amir didn't need to push much because Nicco's body seemed to suck Amir's cock right in.

"God, you feel good," he groaned. He let Nicco get accustomed to the size of his penis while Mac continued to stroke Nicco's erection. When Nicco pushed back against him, he knew he was ready to continue. Good thing because Amir's body was beginning to vibrate with need at the tight squeeze around his shaft. Setting a slow pace, he sawed his cock in and out of Nicco's tight body. With his added girth he seemed to peg Nicco's prostate gland on every thrust.

Nicco bucked and moaned. His back arched up and down as his head flew from side to side. "Oh... Oh." They were the only words Nicco could speak before he was spilling his seed into Mac's tight fist.

"Yeah. Give it to me." Mac released Nicco's cock and sucked the cum off his fingers one by one.

The smell of Nicco's cum combined with the clenching muscles in his ass set Amir off. He growled and howled as his cock continued to throb inside his new love's body, sapping every bit of Amir's strength.

Nicco collapsed to the bed. "My poor ass will never be the same. I'll look like a bowlegged cowboy." Nicco turned his head and received a warm kiss from Mac. Amir leaned in and joined his mouth with theirs. "I gotta get up and use the restroom," Nicco said, climbing out of bed and heading for the bathroom.

As soon as Nicco shut the door, Mac looked over and pulled him into his arms. "So tell me what upset my baby so much."

Amir rubbed his heavy five o'clock shadow against Mac's nipples. "His father ordered him to come home and take care of him. It seems the colonel is having a knee replaced. He told Nicco they wouldn't mention his sexual preference while he was home. I take it Nicco told him to go to hell."

"Good for him. That bastard's had it coming for years. He always treated Nicco like a piece of property rather than a son. I'm glad Nicco's finally standing up for himself."

When they heard Nicco flush the toilet, Mac planted a hungry kiss on Amir's lips. "Thanks for calling me. That was well worth forfeiting a basketball game."

Chapter Seven

Adjusting the semi-hard cock pressing against his fly, Nicco forked more straw into the stall. He'd taken to helping out in the barn lately. He enjoyed the earthy smells he found there. Not the manure smell—that he took care of as soon as possible. No, he enjoyed the smell of the hay and straw. The deep rich scent of the dirt and sawdust. He longed to stay right here. The thought of going back to Manhattan ate at him more every day. He'd never really taken to the city like some. He put up with it for business purposes, but he couldn't say he enjoyed living there.

He put the pitchfork down and lifted the handle of the wheelbarrow. He knew he was still walking a little funny but the fucking Amir had given him two days earlier was worth every sore muscle. The man sure packed a wallop. Smiling, he pushed the wheelbarrow outside to dump in the compost pile. He was just finishing when he heard someone behind him. He turned his head and came face-to-face with the colonel.

Nicco's stomach dropped to his feet. "What are you doing here?" Nicco took his leather gloves off and stuck them in his back pocket. He could see Mac wheeling his way toward them.

The colonel stood straight, using every inch of his six-foot-four frame to try to intimidate Nicco. "I weaseled your location out of one of the secretaries at your company. I've come to talk some sense into you. Is there somewhere more private we could go?"

Nicco looked around him. The only person he saw was Mac. The rest of the guests were out on a trail ride. "It seems perfectly private right here. Why don't you tell me why you're really here?"

The colonel stepped closer. "I wanted to see just how badly that little queer friend of yours had brainwashed you."

Nicco's hands balled into fists. "That's enough." He'd heard all his life that a child should respect their parents, but at that moment, Nicco didn't feel an ounce of respect for the man in front of him. "I think it would be better if you turned around and got back in your rental car and headed back to the airport. And for your information, *Father*, Mac hasn't brainwashed me. Unless showing me unconditional love for the first time in my life could be considered brainwashing."

"Stop it, Niccolo. You are not like him. I forbid it. Now be a good soldier and go and fetch your bag. You're coming home with me." The colonel lunged, trying to grab hold of Nicco's arm but he pulled away.

"Guess what? I no longer follow your orders. I'm my own man now. I'm in love with Mac and Amir and nothing you can say will change that. Now. Leave. Me. Alone."

"Who the hell is this Amir? Damn it, it doesn't even sound like he's American. How could you crawl in bed with the enemy? Let alone another man. You disgust me. You're nothing but a sissy. I should have made you wear pink dresses growing up. Then you would have some kind of excuse at least. But I raised you to be a man, so goddammit, start acting like one."

Mac saved the colonel a punch in the jaw as he wheeled up and broke into the argument, cutting off the colonel's hateful words. "Enough. Get your bigoted ass back into the car and get the hell out of here."

The colonel turned and lunged for Mac. He pulled him out of the wheelchair by the hair. "You. You did this to my soldier."

Nicco wrapped his fingers around his father's neck and squeezed. The colonel let go of Mac and tried to prize Nicco's hands from his neck. Nicco barely heard Mac yelling Nicco's name. Nicco felt detached as his father slumped to his knees, turning a nice shade of blue. Mac's hands landed on Nicco's arms and got in Nicco's face.

"Let him go. He's not worth it. Nicco? Let him go."

Nicco blinked and shook his head. He looked down at the blue face and released his hold on the colonel's neck. The older man slumped to the pavement, gasping for breath. Nicco looked down at his father. "Why? Why couldn't you just love me for who I am?"

Coughing, the colonel tried to catch his breath. He rubbed at his neck and looked up at Nicco. "You're just like your filthy mother. She preferred another woman over her family. She's the one who gave you the perverted blood that runs through your body." The colonel spat on the ground at Nicco's feet.

Nicco reached under and grabbed his father by the chin and lifted his head up. "What are you telling me? That Mom left us because she was gay?"

"Damn right. She was a fucking lesbo. I took her to court and was granted full custody after she took off. She tried to come back for you, but by that time the law was on my side." The colonel laughed as Nicco seethed inside. "She sent you letters for years. I destroyed them, of course. I didn't want her perverted ramblings infecting your brain."

"Where is she?" Nicco asked out of lips that felt numb. The mother he'd thought had abandoned him was kept away by the courts and his father. He pulled harder on the colonel's chin. "Where is she?"

"How the hell should I know? She hasn't written in fifteen years. Last time I got a letter she was in Arizona. Probably still with that other dyke she took off with."

Nicco thrust his father away from him. "Get out. Don't ever contact me again." He turned to Mac and helped him back into his wheelchair. Nicco vowed this was the last time the colonel would ever hurt Nicco or anyone he loved. As far as he was concerned the colonel was a casualty of his own war. Nicco went around and stood behind Mac. With a kiss to the top of his head, Nicco pushed Mac toward their cabin, completely oblivious to the man trying to rise on a useless knee.

"Get a hold of Bram. We've got a mother to track down."

* * * * *

As the days turned into weeks, Nicco started to give up hope of ever finding his mother. He still couldn't believe she had wanted him. He spent a lot of time by himself, disappearing for hours at a time on horseback. Earlier in the week, he realized he needed to deal with his feelings on his own because he'd begun to snipe at the two people he loved most in the world.

They didn't deserve his attitude, and he knew it wasn't them he was really angry with. So he'd take a horse and ride the land. Nicco returned to the same spot day after day. It was the large smooth rock Mac had leaned against the first day they'd made love to Amir. Hidden from the outside world Nicco could let his emotions rein. He'd tried crying and cussing and still no relief came.

How different would he have turned out if his mother had raised him? Would he have ended up with Mac anyway? He liked to think the answer was yes but it didn't really matter. His mother hadn't stayed to raise him.

After one such afternoon he entered the cabin to find Mac and Amir snuggled on the couch watching a movie. They both perked up as soon as he walked through the door.

Mac held his hand out. "Come on over. There's plenty of room for one more."

Smiling wearily, he shook his head. "I need a quick shower first. I smell like Star Dancer, but I'll be back in a couple of minutes." Mac held his gaze for several moments. Nicco could tell he wanted to say something else but he finally nodded.

Walking into the bedroom, Nicco stripped off his clothes, and carried them into the bathroom to stuff into the hamper. The hamper was already overflowing. Nicco shook his head. It was his chore to do laundry and evidently he hadn't been doing a very good job of it lately.

Turning on the shower, Nicco shaved while he waited for the water to heat up. Finished, he stepped into the shower, and soaped his body without really feeling anything. That was just it, he felt numb all the time. After a quick rinse, he turned the water off and walked naked to the bedroom without even drying off. As he passed by the window, he caught his reflection in the glass. He never realized how much he looked like the colonel.

It was like his father had crushed the life out of him. Nicco's blood began to boil when he thought of his father. He'd done this. He'd kept his own mother away from Nicco his entire life. He couldn't even remember what she looked like. He'd only been four when she left and the colonel had rid the house of any evidence of her. She'd been cut out of every family picture. The rest of them had been thrown out with the clothes she had left behind. The anger within Nicco boiled over and without thinking, he punched the reflection of his father in the window. His large fist broke through the windowpane, slicing a nice long gash in his arm.

Nicco stood there and watched the blood run down his arm to the wooden floor, splashing his feet on impact. He heard a shout and Amir was grabbing towels out of the linen closet.

"What the fuck have you done?" Amir wrapped the towel around Nicco's hand and arm. Amir wrapped another on top of that when the blood began to soak through the first one. Nicco said nothing, just continued to watch as his blood stained the clean white towel.

Reaching around Nicco, Amir picked up yet another towel from the stack on the bed, "We've got to get you to the center. The doc won't be able to make a house call on this one."

Rushing to the dresser, he returned with a pair of sweats. He helped Nicco into them and led him past a worried but scowling Mac. "We've got to get him to Declan."

Mac opened his arms. "Sit him on my lap and push us both. I don't think he'll make it if he has to walk." Amir nodded and helped a vacant-faced Nicco onto Mac's lap.

Amir pushed the two large men as fast as he could. As Amir wheeled them to the center, Mac did his best to hold Nicco's body on his lap with one hand and hold the towel firmly against the wound with the other. It was after eight o'clock in the evening and the doc had already retired to his apartment in the back. Amir left the wheelchair and ran to get Declan. He pounded his fist against the cheap hollow-core door. When it opened Declan looked like he was about to rip someone's head off until he noticed the look on Amir's face.

"What's happened?" He advanced through the hall and headed toward the reception area.

"Nicco put his fist through the window. He's got a pretty good gash in his hand and arm." Amir opened the last door between them and Nicco.

Declan rushed over. Taking in the blood-soaked towel, he wheeled both Nicco and Mac into an exam room. He looked over his shoulder at Amir. "I'm not really set up for this. I think it would be best if you called the hospital. I can almost assure you he's done some internal damage."

He nodded and ran to get the truck keys.

* * * * *

The next morning, Mac was on the cell phone outside the hospital door when Amir came walking out.

"I don't care who you piss off, Bram. I want every resource we have concentrated on finding Lilly Bellinzoni."

"Mac, you make it sound like we haven't been trying. The last address we have on her was a little town outside Phoenix. She seems to have just disappeared after that. No job, nothing." Bram sighed heavily into the phone.

"Try her maiden name. Maybe she ditched her married name after she gave up hope of ever seeing Nicco again." Mac ran his fingers through his hair. He felt so damn frustrated sitting in this damn chair. Useless.

"We'll give it another go, Mac."

"Why don't you go to Arizona and see if you can find something that way? You're the best investigator I know. If anyone can find her it's you."

"Maybe so, but I won't go to Arizona. For anyone. Ever." Bram's words were so clipped and final Mac realized there was a story there. He knew Bram was from the southwest somewhere but from his tone, Mac figured it must be Arizona.

"Look, I'm sorry. I'm really not trying to be an asshole about this. Nicco almost lost the use of his arm over this thing. It's tearing him apart. Why don't you at least come to Oklahoma? Maybe if you talked to him he'd remember something else that would help. Bring Thor with you. You've already tied up the loose ends in New York. The job of finding Nicco's mother is our top priority now." He looked over at Amir and held his hand out.

Amir pushed off the side of the building where he'd been leaning, and took Mac's hand. He bent and kissed him on the forehead. Mac closed his eyes, feeling loved and frustrated at the same time.

"I'll be out in a couple days. Take care of Nicco."

"You'll bring Thor, won't you? I think he'll love the kids at the center." Mac felt a little lighter just knowing Bram was agreeing to come.

"Yeah. He's got summer break coming up at the end of the week anyway. We can leave on Friday or Saturday."

"Okay, buddy. See you two on Friday." Mac hung up before Bram could get another word in. He turned toward Amir. "How's my baby?"

"Asleep. The surgeon came in to check on him. He said if the repairs he made to the tendon didn't hold Nicco would need to see a different surgeon in the city." Amir knelt and laid his head on the arm of Mac's chair. "I'm so tired. Keeping up with you two is wearing me out."

Mac kissed Amir's cheek. He'd been Mac and Nicco's rock since the shooting. Mac reminded himself to do something special for Amir sometime in the coming months. "Maybe after all this is over we can take a nice long vacation together. That sound good?" He stroked Amir's thick black hair.

"Mmm-hmm," Amir muttered, half asleep.

* * * * *

After getting Mac and Nicco settled on the deep leather couch, he fell into the nearby chair. "What am I supposed to do with two lame men? I swear I've aged five years in the past two days." He rested his head against the back of the chair and looked at his lovers on the couch. Even injured they were the two sexiest men Amir had ever known.

Mac smiled and stroked his cock through his jeans. "I've got something right here that's not lame. Wanna take it for a ride?" Mac unzipped his jeans and pulled out his pulsing cock. He ran his fist up and down its length and looked at Amir.

Even though he felt completely worn out, the sight of Mac's cock renewed some of his energy. He licked his lips and looked at Nicco. "You have anything for me?"

Smiling for the first time in a week, Nicco tried to unbutton his jeans but the temporary cast on his arm made it difficult. He gave up and looked at him. "I'm sure I do, but you'll have to get it out for me."

Sliding out of the chair, he crawled on his knees toward Nicco. "You know we're all a bunch of horn-dogs." Amir finished unbuttoning his fly and pulled Nicco's pants down. Amir got rid of Nicco's boots before pulling his jeans and boxer briefs down and off. Amir ran his hands up the muscled, hairy legs, not stopping until he was fisting Nicco's cock. Licking his way up the shaft, Amir ran his tongue around the crown. He looked into Nicco's eyes as Amir wrapped his lips around the cock and swallowed. He relaxed his throat enough to take Nicco all the way to the root.

Fisting Amir's hair, Nicco thrust up and groaned as Amir backed off enough to draw in a much-needed breath. Moving up and down Nicco's length, Amir fondled the heavy sac between Nicco's legs. "Oh God. So good." Nicco pistoned in and out of Amir's mouth. Deciding to give Nicco what he wanted, Amir kept his head still and let Nicco take control, applying more pressure to Nicco's balls and Nicco erupted in pulse after pulse of white creamy cum. Deciding he had a better use for Nicco's cum, Amir pulled off, barely getting a taste of Nicco's seed.

Nicco looked down at himself when Amir looked up. He shook his head as he watched the thick cum run slowly down the length of his cock. "What's the matter? My cum not to your liking today?"

Amir stood and took off his clothes. "Watch," he said as he ran his fingers down the length of Nicco's shaft and scooped up as much cum as he could. He turned around and presented his tight rosette to the pair of men.

They both groaned as Amir used Nicco's cum to lubricate and stretch his hole. Mac looked over at Nicco and then back to Amir. The sight of those long fingers disappearing into his own hole started to make Mac's cock throb. Reaching down, he fisted his cock so tightly that his knuckles were turning white. Fuck, as much as he wanted in that sweet hole, the show was worth the wait. "If you want a ride you'd better hop on because this stallion's about to leave without you."

Amir straightened and turned around, scooping a few more drops of seed off Nicco's stomach. Amir brought it over and smoothed the thick white cream over Mac's shaft. Amir turned with his back toward Mac and lowered himself. Mac held his cock straight as Amir impaled himself. With Amir turned around Mac noticed Nicco could watch his cock slide in and out of Amir's hole. "Beautiful," Nicco whispered.

Amir picked up the pace and wrapped his fingers around his own erection. Tugging himself with the same rhythm Mac was using to fuck him, Amir came first. His grunts and the smell of his seed set Mac off within seconds.

He pulled Amir down on his cock and performed a whole-body shiver as he emptied himself into Amir's body. Mac kissed Amir's neck. "I love you."

Amir turned to Nicco, who had placed a hand on his back. Nicco leaned up and kissed him. "I love you, too."

As far as he knew, that was the first time Nicco had ever told Amir that he loved him. Mac watched as the strong silent warrior's eyes filled with tears. "Thank you for giving me back my life. I love you both so much."

Chapter Eight

An SUV pulled up around seven o'clock Friday evening. Mac and Nicco waved from the porch of the main house. Bram got out and went around to the back of the vehicle. He opened the door and extracted an armless wheelchair. Opening the chair, he pushed it toward the passenger door which was already open, and helped Thor into the chair, before pushing it toward the house.

Bram looked up and smiled. He pushed Thor up the ramp at the side of the porch. "Hey, guys."

Nicco walked over to him and went to shake his hand but pulled back at the last second. He held up his cast and shrugged. "Hey, Bram." He nodded at Bram and then nodded at Thor. "Haven't seen you in a while, Thor. How've you been?"

Thor took over his chair and wheeled himself over to the empty space by Mac and Maggie. "Good. I'm glad school is out though. By the end of the year I wonder why I became a teacher in the first place." Thor smiled at Maggie and held out his hand. "Good to meet you, ma'am. I'm Thor Blackstone and this is my big brother and protector, Bram Blackstone."

Maggie took both of Thor's hands in hers. "It's good to have you boys here." Maggie let go of Thor's hands and reached for Bram's. She shook and patted his hand in a motherly fashion.

Nicco smiled and shook his head. "Better watch it, guys. Maggie's always on the hunt for more people to mother." He smiled at Maggie then bent and kissed her cheek.

"Everyone needs mothering now and then." Maggie sat straighter in her chair.

Bram looked at Thor. He could tell by the look on his brother's face, he was also remembering their mother. He shook his head slightly. *Nope, no time to dwell on the past, not with friends surrounding him.* His thoughts were interrupted by Gabe and Amir as they came out the screen door.

Gabe took hold of Maggie's chair. "Dinner's about ready. Shall we retire to the patio?" Gabe didn't wait for an answer as he pushed Maggie into the house.

Amir shook hands with Bram and Thor. "Good to see you two." He turned to Mac. "Ready?"

"Not without a little sugar to tide me over until later." Mac pulled Amir's head down for a kiss. It was nice seeing three of his friends like this, happy, in love.

Smiling, Amir looked at Bram and Thor. "Ready?"

Bram held out his hand. "After you." He followed the rest of the procession inside, and found himself glancing around the rooms as they wound their way to the back patio. "Nice place."

Nicco nodded and looked around. "Yeah, it is. I love the way Cree designed it. On the outside it looks like it could have been here for a hundred years, without the peeling paint, of course. But the inside is totally modern and comfortable. You've met Cree and Jake, haven't you?"

Bram nodded as he glanced around the modern kitchen. "Yeah. A couple times." He followed Nicco out the French door to the patio.

Nicco pulled a couple of beers out of the cooler and handed one to Thor and one to Bram. "They're coming in next weekend. We thought maybe we'd throw a barbeque and dance. Kind of a thank-you to all the volunteers and steady guests. We're planning a really big blowout for the last week of July, although the center is shutting down that week to guests. We're inviting all our friends to stay the week. You two might as well make plans to come back." Nicco looked at Thor. "You'll still be out of school, won't you?"

"Yeah. Thank God. I don't have to go back until mid-August." Thor took another drink of his beer.

Taking a chair next to Maggie, Bram looked around at the countryside. The setting sun was just on the horizon. He closed his eyes for a moment, loving the evening glow on his face.

"Beautiful," Maggie said beside him.

Bram opened his eyes and looked back at the sunset. "Yeah, it is."

Maggie giggled like a schoolgirl. "The sunset's pretty, too, but I was talking about your hair. May I touch it?"

Well, that seemed like a strange request, but Maggie didn't seem like an ill-bred tourist who'd never been this close to a Native American, so he guessed she must've had her reasons. At his nod, Maggie ran her hand down the length of his single braid. When left loose, his hair reached the middle of his ass but was a tad shorter in a braid.

"It reminds me of my husband's hair. He was a Native American also. His hair was what first attracted me to him."

Bram squirmed a bit. He wasn't used to talking to mothers. "I take it he's no longer living?"

"No. He passed away years ago when Rex was still a boy." Maggie looked wistful for a moment. "He was the love of my life."

Running his knuckles down Maggie's lined cheek, he didn't see an old woman, but rather a loving wife and mother. Bram wondered what his and Thor's life would have been like had they grown up with someone like Maggie taking care of them. "He was lucky to have you, Maggie Cotton."

Their conversation was interrupted by the greeting of a stranger. Bram looked at the approaching man. He was a tiny fella with short brown hair showing under his cowboy hat. The new diner stepped onto the patio and started shaking hands with everyone.

Bram watched the guy's leanly muscled arm reach out and shake Thor's hand. He stopped to kiss Maggie on the cheek and then walked over to Bram. Standing, Bram stuck his hand out to introduce himself. "Hi, I'm Bram Blackstone." He winced, noticing his already incredibly low voice had gone even deeper at the touch of Declan's hand.

"Nice to meet you, Bram. I'm Dr. Declan O'Malley. Most folks around here either call me Doc or Declan."

For a moment, he felt sucked in to the light green eyes staring back at him. He watched as the long curly black lashes opened and closed, creating a fan of black against Declan's skin. He internally shook himself and let go of Declan's hand. Declan turned and walked toward the barbeque where Rex was grilling steaks. He stopped once on his way over and took a beer out of the cooler. Bram couldn't take his eyes off him. Opening his beer, Declan glanced back at Bram and caught him staring. Declan raised his beer and walked toward Rex.

Bram blew out a breath and sat down. He picked his beer up off the table and took a long pull.

Maggie tapped his arm. "Dreamy, isn't he? All the girls that volunteer here are crazy for him but I believe you're more his type." She winked at him before she wheeled herself across the patio to talk to Mac.

Bram couldn't help taking another peek at Declan. His tight jeans fit his slender ass to perfection. His hands began to twitch with the need to cup that ass. Next to him Thor cleared his throat. He looked over at his smiling brother. "What?"

"Put your tongue back in your mouth, big brother." Thor started laughing and wheeled himself over to get another beer out of the cooler.

Nicco walked over and sat in the chair next to Bram. "Any news yet on my mom?"

"Not really. Sorry, Nicco. I thought maybe I'd see if Amir wanted to take a short trip to Arizona for me. There's some information that can only be obtained there, but I won't go back to that state again, so I'm hoping Amir can take care of it." Bram looked at his friend. He could tell what Mac had told him was true. Some of Nicco's spark was missing.

"Can you at least tell me why?" Nicco peeled the label off his beer bottle, refusing to look Bram in the eye.

"I took Thor away from the reservation when I was eighteen. I promised myself I'd never set foot in the state again and I intend to keep that promise." He looked over at Thor who was laughing at something Mac was telling him. God, he envied him. To be able to put all he'd been through behind him like he had. Bram wished he had half as much strength as his baby brother. He looked back to Nicco. "I'm sorry. I just can't do

it. Not even for you." He felt like a piece of shit for letting his friend down, but some wounds cut too deep to reopen.

Nicco looked up from his beer bottle. Bram knew Nicco heard the pain in his voice, hell, he heard it too. Right out there, for anyone to witness. He tried to pull himself together, to once again put the past where it belonged.

Nicco reached out his hand and placed it on his knee. "It's okay, buddy. I know you would if you could. You've done a lot for us already."

* * * * *

The next morning in the dining hall, Bram took a seat next to Thor and a little boy. Thor looked over at Bram and grinned. "It's about time you rolled your old bones out of bed. Billy here and I have already helped feed the horses this morning. Haven't we, Billy?"

"We sure did. Are you Thor's brother that he keeps talking about?" Billy pushed his glasses back up on his nose.

"I'm his only brother, so I guess the answer would have to be yes." Bram stuck out his hand. "Good to meet you. My name's Bram."

Billy shook his hand. "Nice to meet you, Bram. Isn't this place the coolest? I mean, I can go anywhere I want to go here. There aren't any doors I can't open and every building is either sitting flat on the ground or they have nice ramps. It's not like this back in Oklahoma City."

Bram smiled at the boy's enthusiasm. "Yeah. I guess we're all pretty lucky to be able to spend a little time here." He took a forkful of scrambled eggs and put them into his mouth.

"Oh, I'm hoping to stay. My social worker brought me here. Mr. Boone made it so I got a scholarship for the summer. But Ms. Petree, that's my social worker, she told me that Mr. Boone has filed papers to see if he could be my new dad." Billy was almost vibrating with excitement.

Bram glanced at Thor, who shook his head. "That's good, Billy." Noticing Billy's empty plate, he pointed to it. "Would you like some more breakfast?"

"No thanks, I'm gonna go find Amir and see if he'll take me riding." Billy struggled to put his plate in his lap to take it to the kitchen window.

Bram tried to take the plate from him. "That's okay. I'll do it for you."

"No, Bram. Billy can manage on his own. Can't you?" Thor looked at Billy, smiling.

"Sure I can. I do it all the time." Billy nodded his head and wheeled off.

"You've got to let people learn how to do things themselves or have you forgotten? I seem to remember you being harder on me than a drill sergeant about that stuff when I was just a little older than Billy. It worked out great, didn't it?"

Nodding his head, he slapped his brother on the back. "It did. It's just hard to see someone struggle to do something that comes easily to me. Believe it or not, it was even harder when that someone was my baby brother. But I knew the only way you'd be able to have your own life was if I made you self-sufficient." Looking up, he spotted Declan coming into the dining hall. He was greeting each of the guests. Some were obviously patients and some parents.

He saw Declan talking to Billy on his way out the door. "Why did you shake your head no when I was talking to Billy? Is Boone not trying to adopt him?"

"Yeah, he is, I just didn't want you to ask him what happened to his folks. They died in the same car wreck that paralyzed him. He's been in foster care for the last couple years. I guess before he came here, he sat in front of the TV all day and wouldn't socialize with the other kids. From what I can tell this place has changed him dramatically."

Looking back over at Billy, he couldn't help but notice the easy rapport Declan had with the kid. Billy was still excited and gesturing madly about something. "I'll say. He's one of the liveliest little kids I've seen in a long time."

"Who's lively?" Mac came wheeling up to take Billy's spot at the table. He was followed by Nicco and Amir, who was carrying two trays of food. He set the trays down in front of Nicco and Mac and left to get his own breakfast.

Bram pointed his fork at Billy. "We were talking about that little ball of fire over there."

Mac smiled and winked at him. "Doc's something, isn't he?"

Bram rolled his eyes at Mac. "I was referring to Billy, not Declan."

"Oh. Well, sure. Billy's a great kid, all right. I just wish they'd hurry and push that paperwork through." Mac took a bite of his sausage. "So tell me what you think of the doc?" He wagged his brows at Bram.

"Is sex all you ever think about?" He finished up his eggs and started on his pancakes.

"Of course it's all I think about," Mac said as Amir sat down with his tray. "Have you seen the two gorgeous men I live with?" Mac winked and blew Nicco and Amir a kiss across the table.

"Stop it, you three." Declan smiled at everyone as he sat down across the table from Bram. Declan looked from Thor to Bram. "Nice to see you guys again. Thor, I was hoping maybe you'd come by the facility room today. I kinda thought I could interest you in helping me teach the patients how to build upper-body strength. From the looks of it you do a damn good job."

For some reason, Bram wanted to growl at that remark. He looked over at Thor, who nodded enthusiastically. "I'd love it."

Setting his coffee cup down, Declan nodded. "Great. You can follow me back if you want." Declan looked at Bram. "What are your plans for the day?"

With his ego soothed just a little, he tore himself away from Declan's beautiful eyes to look at Mac. "I'm supposed to be having a business meeting with Mac. That is why you brought me all the way out here, isn't it?"

Mac shook his head. "That's why I asked you out here originally, but finding Nicco's mother is at the top of our priority list now. The other stuff can wait."

Amir butted in. "Nicco tells me you've got a lead in Arizona. If you'll fill me in, I'll see if I can't get away for a few days to check it out."

Feeling his face heat, Bram mumbled an okay. God, he hated this. Hated feeling like a complete loser who was afraid of a fucking state. How stupid was that? He pushed away from the table. "I'll talk to you guys later. I'm going to check out the horses." Bram picked up his tray and left the table.

When he walked out the door, Amir looked at Thor. "Did I say something wrong?"

Thor pushed his plate away. "No. He just hates it that he can't make himself go back to Arizona. He feels like he's letting Nicco down by asking someone else to do the work. He'll be okay."

Declan looked around the table. "Am I missing something? Why can't Bram go to Arizona?"

Everyone deferred to Thor, who shrugged. "It's not really that he can't, it's just that he won't. I know he's been forbidden to return to the reservation where we were raised by the tribal elders. I don't know all of it, but something happened when he came home to take me away."

Thor shut up after that and no one questioned him further, although they all had a lot more questions than answers. Declan gave a little nod and finished his breakfast. "You ready?"

"As I'll ever be. Let's go show these people how to pump some iron." He grinned as he gathered his tray in his lap. "See you guys at lunch."

Nicco watched Declan and Thor leave the dining hall. He looked from Amir to Mac. "Do any of you know what's going on with Bram? And why do I suddenly get the feeling that I don't know him at all?"

He turned to Mac who had finished eating and was sipping on his coffee. "I know very little about Bram's life before he entered the police academy. That seems to be where his life starts as far as he's concerned. I know he's had custody of Thor since he was eighteen and Thor was eleven. But I don't know the how or why of it." Mac shook his head and looked at Amir. "Give him another half-hour and find out what you need to know before taking off to Arizona. We need to get this thing wrapped up so you can get back here before the big barbeque next weekend."

Amir looked at his expensive gold watch. "Well, whatever shall we do for the next half-hour?"

Groaning, Mac looked at Amir. "Don't. I have therapy in fifteen minutes. I can't go in there with a stiffy. Why don't you take Nicco home though and show him a good time." He looked over at Nicco. "Put another smile on this man's face, will you?"

Yeah, yeah, Nicco thought, he could definitely go for that plan. He turned to Amir and batted his eyelashes.

Standing, Amir picked up the three empty trays. "I aim to please. Come on, good-looking. Let's go see what kind of trouble we can get in before my meeting."

"Hoo boy," he said as he followed Amir.

Chapter Nine

Nicco was folding laundry one-handed when his phone rang. He looked at the display and smiled. "Hey, sugar."

"Hey. I thought I'd call and tell you I think I just found our big break. I've been in the dungeons of the courthouse here in Phoenix and I think I've hit pay dirt."

Throwing down the towel he'd been folding, Nicco sat down on a kitchen chair. "What did you find?" He could feel a cold sweat appear on his forehead.

"A Lilly Anne Rollings applied for a name change in December of nineteen ninety-three. Have you got a pen handy?"

Standing, he went over and pulled open the kitchen junk drawer. He searched and finally found a nub of a pencil. He tore off a paper towel. "Okay, I'm ready."

"Her new name is Lilly Rowan. It lists her address as Albuquerque but that was thirteen years ago. I'm going to fly to New Mexico today to poke around Albuquerque a little. Have Bram call me if he comes up with anything."

"Thanks. We miss you. You've only got three more days until the barbeque, don't forget."

"I won't forget. I love you and miss you guys, too. Tell Mac he owes me some phone sex tonight. From what I hear, he's pretty damn good at it."

"I'll do that and by the way, he's fantastic at it. Love you and see you soon."

"Bye, love."

* * * * *

Amir hung up the phone and ran his fingers through his hair. He hated lying to Nicco, but he and Mac thought it best until they checked Lilly out. The last thing either of them wanted was for Nicco to get abandoned again. So, despite what he'd told Nicco, Amir had been able to locate Lilly as soon as he'd gotten to Phoenix. There were no dusty dungeons to dig through, only a nice woman who pulled the information he needed up on her computer. He'd had to show his PI license and the paper Nicco had given him saying he'd been hired to find his mom, but it had all been relatively painless. With the correct name, it had been easy to track her to New Mexico, but he wasn't going to tell Nicco he found her until he made sure she would welcome the man he loved with open arms.

Getting on yet another plane, Amir started thinking about his own mother and what she would think of the man he'd become. He'd loved his family to the depths of his soul, but he knew they wouldn't have approved of his lifestyle. The thought of them

shunning him and his men hurt deeper than he wanted to admit. Pushing the thoughts away, he looked forward to giving Nicco back his mom and his smile.

* * * * *

Nicco ran out of the cabin with the crumpled paper towel in his hand. He went to the main house where Bram and Thor were staying, but no luck. Turning on his heels, he headed toward the barn. No Bram, but he found Boone and Billy grooming one of the horses. "Hey, guys. Have any of you seen Bram?"

Billy pointed toward the center. "I think he's in there."

"Thanks." Waving, he took off again. Walking into the center, he spotted Thor right away. He was working with a boy of about seventeen on the banded weight machine. "Hey, Thor. Sorry to interrupt, but have you seen your brother?"

"I heard him arguing with Doc a couple minutes ago. They're probably still going at it. The noise was coming from the office."

"Thanks." The closer he got to Doc's office the louder the voices became. Nicco smiled to himself. There seemed to be an awful lot of misplaced passion in that relationship. Declan and Bram seemed to butt heads on almost everything, but anyone who was around the two could tell they were attracted to each other. If only they'd let the small stuff go and just reach out to each other.

Lifting his fist, he beat on the wooden door. He heard a few more clipped words. Bram's voice was so low that he only heard rumbles and not actual words. The door opened and Doc looked at him. "What?"

"Sorry to interrupt your, uh...discussion, but it's really important that I speak to Bram." Nicco shifted from one foot to the other. His nerves and excitement were battling inside him.

Doc turned and looked over his shoulder. "Nicco needs to speak with you." Declan stepped back so Bram could get past him.

Stopping in the doorway, Bram looked back at Declan. "We'll finish this discussion later." He followed Nicco out of the center.

Nicco led him to the bench under the big shade tree. When Bram was seated he looked at Nicco.

"Care to tell me what all this is about or is it a secret?"

"Man. You're snippy today. Good thing I'm in such a good mood or I might have to punch you." He held out the paper towel.

Bram took the wadded towel out of his hand and smoothed it out on the leg of his jeans. He narrowed his eyes in confusion. "What's this say?" He handed it back to him. "You know I've never been able to read your chicken scratches."

Nicco took the towel back and held it up like he was a teacher at the chalkboard, dragging his finger slowly across the words. "Lilly Rowan. Lilly Anne Rollings changed her name in Phoenix back in nineteen ninety-three." Damn, he couldn't believe he was

so close. "Amir just called with it. He said the last address he could find under that name was in Albuquerque. He's flying there today to do some more digging. He wants you to get on your computer and see what you can find."

Bram smiled and hugged Nicco.

"Hey. What the hell do you think you're doin'?"

Releasing him, they looked around and spotted Mac about ten yards away and closing in on them as fast as his muscles would wheel him. Bram held his hands up in surrender. "Sorry. It wasn't anything sexual. I was just happy for Nicco. He found a terrific lead on his mother."

Mac's eyes lit up as he reached him. "Really? How? Did Amir call?"

Laughing, he covered Mac's lips with his own. When Mac tried to push his tongue in his mouth, Nicco pulled back. "Not out here, too many kiddos around. Amir called and said my mother had her name legally changed." He went on to fill Mac in on the information Amir had provided, totally unaware that Mac had already talked to Amir. Nicco left out the phone sex part because he didn't think Bram needed to hear that much of their private life.

Turning his head to Bram, Mac jerked his thumb toward the main house. "Well, don't just sit there, go hijack Gabe's computer."

Chuckling, Bram stood and straightened his neatly pressed low-rise jeans. "I brought my own computer." He looked at Nicco. "I'll see what I can dig up. I'll let you know as soon as I find something."

When Bram was gone, Mac took his hand. "Forget therapy today. I've got a different sort of exercise in mind. Push me home, baby."

Nicco didn't have to be asked twice. He stood and pushed Mac as fast as he could, one-handed, toward the house.

When they reached the bedroom, Mac stood on his own and started to undress himself. He took off his t-shirt and pulled down his sweats and jockstrap. Nicco stood staring at him.

"Since when can you do that?" He motioned toward Mac's almost-naked body.

Mac shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. I've pretty much been undressing myself since I was around two, I imagine."

"Smartass. You know what I'm talking about. You're standing as sturdily as I am."

Sitting back in the chair, Mac pointed toward his athletic shoes. "Oh, that. Well, the doc and I've been working hard. He thinks I'll be ready for crutches any day now. The legs seem to be working for the most part but they're still too weak to support me for long stretches. I didn't want to tell you until I could actually show you. I planned to surprise you and Amir when he gets back. But alas, my own horniness has spoiled my surprise." Mac pointed down. "I still need help with the shoes though."

Nicco immediately came across the room and knelt at Mac's feet. He slipped off his shoes and pulled the sweatpants and jock down and off. Groaning, he kissed and licked his way up Mac's legs.

Mac ran his fingers through Nicco's hair. "I'm so happy for you. This is such a big deal. It's what you've been killing yourself for all this time. I can't believe you tried to hide it from me," Nicco said, kissing his way up Mac's thigh.

Nicco pulled himself up into Mac's lap and gave him the deepest tongue-washing ever. Sitting back, Nicco shifted against the hard ridge under him. "This feels promising." He rubbed Mac's erection up and down the crack of his ass.

Plucking at Nicco's nipples, Mac chewed on his neck and chest. He leaned in and sucked a mark on Nicco's nipple. "I want you to fuck me this time. It's been so long since I've felt you inside me."

Jumping out of Mac's lap, Nicco turned down the covers. "You need any help getting to the bed?" After making sure the lube was close by, Nicco wrapped his fingers around his cock and stroked.

Standing, Mac shook his head. "You just keep polishing that pole of yours and I'll get my little fireman to the bed." Mac slowly walked toward the bed and stretched out. Nicco watched as Mac stroked his own cock a couple of times before lifting his legs and spreading them wide. Nicco swallowed, as Mac used a little of his pre-cum to lubricate his hole. "You still want this?"

Moving toward the end of the bed, Nicco climbed between Mac's spread thighs. "Hand me some pillows." He took them from Mac, being mindful of his still-healing arm, and positioned them under Mac's hips. "Gotta taste you."

Licking his way up and down Mac's shaft, he took over fingering Mac's hole. Nicco gave Mac a couple of deep-throated pulls on his cock and then scooted down, licking around his sac. Nicco continued down to the tasty-looking pucker. He licked his way around the hole, smiling at the low groans issuing from Mac and held his hand out for the lube. Mac placed the tube in Nicco's hand as he pulled his tongue away. "I could you taste all day if it hadn't been so long. I just need in you," Nicco said by way of apology.

Mac hooked his arms under his knees and pulled them to his chest. Nicco started stretching Mac with two fingers and when his lover groaned his approval Nicco added one more. "So pretty." Nicco pulled his fingers out and replaced it with the crown of his cock. "Tell me if you need to stop."

Hooking Mac's legs over his shoulders, he glided smoothly inside. Nicco had to close his eyes and recite the SEAL Code of Conduct to keep from coming as he buried himself balls-deep. Damn, damn, damn, his man felt good, tight and hot around his cock. "Oh, fuck." He ground his groin against Mac's ass as he waited for the signal to continue.

"Move, baby." Mac pinched his nipple as Nicco pulled out and thrust back in again. Soon the sound of his balls slapping Mac's firm flesh was more of a Latin rumba

rhythm than a tango. Mac's pleasure was evident on his face as he reached down to fist his cock. "Yeah. Feels good." Stroking himself, Mac tensed. "Gonna."

"Do it. Wanna watch you come with me buried deep inside." Never losing his rhythm, he watched as Mac's cum splashed across his chest and neck. Fuck, that was sexy. Without missing a beat, Nicco leaned down and swiped a big pearly patch on Mac's neck with his tongue. As soon as Nicco pulled his tongue back into his mouth his whole body went rigid as he pumped his seed inside Mac.

Releasing Mac's now-tired legs, Nicco continued to lick the cum off his chest and neck. "Love you," Nicco said in between licks. "Love your taste."

Mac threaded his fingers through Nicco's hair. "Mmm. I needed that. I'm starting to feel like a man again."

Nicco rose up and looked at Mac. They both chuckled and Nicco poked Mac in the ribs. "God, wouldn't the colonel love to hear that statement."

"Hey. No bringing that bastard into our bed." Mac stroked his hair.

"Oh, now that's just an icky thought." Nicco teased Mac with an exaggerated shiver.

Mac must have realized what he'd said and laughed harder. "Yeah, it is. Sorry. Didn't really mean it that way." Lifting a long black ringlet, Mac twisted it around his finger. "I love your hair like this. Don't cut it short again."

"Won't. That was the...other man's orders. He didn't want me looking like a girl," Nicco said, licking his way around Mac's sensitive nipples.

"Well, I have to admit that you're damn pretty, but with a body like yours I don't think anyone would ever mistake you for a girl." Mac reached between them and wrapped his fingers around Nicco's still half-hard cock. "Especially if you flash them this." Mac gave the cock in question a few strokes. "On second thought don't go around flashing anyone but Amir and me. I don't want some stud trying to take you away from us."

"Never gonna happen." He nipped Mac's nipple with his teeth and thrust into his fist. "I've got the two best-looking studs already in my bed. Well, as soon as Amir gets his ass home I'll have them both in my bed." Nicco scooted up just enough to lick the side of Mac's face. "What do you think she's like? I mean, do you think she's angry with me for not replying to her letters?"

Releasing Nicco's shaft, Mac wrapped his strong arms around him. "I imagine she thinks about you every day. She may be shocked when we find her, but I don't see her pushing you away or anything."

"I hope so," he said as he yawned. "Let's take a little nap before we get into the shower."

Mac yawned, watching Nicco yawn. "I'm all for that. You wore me out worse than Doc."

Oh, that deserved another poke in the ribs.

* * * * *

"Hey, Bram, did you find anything?" Nicco walked into Gabe's study to find Bram hard at work on the computer.

With his tiny reading glasses perched on the tip of his long slender nose, Bram looked up from the computer. "Maybe. I didn't find a residence listing anywhere for a Lilly Rowan in or around Albuquerque, but I found her name mentioned in an obituary in the Albuquerque newspaper." Bram saw Nicco's face go pale as he swayed a little and sat down. Shit, trying to cover Amir's and Mac's ass wasn't easy. Now he'd gone and really stuck his foot in it.

Bram was quick to set Nicco's mind at ease. "No. No. I'm sorry, Nicco, it's not what you think. It wasn't Lilly's obituary, but that of her long-time partner. Her name was Clementine Rowan." When Nicco said nothing he continued, "You know the author of all those romance books?" At Nicco's still-vacant look Bram sighed. Damn, Nicco was sheltered. Bram didn't even read romance books, but he thought everyone had heard of Clementine Rowan. "It listed her address as a house just outside Albuquerque. I've been searching to see if the house was transferred into your mother's name, but I haven't come up with it yet. I thought I'd call Amir and ask him to visit the house and see what he can find out."

Nicco leaned his forearms on his knees and put his face in his hands. "I think you almost gave me a heart attack. To come this far and think my mother was dead was just too much." Nicco held his head for a few more minutes in silence then looked up at Bram. "Call Amir."

Nodding, he picked up the phone.

* * * * *

They were at the main house that evening eating dinner when Mac's cell phone rang. He looked at the caller ID. "Sorry to interrupt dinner but it's Amir." Mac pushed his chair away from the table. "Hey, honey."

Mac nodded his head a few times with a few yeahs thrown in. "Okay, hold on a minute." Mac held the phone out to Nicco. "There's someone who'd like to talk to you."

His eyes became big as saucers as he stared at the phone in Mac's hand. "Is it?" At Mac's wink and nod, Nicco took the phone, inhaling a deep breath, hoping like hell he didn't throw up.

"Mother?"

"Nicky?" Lilly was crying so hard into the phone it brought the sting of tears to Nicco's eyes. A sudden memory of his mom in a yellow and white dress came to mind. Nicco thought it must have been Easter because he too had on dress clothes. His mom was laughing and holding her arms out, calling him by that name.

He wiped his them with the palm of his hand. "I hadn't remembered that you used to call me that until just now. How've you been, Mom? I've missed you."

"Oh, Nicky, I've missed you, too." He heard her blowing her nose on the other end of the phone. "I've been good. Great, before Clem died. She was all I had for so many years. I thought I'd lost you forever. Your young man explained everything to me. I wished I'd known that your father would take things to that level. I thought you were as disgusted with me as he was. I tried to explain everything in my letters and when you never answered them I thought you'd written me off."

"Never." Nicco broke down in tears, his hatred for his father growing to an all-time high. Mac wrapped his arms around Nicco. "Can I see you, Mom?"

"How soon can you get here, son?"

He looked at Mac. "One of my partners is in a wheelchair right now. We're living on a ranch in Oklahoma. There's a big celebration this weekend. Do you think you could get away long enough to come east with Amir for a few days?"

"Just you try to stop me. I'll drive Amir back to you first thing in the morning. Expect us by lunchtime."

"I can't wait to see you both." Nicco knew he should say something profound, but all that managed to come out was, "Thanks for not hating me, Mom." Nicco wiped his eyes and nose with his dinner napkin.

"Never, baby boy. Momma never hated you." Nicco heard her voice crack and knew that she was crying again.

"Have Amir hold you if you need him to. He's a pretty solid wall to lean on when you need one." Lord, did he know that from experience. Amir had held both Nicco and Mac up enough times in the last couple of months.

"See you tomorrow, son," she said, like she didn't want to hang up.

Nicco knew the feeling. He knew he'd dream of his mom later that night. Memories of her that he'd hidden away in some dark recess of his mind would all come pouring out. For the first time in a long while, Nicco couldn't wait to get to sleep later.

"Bye," Nicco finally whispered. He hung up and wiped his face again. He realized where he was and looked at the other men around the table. Instead of the teasing he expected to get after acting like a baby in front of them, there wasn't a dry eye.

Gabe was the first to speak, he cleared his throat. "Congratulations. I know how you must feel. I can't imagine finding my mother."

Nicco looked from Mac to Bram. Oh shit, he'd forgotten Gabe's mother had been lost to him as well. "Well, maybe you can be our next project."

Gabe wiped the tears from his cheeks. "No. If my mother wanted me she wouldn't have left me on that bench outside the drugstore like she did."

Reaching across the table, Nicco took Gabe's hand. "I used to think the same thing. Maybe there are things you don't know? And maybe it's time you had some answers." Nicco knew it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack but he vowed right then and there not to stop until Gabe was given the same gift Nicco had just received.

Gabe looked at him and squeezed his hand. "Maybe. I'll think about it. It wouldn't be easy though. I don't even know my real name or my mother's. The only thing I remembered when the lady from the drugstore took me to the police was that my name was Gabe. My mother's name was Mommy."

That released a fresh round of tears from those sitting around the table. "You're lucky we've got the most awesome cyber-detective in the country. He's the best." Nicco looked toward Bram. "Thank you for giving me back my mom."

"Glad to do it. I can't wait to meet her." Bram's eyes flashed toward Thor. "Happily ever afters are nice to see once in a while."

Chapter Ten

Nicco woke the next morning with hot lips wrapped around his cock and a wet finger exploring his hole. "Well, good morning to you, too."

Mac just grunted and continued his assault on Nicco's morning erection. Reaching down, Nicco wrapped his fingers in Mac's dark hair. "Talk about *my* hair getting long." Mac's hair had grown several inches in the past few months. Nicco suspected all the vitamins he'd been taking had something to do with it.

"I had a dream last night about my mom," Nicco mumbled.

Releasing his cock, Mac scooted up to place a kiss on his lips. "You wanna talk about it?"

"Yeah, I kinda do." He realized Mac was willing to forgo his usual morning romp session to listen, and that meant the world to him.

"I don't think it was so much a dream as a memory. My mom was singing to me." He looked over at Mac. "She always sang that song, 'You Are My Sunshine', do you know that one?"

"Yeah," Mac answered, "it's a nice one."

"Yeah, it was. I remember she used to sing it every night when she put me to bed." He thought of his mom tucking the covers tightly around him before stretching out beside him for their nightly ritual. She'd lay her head on his pillow and tell him how much she loved him, and then she'd sing.

"The night before she left me, I remember her crying as she sang that song. I didn't understand at the time why, but I remember her just singing it over and over again. Eventually, I fell asleep and when I woke the next morning she was gone." Snuggling into Mac's chest, he shook his head. "I can't believe I'd blocked that memory out for so long."

"Well, even though it seems like a nice memory now, I'm sure at the time you were confused. Probably the only thing you thought of was your mother crying. Kids don't always see things the way adults do. It's just a guess, but I'd say you felt that because she was crying as she was singing to you before she disappeared, you must have had something to do with it. Kids tend to blame themselves. I know I did for a long time after my mom died. I kept thinking if only I'd been a better kid she wouldn't have gotten sick. Like somehow my being a typical rowdy boy had given her cancer. But at the time, it's how I felt."

"Do you remember my mom?"

"No, I don't think I ever met her. I remember hearing about—" Mac stopped suddenly. "Sorry."

"It's okay. I got used to people whispering whenever I was around. I imagine having a military wife running off on her family caused quite a stir around the base back then."

"I never heard about her running off with a woman though. I remember my mom talking on the phone though, saying something about how could a woman leave her own child behind."

Mac kissed him. "You two have a lot to talk about. After she gets here why don't you take her somewhere quiet and do just that? I'll take care of Amir," Mac said with a gleam in his eyes.

"Yeah, I just bet you can take care of him. But you're right, I need to talk to her, get some answers. Funny thing is it doesn't really matter to me why things happened the way they did. I mean, I love her no matter what, but I'd like to know."

"Of course you would."

"I think about all the holidays I've missed. Did you know that for about ten years after she left I bought her a Mother's Day card every year? Of course I never mailed them, but it made me feel better, more normal, I guess. I still have them back in New York."

"You'll have to give them to her. I'd imagine she'd love to have them."

"You don't think she'd find it silly that I kept them all these years?"

"She's a mom, they eat that stuff up, and she'll love them."

* * * * *

"Hey, Boone. Need help with anything for the party tomorrow?" Nicco asked as he climbed the porch stairs to the main house. He sat down in the white wicker chair. This sitting around waiting was getting on his nerves. He'd been worse than a girl that morning, trying on three different shirts until he'd finally settled on the black sport shirt Mac had given him for Christmas.

"Not really today," Boone replied. "I'll need all the help I can get in the morning, though. I've got the big party awning coming in. We can't really set up the tables and chairs until after the tent is up. Rex is planning on firing up the smoker before sunrise. I'm sure he'd love the company if you want to get up then."

Laughing, he shook his head. "I think I'll pass on that job. What with Amir coming in today, I would imagine we'll be skipping breakfast." Nicco looked out toward the county road. He kept expecting Amir and his mom any minute and the waiting was driving him crazy.

"They'll be here. A watched pot never boils," Boone said, reading his mind.

"Mac's supposed to meet me here when his therapy session's over. I'll let you in on a little secret. Declan is going to let him try out a pair of crutches. If Doc thinks Mac is sturdy enough he'll be out of the wheelchair for the most part."

"That's fantastic news. He's worked long and hard to get where he is." Boone looked toward the rehab facility. "I wish the rest of the patients had that kind of chance." Boone ran his fingers through his long blond hair.

"No hope for Billy, huh?" He could see the painful answer in Boone's eyes before he even spoke.

"No. I just hope he turns out like Thor. I've yet to see anything that man won't take on. Did he tell you we've offered him a full-time job?"

"No shit? Doing what?" Nicco looked at Boone but kept one eye on the road.

"Working with Doc O'Malley. He's been quite an inspiration to the patients and he's great with the weight and exercise portion of most patients' therapy."

Nicco nodded at Gabe as he came out of the house. "So did Thor say yes?"

Boone gave Gabe a quick kiss as he pulled him onto his lap. "Not yet. Thor's been fighting it over with Bram, who of course wants Thor close to him in New York."

"Oh, so that's why Bram and Doc have been fighting so much lately? I thought it was some kind of lover's quarrel." Nicco looked toward the facility and spotted Mac hobbling toward him on a pair of elbow crutches. "Damn, would you look at that." He jumped up and ran down the stairs to meet Mac halfway.

He pulled Mac into his arms and kissed him. "You did it. I'm so proud of you. I can't wait for Amir to see you walk toward the car." He gave him another quick kiss after looking around. They'd all made an agreement not to show too much affection toward each other while children were around.

"Easy, baby. I'm not as steady as I once was. Yet." Nicco released Mac and the two walked to the porch. Mac looked at the stairs. "I think I'd do better with the ramp for a while." He went to the edge of the porch, followed by Nicco, and walked up the ramp.

When they got to the porch, Gabe and Boone both hugged him. "Congratulations."

"I owe it all to you, Boone. If you hadn't started this facility I don't think I'd be up nearly as early." Mac sat down in the chair Nicco had vacated earlier, so Nicco sat on the footstool in front of him.

"The facility is great but Doc O'Malley is even greater," Boone said, sitting back down and pulling Gabe back onto his lap.

"Who says Declan is great? He's just a stubborn-ass quack," Bram said, walking out the screen door.

Mac piped up before Boone had a chance. "I say he's great. He's got me walking again. The doctors in Key West said it would take at least six months before I'd be able to even take a couple steps on my own. Doc's got me walking in half that time. Just because you have a personal problem with the man don't go putting down his abilities." Nicco was surprised at Mac. Nicco had never heard him talk that way to Bram.

Nicco looked over at Bram to see how he was taking the dressing-down. "Sorry, Mac. I know he's helped you a lot but the man is trying to take my brother away from me. How am I supposed to just sit back and let him do that?"

"Um. Maybe because your brother is a twenty-eight-year-old man. He's not the little boy you raised anymore." Mac's voice softened. "You taught him to be self-sufficient, but now you're trying to hold him back from something he really wants to do. Something he's good at. All I've heard from him since he got here was how glad he was that he didn't have to go back to teaching until August. Thor's happy here. Isn't that the important thing?"

Bram's jaw tightened and his hands clenched into fists. "Yeah, it's important." Bram looked at the men and walked down the porch steps, heading toward the barn.

Nicco looked over at Mac. "Go easy on him. He's afraid of losing the only person in the world he loves." Nicco leaned in and kissed Mac, feeling Mac's anger evaporate under the attention.

The men sat and talked about the party for a while. When they saw a vehicle pull in the drive, Nicco jumped up. Mac put a hand on his thigh. "Relax. It's just the Triple Spur gang." When Nicco sighed, Mac stood and put his arm around Nicco. "I'm sure Amir and Lilly are just as anxious to get here as you are. Now let's go greet our friends."

Nodding, Nicco walked back down the ramp with Mac as the doors to the minivan opened and people started pouring out.

Jake climbed out of the back with Cory and Jenny in tow. He spotted Mac and dropped his jaw. "You're walking?"

Mac chuckled at the look on Jake's face. "Well, not very well yet. This is my first day on the crutches, but yeah, I'm walking."

Everyone seemed to swarm Mac at once. Jenny and Cory hugged him after Jake released him. When they'd each had a warm hug they stepped back and Remy and Cree wrapped him up for a big hug. Remy even went as far as to kiss his cheek.

Nicco narrowed his eyes at Remy, but he just smiled. "That's just to get you back for all the times you teased me by kissing Cory."

"Well, now you've had your hug. Step away from my man." Nicco looked toward the van. "Where's Ben and my little spitfire Kate?"

Jenny answered for the group. "Kate's getting too far along in her pregnancy to ride in the car for long distances, so she asked if she could keep the twins for the weekend." Jenny touched her breasts. "My life's been a lot easier since they had to be weaned."

At Mac's confused look, she continued. "I just wasn't producing enough to keep them both happy and healthy. The pediatrician suggested I just put them on formula so we know how much food they're actually taking in. Anyway, this is the first weekend I've been away from them so I hope I do okay."

Nicco shivered a bit at the whole breast milk discussion. He was just glad he'd never have to deal with that. And by the disgusted look on Mac's face, he agreed with Nicco.

They climbed the porch steps and sat in the various wicker chairs and rockers. Nicco continued to watch the road as he visited with his friends.

Cree looked at Mac and pointed toward Nicco. "What's he doing?"

Smiling, Mac rubbed Nicco's back. "He's waiting on Amir and his mother. I told you on the phone a couple days ago we've been looking for her. Well, we found her living just outside Albuquerque. Small world, huh?"

Cree rose out of the rocker and came over to shake Nicco's hand. "I'm damn happy for you."

"Thanks. I didn't expect to ever see her again. The colonel told me she abandoned us, but it wasn't true." He went on to tell them the story behind his missing mother.

Cory cut in just as he was finishing. "What kind of car are you waiting for? Because there's a huge black truck coming up the drive."

Nicco looked at Mac. "I think I'm gonna throw up." Nicco stood and wiped his sweaty palms on his jeans. He briefly wondered if he should run in and comb his hair. Maybe the shirt was too stark for a first meeting.

"Just breathe," Mac soothed from beside Nicco.

They walked down the ramp together.

The truck stopped and Amir opened the driver's door. He climbed out of the truck and shut the door. He watched Mac and Nicco walking toward him. Nicco watched Amir's throat work trying to get something out as he watched Mac walking for the first time. "Oh my God." Amir walked straight into Mac's arms. It warmed Nicco's heart to see the joy on Amir's usual stoic face. It was nice that Amir was finally learning he didn't have to wear a mask around the people who loved him.

"When?" Amir kissed him long and deep. It was more than a congratulations kiss. It was also an I-love-you-and-missed-you kiss. Pulling back, he looked into Mac's eyes. "I'll give you two a proper hello later." He turned toward the truck and motioned Lilly to step out. "First, someone wants to meet Nicco again."

Nicco was rooted to his spot as Lilly climbed down from the truck. She was a tiny thing, barely five foot two with brown hair and brown eyes. She looked different than he'd remembered her. To a boy of four, his mom had been tall and beautiful. Oh, his mom was still pretty, but right now it appeared that she'd been doing a good deal of crying. Nicco stepped toward the truck, wiping his hands on his jeans, again. *Damn nerves.* His mouth had gone dry and he wasn't sure whether he'd be able to talk. He felt tears threatening and cleared his throat. Standing in front of the mother he hadn't seen in thirty years, he felt the rush of love pass over him as she looked into his eyes. That gave him the courage to approach her. Looking down at the tiny woman, tears spilled over onto his cheeks. "Mom?"

Lilly took the extra two steps and wrapped Nicco in a tight embrace. "Oh, Nicky. I'm so sorry. I hope one day you can forgive me for leaving like I did. I tried to come back for you." She began crying so hard she couldn't go on. No, he didn't want her to feel guilty anymore. If her reaction to him was anything to go by, Lilly had tormented herself with the loss of her son for years. It was time she was given the okay to forgive herself. Nicco promised himself he'd make her understand that when they went for their ride.

Pulling back, he wiped her tears and then his own. "I have some very special people I'd like for you to meet. Then I thought maybe we could go somewhere quiet, just the two of us."

Nodding, Lilly pulled a tissue out of her purse and blew her nose. "I've already met one of your wonderful men. He's told me quite a bit about you already."

Leading his mom over to Mac, Nicco stopped and pulled Mac close. "Mom, this is Mac Jefferson. You might remember his father, Colonel Jefferson. Mac's been my best friend since I was a boy. I've just recently had the courage to go against Father's orders and make him my partner." He looked at Amir and blushed. "One of my partners. Of course you already know Amir is the other love of my life."

Lilly rose up on her tiptoes and Mac leaned down so she could kiss his cheek. "Thank you for being there when my son needed you. I'm sorry but I didn't know your father. The colonel wouldn't allow me to socialize with the men he served with. I was to stay at home and mind the house." Lilly cut herself off. She looked toward the rest of the group standing on the porch.

Nicco wasn't sure how to introduce the rest of his friends. They all had so many partners it was hard for him to keep them straight, but his mom? Well, he just wasn't sure how she'd react.

Squeezing his hand, she must have sensed his hesitation. She leaned toward him and spoke in a soft voice. "Amir already filled me in on the relationships of your friends. I just need you to put the faces together with the names for me."

Nicco sighed and smiled. "You're the best, Mom." He walked her up the porch steps and introduced his mom to his extended family. When he was finished introducing everyone Rex stepped forward.

"I know you'd like some time with your mom, but after that, my mom has invited Lilly to stay with her. I think she's looking forward to a little girl talk."

"Thank you. I'd like that." Lilly patted Rex's hand. She turned toward Nicco. "So tell me what you had in mind, Nicky?"

Nicco looked out at the countryside. "I don't suppose you ride horses, do you?"

Amir laughed. "She's got the fanciest breeding ranch I've ever seen."

Lilly swatted at Amir just like a mother would do to a pesky child. "It's not really a ranch. We—I've—got a little over a hundred acres. Not much really. But it's enough for about ten horses. Clem started a small Arabian breeding program years ago. Since her

death I've scaled way back. I've a nice gentleman that helps me with the horses I've kept."

"Well, then let's go for a ride." Nicco kissed Mac and Amir. "We'll be gone a couple hours." Nicco led his mom toward the barn.

* * * * *

They rode through the pasture to his thinking rock, hidden in the little stand of trees. Nicco dismounted and loosened the cinch on Star Dancer's saddle. After tying the reins to a low scrub bush, he went to help Lilly with her horse but he found her off and the cinch already loosened. Nicco's chest puffed up a little, proud that his mom could take care of herself. "This is where I come when I need to think. I thought it'd be a nice place to get to know each other a little."

Lilly tied her horse and sat beside him on the smooth rock. "It's a nice place to think, Nicky. I can see why you picked it." Before he could say anything else, Lilly took his large hand in hers. He felt the calloused skin on her small hand and wondered how someone could go from a sheltered military wife to a hardworking horsewoman and still look so dainty. "I guess I need to talk to you about Clem and how we fell in love. But before I begin I want you to understand, I never meant to hurt you. I had no idea your father would keep you from me for thirty years." Nicco saw the truth in her eyes. She'd suffered as bad as he had at the hands of his father.

Looking out over the dried-up land, Lilly sighed. "I met Clem at the bookstore where I worked when you were just a toddler. The colonel never liked me working, but I needed something of my own. He eventually agreed to let me work two mornings a week as long as his meals were on the table when he came home. I met Clem when she came in for a book signing. My job was to sit with her and help her with the fans." Lilly shook her head as if remembering.

"She was the funniest woman I'd ever met, and we formed an instant friendship. When she left we kept in touch through letters and the occasional phone call. She'd come back into town to do another signing about every three months. After about a year, she asked me to lunch. I knew you were being well taken care of by Mrs. Henderson next door, and the colonel wouldn't be home until dinnertime so I said yes." Lilly's voice grew wistful.

"Clem took me to the fanciest restaurant I'd ever been to. She held my hand and told me over lunch that she'd fallen in love with me." Lilly looked at him. "I loved her, too. I'd never before even thought about being with another woman, but maybe it was just Clem, I don't know. She made me feel beautiful and funny and...loved. The colonel never had time for such trivial matters as love or affection. Appearances were all that mattered to him. As you well know, I'm sure. Anyway, several weeks later after I'd put you to bed, I finally got the nerve to tell your father I was leaving and he told me to get out and never come back." Nicco replayed his mom singing to him with tears running

down her face. He couldn't imagine how scared she must've been, knowing she was about to confront his father.

Wiping the fresh tears from her face with a tissue, Lilly put her hand on Nicco's cheek. "I was afraid of him in those days. He told me I couldn't take you with me, but I was no longer welcome to stay. I didn't know what to do, so I called Clem from a pay phone and she told me to get on a plane and come to Phoenix. We both thought I could get a lawyer and get custody of you, but things were different in those days. I was a woman living with another woman and your father was a colonel in the United States Marines. I didn't have a chance. He promised that I could write to you, and I did. I sent you long letters every week for years. I never received an answer and I thought you must be too disgusted and ashamed to call me Mom."

He couldn't take anymore. The thought of what those letters would have meant to him and the anger at the animal who kept them from him was all too much. He fell on the ground at his mom's feet and put his head in her lap. "No, Mom. I never received any of your letters. I've missed you so much. But Father told me... Well, it doesn't matter anymore what he told me. I've got you back now and that's the important thing. I wish I could have met your Clem. She must have been a really fine lady to fall for you."

Taking another tissue out of her pocket, Lilly wiped Nicco's face like he was a little boy. Nicco lifted his head for her, relishing the motherly touches.

"Hey, Mom? Do you remember that song you used to sing to me?"

"It's still my favorite," Lilly said as she sang his bedtime song to him. Even though he was a grown man now, that song filled him with as much joy as it had all those years ago. His mom ran her fingers through his curls as she continued to sing it, over and over.

Finally, she stopped and rubbed his head. "I think it's about time we got you back to your men."

His mother's love and approval suddenly became very important to Nicco. He looked into her eyes. "Does it bother you? That I love *two* men?" He held his breath waiting for his mom to answer.

"It just means twice as much love." She smoothed his wayward curls, trying to groom him like any mother would do. "I learned the hard way, when your entire world crumbles the love of a good person will see you through. It doesn't matter who that person or persons are, just that they're yours."

Rising, he kissed her. "I love you."

New tears welled in her eyes. "And I have always loved you, son."

* * * * *

They all had dinner together out on the patio that night. Gabe and Rex set up some of the folding chairs and a couple of tables they'd rented for the party the next day.

Maggie and Lilly sat off to the side chatting and giggling like a couple of schoolgirls. Nicco couldn't stop watching his mom. He felt two strong arms wrap around him and he leaned back. "Hey."

Mac kissed his neck. "Hey, babe. How're ya doing?"

Smiling, Nicco turned in Mac's arms and gave him a proper kiss. "I'm great for the most part. A little sad at the thought of moving so far away from her, but glad I found her in the first place." He stepped a little closer and rubbed his erection against Mac. "Did you and Amir get reacquainted while I was gone?"

Mac smiled and rubbed back, showing Nicco the proof of his lust. "Don't worry. I just warmed him up for you."

"Mmm. Speaking of, how long do we have to stay?" Nicco felt another warm body press against his back. He turned his head and stole a kiss from Amir. "I was just asking Mac how long we had to stay and be sociable."

Amir ran his hands down Nicco's chest to the bulge in his jeans currently hidden by Mac's body. Amir massaged Nicco's cock through his jeans. Mac must have felt it on his end too because he moaned.

Looking over at Rex and Boone standing in front of the grill, Mac called out. "Hey, Rex, how long before dinner?"

Rex turned around and smiled. "About fifteen minutes. There's an office down the hall if you need to make a call." He winked at Mac.

Mac lifted his brows at Nicco and Amir. "Quickie?"

At Nicco's nod, Amir marched him into the house. Mac followed behind them because he was a little slower on his crutches. When they entered the office it was already occupied. Remy was bent over the desk while Cree was buried balls-deep inside him.

"Uh, sorry, guys. We'll find another empty room." Shutting the door, he smiled at Mac and Amir. "I would never have pictured Remy in that particular position." He walked down the hall and found the media room. "Perfect."

Pulling Amir and Mac inside, Nicco shut the door and locked it. "We've got about ten more minutes." He dropped to his knees in front of Amir and unzipped the other man's jeans. Nicco pulled Amir's weighty cock out and sighed. "God, I've missed you." He placed a kiss on the crown of Amir's cock.

Laughing, Amir looked at Mac. "Did he miss me or just my cock?"

Licking his lips at the sight of Nicco trying his best to take Amir into his mouth, Mac shook his head. "We missed you both." Mac looked down at him again and unzipped his fly. He dug out his hard cock and stood beside Amir.

Amir turned and kissed Mac hard and deep, while reaching down to tangled his fingers in Nicco's hair to still him. Amir thrust his cock in and out of Nicco's mouth in shallow jabs. Mac reached over and ran his hand up Amir's shirt to pluck and play with his nipples. Nicco loved watching his men play with each other. Amir moaned and

used his free hand to squeeze Mac's ass. Nicco watched as Amir ran his hand up and down the crack of Mac's butt, slowly separating the twin globes. Amir ran a finger around the tight pucker and slipped just the tip inside.

Sliding his finger into his mouth alongside of Amir's cock, Nicco withdrew it and joined Amir in Mac's ass.

Moaning, Mac broke the kiss and looked down at Nicco. "Hurry up and finish him off before I shoot in your eye."

Nicco started to laugh and almost choked on Amir's thrusting cock. Nicco looked up at Mac and winked. Using his other hand, Nicco brought two fingers up to his mouth and pulled off Amir's cock long enough to get them nice and wet before pulling them out and reaching back to find Amir's pretty rosette while taking his cock back into his mouth. Not messing around trying to ease into him. Nicco set his jaw and thrust two fingers into Amir as deep as he could go. Within two seconds, Nicco was drinking Amir's tasty cum. Not wasting time to clean him up, Nicco turned and engulfed Mac's already-dripping cock.

Mac was so sensitive from his earlier round with Amir it didn't take long before Mac was shooting down Nicco's throat. His body stiffened as he drank Mac's offering. Nicco's stomach muscles clenched and his sac drew up close to his body as Amir unbuttoned him and took him all the way down his throat to the root. Releasing Mac, Nicco collapsed onto the floor and spread his legs to give Amir better access. Amir was a pro at sucking cock. He did this squeezing, humming thing with his throat as he took the length of Nicco's cock all the way down. "Uhhh." He shot so hard Amir, the pro, almost gagged as the forceful jets of cum came shooting from the end of his shaft.

Nicco had his eyes closed and was almost ready to fall into a deep sleep when he felt Mac's foot nudge him. "Come on, lover boy, you got to get up. I'm sure dinner's ready."

Nicco rolled to his side. "I've already eaten two helpings. I'm full. You two go ahead."

Smiling down at the now-sleeping Nicco, Amir walked over to the big sofa and picked up the lap blanket. He brought it back over and covered Nicco as much as he could before looking at Mac. "At least his bare ass isn't shining."

Taking Amir's hand, Mac pulled him in for a kiss. "Nicco's not been sleeping well lately. He may be here all night." Mac let go of Amir and reached for his crutches. "Let's go eat."

* * * * *

Finishing up his steak, Mac pushed his plate away and rubbed his stomach. "I can't eat another bite." He looked at all the food still left on the table. "Too bad Ben couldn't make it. Now we're gonna have to wrap all this stuff up."

The entire group except Lilly started laughing. Mac quickly filled her in on the joke. "Ben's another ex-SEAL friend of ours. He and his wife Kate have a ranch just down the road from the Triple Spur. Lilly, you've never seen a man eat like Ben. I can honestly say I don't know if he's ever been full in his life. He usually just eats until all the food's gone."

Lilly chuckled as she looked at the food. "My, oh my. I'd like to see that someday."

Mac looked around the table. He noticed Bram sitting across from Declan. The two men weren't speaking, but there still seemed to be plenty of sparks flying between them. "We originally asked Bram to come to Oklahoma because we wanted to discuss relocating the business with him. When we found out about you, all that was pushed to the back burner. But now I think it's time."

Bram snapped out of whatever spell Declan had him under. "What are you talking about? I don't think there's much call for bodyguards in Oklahoma."

Nodding, Mac took Amir's hand. "We don't want to live in New York anymore. We don't have our hearts set on Oklahoma but the three of us want open spaces. We've discussed dropping the bodyguard side of the business and focusing on the training aspect."

Remy's ears perked up. "Training? You know that we're planning a training facility on the Triple Spur for women. Not really bodyguard training, more like self-defense. We thought it would give women back some inner power that abusive husbands or boyfriends have taken away. Ben has agreed to help finance it like he's done with this rehabilitation center. We'd be honored if you'd think about maybe joining us in it."

Mac looked at Amir. "It would be something to think about, although I'd still like to build a training facility for bodyguards somewhere. Amir and I were talking while Nicco took Lilly out riding, and we thought it might be nice to relocate the business to Albuquerque. We could come up to the Triple Spur once a month or so for a couple of days at a time but Albuquerque is where we want to be."

"What about me?" Bram piped up from the end of the table. "What about all the employees back in New York?"

"Well, we'd like you to join us, of course. Maybe you could even open up a branch of JB Protection yourself somewhere. We wouldn't be able to handle the local day-to-day bodyguard jobs but there's no reason we couldn't still function as a clearinghouse of sorts for them. You know, match our highly trained guards up with clients." Mac shook his head. "I know it's a lot, Bram, but we need to figure it out because we can't take Nicco away from his mom when he's just found her. I'd be glad to listen to any suggestions you have. Hell, for that matter, if you want to go back to Manhattan and run JB Protection we could probably work something out."

Chewing his lip, Bram reached behind him and took his long black hair out of the braid. Mac had seen him go through this ritual often. It's what he did to center himself. He undid the braid and ran his fingers from his scalp down the long black waterfall.

"I'll have to get back with you. I need time to think." Bram's voice had dropped so low that everyone unconsciously leaned forward to hear him.

Pushing himself back from the table, Bram rose. "Thanks for dinner. I'll see you all in the morning." Bram walked off into the night, his hair hanging down his back, blowing in the evening breeze.

Mac noticed the way Declan watched Bram walk off the patio and head for the corral. The sun was setting directly in front of Bram and his silhouette was awe-inspiring. With his hair blowing he looked like a warrior out of his time. It must have affected Declan even more because he stood and set his napkin on the table. "Well, I've got a busy day tomorrow so I shall see you all at breakfast. Thank you for a lovely dinner."

"Goodnight, Doc." Mac reached out and shook Declan's hand as he passed by. Mac couldn't help notice Doc heading in the same direction as Bram. Mac turned toward Thor. "Did you give an answer yet on your job offer?"

Thor looked in the direction Bram and Declan had walked. "Yeah. I accepted the job. I'm afraid Bram's not too happy with me. I just can't make him understand that I feel like I'm supposed to be here, like I have a real purpose here at the facility."

"It doesn't have anything to do with the job. Bram's feeling like you don't need him anymore. You've been the center of his universe since you were just a kid. He's just wondering what *he's* supposed to do now."

Chapter Eleven

Walking into the barn, Declan tried to adjust his eyes to the dark. There was a single light on in the back. It looked like the place was completely empty until he heard a low vibrating voice coming from the row of stalls. Taking a deep breath, he followed the low throaty whispers. He found Bram rubbing Chief's head and looking way too delicious. Swallowing around the lump in his throat, Declan stepped up behind him. "Feel like talking to a human?"

Bram's head snapped around and he looked at Declan. He noticed the moisture in Bram's eyes, like he knew Thor would be happier here, but where would that leave Bram? Declan didn't even stop to think. He just pulled the hurting man into his arms. "I've got you."

Bram wrapped his arms around Declan and almost squeezed the stuffing out of him. *Man*, Declan thought. *Who knew holding Bram would feel this good?* He rolled his eyes at himself. *I did. That's why I've tried my best to push him away, to make him hate me.*

Pulling Declan even tighter against his well muscled frame, Bram cupped his ass. *Ah. He'd wanted to do this the first night they'd met.* Lifting Declan just a little, Bram lined their hardened cocks up. The much-bigger Bram moved back and forth over the bulging evidence of Declan's desire. Bram leaned down and sucked on Declan's bottom lip.

Opening his mouth in welcome, Declan was instantly taken by Bram's tongue in an all-out assault. The sparks between them ignited and Declan's breathing picked up dramatically as Bram pulled his shirt off over his head.

"I want you," Bram said in Declan's ear. Bram ground the evidence of his desire against him. "I want to bend you over and fuck that beautiful ass of yours. You've been shaking it enough and teasing me with it. Now you're going to get what you deserve." The words prickled at the back of Declan's neck.

Bram turned Declan around and wrapped his arms around him. Declan moaned as Bram ran his hands up the length of Declan's six-pack, stopping to pay attention to his beaded nipples. It evidently wasn't enough for Bram because he began touching him everywhere. His skin felt like it was on fire under Bram's fingers. It had been so long since anyone touched him like this. Bram ran his hand over Declan's bare back. Oh shit, in all the passion he'd forgotten about the road map of ugly scars on his back. Stiffening, he pulled away from Bram's touch. Declan shook his head, refusing to look up. He didn't want to see pity or disgust on Bram's beautiful face.

Grabbing his shirt from the floor, he made his way to the barn door, hoping like hell he could just get away without a confrontation. "Sorry. I just can't. I thought I was finally ready, but I'm not." He felt overwhelmed and ended up running the last few yards out of the barn and into the night.

Bram rubbed his hand over his face. "What the hell did I do?" He thought of the scars on Declan's back and had a few flashbacks of his own. The memories of other scars haunted him. Bram walked over to the wall and turned off the single light he'd turned on when he'd entered the barn. "It's too much right now. I've got enough to deal with on my own without taking on someone else's problems," Bram mumbled as he left the barn, refusing to listen to that little voice that told him it would be worth it.

* * * * *

The next morning Bram walked into the dining hall in search of Mac or Nicco. He looked around but they were nowhere in sight. Bram spotted Boone talking to the cook, so he walked over. Standing back far enough to be polite, Bram waited for Boone to notice him.

"Hey, Bram. Looks like you're the first to arrive for breakfast. Mom and Lilly are having toast and tea at Mom's house."

"I'm looking for Mac or Nicco. Do you know if they're up yet?" Bram shuffled his feet and stuck his hands in the back pockets of his jeans.

Boone chuckled and shook his head. "The way the three of them were looking at each other once Nicco woke up from his little nap, I doubt they got much sleep. I figure they'll probably skip breakfast here."

Bram nodded. "Well...um...I just wanted to thank you for your hospitality, but I'm heading back to New York this morning. I've let things go at the office too long and it's starting to wear on me." *Please don't try to talk me out of this.*

"You're not staying for the 'Thank you party' this afternoon?"

God, did Boone know how to turn on the puppy-dog eyes. "No. Sorry."

Boone stuck out his hand, still looking less than pleased that Bram was leaving. Bram shook it and Boone patted him on the back. "I've enjoyed your company. With Thor working here now, I want you to know you're welcome anytime."

"Thanks, I'll keep that in mind, but I'm sure with Nicco, Mac and Amir going to New Mexico I'm going to have my hands full for a while in New York." *Besides, I can't come back here, knowing the way I feel about Declan. He's a dangerous temptation for someone like me.*

"Well, as long as you know you're welcome. Maybe you could take a long weekend and come back in a month for the end of July celebration."

"We'll see. Bye, Boone." Bram walked out of the dining hall. Moving toward the main house, he pulled out his cell phone. Dialing Mac's number, he waited for him to pick up.

"What!" Mac yelled in a grouchy voice.

"Sorry to wake you, but I'm getting ready to head to the airport and I thought I'd say goodbye. I haven't made my mind up on the business side of things yet, but I know

I don't belong here any longer. I'll go into the office in the morning and see how things are running. I'll give you a call sometime after that." Bram walked into the house and headed up the stairs.

"Just like that? What? Did you and Doc fight last night?" Mac yawned into the phone. *Hell, he was so transparent even his friends knew he was taken by Declan.*

"We didn't fight. It's just time to go." Bram picked up his suitcase from the bed. He'd already said goodbye to Thor so he headed down to his rental.

"Sorry to hear things didn't work between the two of you. Call when you get settled in the office."

Throwing his suitcase in the back of the SUV, Bram said his final goodbye and hung up. He climbed into the driver's seat and started the engine. He thought he spotted Declan silhouetted in the window of the facility. It was his choice to go so why did he feel like he was leaving everyone he loved and could easily love behind? Bram sat there for a few more minutes, but when Declan didn't come out, he pulled out of the parking lot and was on his way back to Manhattan.

* * * * *

Mac hung up the phone and set it on the table. He felt a hand pass over his hip and settle on his cock.

"Who was that?" Nicco said, snuggling in even closer. He lazily moved his hand up and down on Mac's morning erection.

"Bram. He's headed to the airport." Mac pushed back against Nicco's cock. "I've never heard that particular tone in his voice before."

Amir turned over and snuggled against his front. He wrapped his arm across Mac to land on Nicco's hip. "What tone is that?" Amir ran his hand in small circles over Nicco's hip and butt.

"I don't know, defeated maybe." Mac knew he'd used that same voice for years. It's the pain of wanting someone you can't have. Shaking his head, Mac reached between him and Amir and stroked the long, thick cock painting a snail trail on his stomach. Amir moaned and thrust into Mac's hand.

Looking at the clock over Mac's shoulder, Nicco sighed. "We really should be helping with the setup preparations. It's already ten-fifteen."

Kissing Amir, Mac gave a muffled, "Mmm-hmm."

The more Mac kissed him, the more Amir's hands and fingers wandered. When he brushed his fingers over Nicco's hole, Amir felt him flinch. He broke the kiss and leaned up on his elbow so he could see Nicco over Mac. "Sore?"

"Yeah, Mr. Mighty Meat. I believe I am. If you feel like playing though there's nothing wrong with my cock. You'll have to wait to fuck my ass until later."

Leaning over Mac, he shared a deep kiss with Nicco. Amir loved that Nicco was so entrenched in his life he could speak his mind without fear of hurting Amir's feelings. "I'm sorry. What if we just did some cuddling this morning and saved the big stuff for tonight?"

"Yeah, big stuff is right," Nicco joked and looked at Mac. "Feel like a good cuddle this morning?"

"Mmm-hmm," Mac mumbled, pulling Amir and Nicco even closer.

With their arms wrapped around each other, he asked the question that had been on his mind since the previous evening. "So, what are we going to do about the future?"

Mac pulled back enough to tilt up his chin. "I thought we'd already agreed to move to New Mexico to be close to Lilly?"

Swallowing, Amir spilled his troubles. "I know that you both want to start a new business in Albuquerque, and I think that's a fantastic idea for you both, but what about me? If I do this, I want to help pay for everything, be a real partner in love and business. I know that you know I'm worth a fair amount. My parents were wealthy people and when they died I inherited everything. I want to use the money to help set us up in our new life."

Mac looked at Amir for several moments. "Okay."

"Just like that? You mean the two of you don't need to discuss it privately?" Amir had prepared himself for a long drawn-out discussion. This was too easy.

Shaking his head as if to clear his thoughts, Mac narrowed his eyes. "What's this about?"

He bit his lip and looked a little over Mac's head. "You and Nicco have always been partners in business. I know that you were open enough to include me in your private lives, but neither of you have said anything about including me in the professional side of things. I just want to feel like an equal partner, at least in that."

Now it was Nicco's turn to get upset. He rose off the bed and came around to lean over Amir. "Are you suggesting that we don't already treat you like an equal partner in this relationship? Because I gotta tell you, that pisses me the fuck off. We've opened our arms and hearts to you. We include you in every decision. So tell me just what the fuck isn't equal about that?"

Mac sat up and held up his hand. "That's enough! Nicco, why don't you go take a shower and cool off." Mac looked at Amir. "You stay. I think we need to have a talk."

Amir gave a short nod and walked over to the dresser. If he was going to have this conversation, he'd rather be covered. He knew it sounded too easy. Slipping on a pair of underwear, he turned back toward Mac as Nicco walked out the door. This was definitely not the result he was hoping for. He hadn't meant to piss Nicco off, he just wanted things cemented before he moved across the country. Walking over, he sat on the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry. Hell, I don't know why I said it."

Running his hands over his face, Amir sighed. "Yeah, I do." He looked at Mac. "I'm scared. Everyone I've ever loved has been taken from me. First my family, then you. I just don't know if I can handle it again."

Opening his arms, Mac beckoned Amir. "Come here."

Moving toward the center of the bed, he wrapped his arms around the man he loved.

"I've told you that I loved you, and Nicco's told you the same thing." Mac tilted Amir's chin up. "Evidently it's your own insecurities that are keeping you from truly letting go. We've loved you with our bodies and our words. Now it's your turn to realize that you're worthy. Nothing we can do or say will change the way you feel about yourself. Only you have that kind of power."

Closing his eyes, Amir shook his head. "All I wanted was to have proof that I would be welcome for the long haul. I thought if we all went into business together it would guarantee me that. I just wanted to secure my place."

Pulling Amir tighter against his chest, Mac kissed him. "I love you, and that won't change. Hell, if you'd rather not go into business with us and instead become a damn gas station attendant it wouldn't change my love." Mac put Amir's hand over his heart. "This is where you've guaranteed your position in this relationship."

Shit, now he felt like a complete ass. "Have I screwed things up with Nicco?"

"No, but you owe him one hell of a blowjob. Why don't you go in and join him in the shower?"

Grinning, he kissed Mac again. "I like this kind of making up."

* * * * *

"Hey, Jenny, where'd Boone tell you to set up the DJ?" Remy asked. Jenny stopped putting tablecloths on the tables and looked behind her. Remy had a man with him that Jenny assumed was the DJ.

"Well, the dance floor will be on that side of the awning," she replied, pointing toward the north side of the tent, "so I'd say over there, wouldn't you?" Jenny rolled her eyes at Remy's growl. She looked over at Cory as they walked off. "Men. Maybe if they tried thinking for themselves once in a while they'd evolve into more intelligent beings," she smiled, "like women."

Cory laughed and put another bucket of sand on the table. She dug into the plastic bag beside her and arranged three candles into the sand of each bucket. "How many people are expected to show up today anyway?"

Jenny shook her head and started on the last table. "I'm not sure. I know Boone said some of the past patients and their families that were from around here would be coming. I know the volunteers will be here too. That's one of the reasons he's having the party in June, I think the town has a big party on the Fourth of July and he didn't want to have to compete with that one. My guess is around seventy-five or so. He's ordered

enough tables to seat one hundred." Arms wrapped around her and she turned her head. "Hey, Sheriff."

Cree gave Jenny a kiss. "What's up next? Should I go help Rex at the smoker?"

Jenny giggled and shook her head. "No. I believe Gabe's helping him with *his meat* before the guests arrive."

Cree ran his hands up her stomach to her breasts, and looked around. "Where's Billy?"

"He's with Lilly and Maggie. They're teaching him how to make homemade, old-fashioned lemonade. All the other guests are on a trail ride." She raised her arms above her head to hold the back of Cree's neck and give him room to maneuver.

Slipping under her tight t-shirt, Cree pinched her engorged nipples. She caught him looking over at the DJ, who was pretending to set up his equipment. "Let's find somewhere a little more private."

She turned in his arms and looked over at Cory. "Room?" At Cory's smile and nod they made their way to their room in the main house.

Chapter Twelve

The party was going well when Declan finally took a seat next to Mac. Declan hadn't felt like a party today, but knew he was expected to show up and mingle with the guests. Since the children had all either left or been sent to bed, Amir and Nicco were dancing cheek to cheek on the dance floor. Declan looked at the men and then back to Mac. Here it was right in front of his face, love, true all-consuming love and yet Declan still refused to believe it was something he could ever have again. "You're a lucky man, Mac Jefferson."

Mac continued to watch the now-kissing couple. "That I am, Doc." He looked at Declan. "Thought maybe you and Bram might hit it off?"

Declan took a drink from his plastic glass of beer. He replayed the kiss with Bram in his head for the hundredth time that day. "Yeah, well, some things just aren't meant to be." He finished his beer and held up his glass, pain slicing through his gut at the thought of watching Bram drive away. "I'm getting me another one. Can I refill yours?"

Mac shook his head. "No thanks but you could bring me back a glass of lemonade." When Declan smiled, Mac shrugged. "My night isn't near over and in order to keep up with the two of them," Mac pointed toward the dancing pair, "I've got to have all my faculties in place."

With beer cup in hand, Declan stood. "Oh, to have such problems." He went to the keg they'd brought out after the kids had left and filled his cup. Boone walked over to fill his own glass and patted Declan on the shoulder.

"Having a good time?" Boone took the tap from Declan and began to fill his glass.

What else could he do, but tell Boone what he expected to hear? "Okay. The children seemed to enjoy themselves. Just too bad we couldn't have actual fireworks for them." Declan took a drink of his beer.

"Yeah, but with no rain in sight I just couldn't take the chance with the big ones. I think the fountains we set off in the parking lot cheered them up though. Besides, they'll see more fireworks in town on the Fourth of July."

"Any word from the social worker on Billy?" Declan had seen Boone, Rex and Gabe talking to her earlier in the evening.

"Not really. She says everything looks like it should go through okay. Now it's just a waiting game. They've given us temporary custody though. We've been trying to figure out whether he should stay where he is in Maggie's house or build him a room on to the main house. All our bedrooms are upstairs."

Declan looked toward Maggie's house. "Why don't you just ask Billy? I mean, I know he loves you all, but he's formed quite a bond with Maggie. I think he enjoys

helping her with everyday things and it's good for him to feel needed. If you want him to turn into as fine a man as Thor, you need to give Billy regular chores and stuff. Start treating him like you would any other child and he'll be all the better for it."

"Boone, get your sweet ass over here and dance with me." Rex was standing at the edge of the dance floor.

Rolling his eyes, Boone handed Declan his beer. "Hold that for me, will ya? Rex is a dancin' fool. He's already worn poor Gabe out and now he wants to start on me." He laughed and headed toward Rex.

Declan watched the men wrap themselves up in each other. *Why can't I get past my fears and open myself up again?* It hurt Declan to the core to see Bram leave that morning, but he was in no position to offer him a reason to stay. He carried both beers over to the table and set them down next to Mac, Cory and Gabe.

He handed Gabe Boone's beer. "Hold this for Boone, will you?" Declan took a drink and looked at Mac. "So...uh...is Bram gone for good back to New York?"

Mac seemed a little surprised at the question. "I guess that means you didn't talk to him before he left." Mac looked at Declan like they were the only two at the table. "I've never heard a man sound so defeated. He'll probably take over the New York operation for the time being."

Declan picked at the tablecloth. "He's after something I can't give him. I didn't mean to hurt him though. It really wasn't my intention." Taking a drink of his beer he looked toward Mac's cabin. "Would you be interested in selling me the cabin when you leave? I figure I can let Thor have my apartment at the facility. I just need something to call my own."

"Well, I guess that depends on how long you're gonna keep me here." Mac suddenly realized his glass was empty. "Hey, I thought you were going to bring me back a glass of lemonade."

"Sorry, I got sidetracked. I'll get it for you now. I need a refill anyway." Declan stood and walked back toward the keg.

When Declan left, Mac turned toward Gabe and Cory. "I'd say Bram's spirit isn't the only one suffering. What do you think about me giving the cabin to Declan?" Mac asked Gabe.

"I'd say do it if it'll keep him here longer. I've never seen a better man with children. Everyone loves Doc," Gabe said, finishing off his beer and starting on Boone's.

"Yeah," Mac said. "I think that's part of the problem."

When Doc sat back down, Mac took the glass of lemonade from him and took a long drink. "So, you never told me when I could get out of here."

"Another week or so of strengthening on your legs should do it. Of course you'll have to continue on your own after you leave." He rose from the table. "Well, I think I'll call it a night. I'll see you all in the morning."

"Before you go I wanted to tell you that you can have the cabin when Nicco, Amir and I leave. Consider it a bonus for a job well done." Mac was surprised when Declan started shaking his head vehemently.

"No. I won't live there if I don't pay for it. I want something of my own, that I've purchased by myself. Come up with a figure and let me know in the morning." With that Declan took his glass of beer and stopped to refill it before heading to his apartment.

* * * * *

An hour later, the DJ started packing up his equipment as the gang sat around the table. They were all too wired to go to bed yet. Rex went around and blew out the candles. "What do you say to a little party of our own on the patio? No chance of anyone seeing us back there."

They all exchanged heated looks. Cree stood and pulled Cory into his arms. "I say lead the way."

Deciding to wait and clean up the mess in the morning, they all headed toward the main house. Amir rubbed against Nicco as they walked. "Would you like to take a little dip in the hot tub?"

Nicco ran his hand over the bulge in Amir's jeans. "I could probably be persuaded."

Watching Nicco and Amir fondle each other on the way to the house Mac cursed his crutches. "Damn, I'll be glad when I can walk without these things. I'm missing out on all the fun." Mac gave them both his pouty look.

Chuckling, Nicco and Amir went to either side of Mac and began to rub on his cock and chest as they walked the remaining distance. When they finally reached the patio it already looked like a scene from a Roman orgy. Although Boone had thoughtfully supplied plenty of blankets for privacy some of his now-nearly naked friends didn't seem to mind walking around in their underwear.

Nicco looked at Amir. "Try to keep your package under wraps tonight, sugar. I love these friends of ours to death, but I might have to kill someone if they start ogling your cock."

Nipping Nicco on the neck, Amir lifted a brow. "What? You don't want to make your friends jealous of what you get and they don't?"

"Mmm. I never thought of it that way. By all means then. Strip." Nicco started unzipping Mac's jeans while he watched Amir take care of his own clothing down to his white boxer briefs. "It's nice to play under the moon."

When they heard a large splash all three looked toward the hot tub. Remy, Jake and Cory were starting to play. "Hey, no fair, we were getting in there," Mac shouted at the threesome in the hot tub.

Remy looked over and motioned to them. "This tub's big enough for more. Just make sure you three stay on your own side."

When Nicco stepped out of his jeans they made their way over to the hot tub. As Remy, Jake and Cory got a good look at Amir their eyes became as round as saucers. Remy quickly turned Cory's head. "No fair flaunting around my wife. Get in the water, stud-muffin."

Amir laughed at Remy's jealousy. He looked over at Nicco and winked. "Told you." Amir received a slap on the ass from Mac.

"Just help me get in the damn thing, would you?" Amir and Nicco helped him into the warm bubbling water. Amir and Nicco sat on either side of Mac as Boone came around with a tray of champagne. Mac took a glass and handed it to Nicco. Amir took a glass for himself. The threesome on the other side of the tub looked a little busy, but a nudge to Remy's butt from Nicco's foot broke them apart.

"What?" Remy said, looking like he was about to tear someone's head off for disrupting him.

Nicco chuckled and motioned to Boone. "I think Boone would like you all to take a glass of champagne." Nicco's breathing picked up on the last part of the sentence as Mac's hand wrapped around Nicco's rigid cock bobbing in the bubbles.

Remy looked over at Boone and took two glasses. "Sorry." He handed Jake and Cory a glass before taking a third for himself. "Are we toasting something or should we go ahead and drink it?"

"Just wait. Gabe wants to make a toast." Boone walked away to get another load of glasses. He had to wait a few minutes for Cree to come out of the house with a giggling Jenny in tow, but soon everyone had a glass in their hand.

Gabe stood in front of his friends and raised his glass. "I'd like to give thanks to all my friends." He poured a small amount of champagne out of his glass onto the patio. "That's for Ben and Kate. May their dreams come true upon the birth of their first child." Gabe held his glass up again. "And to the rest of you. You've been my family for years and I love you all. Thank you for helping Rex, Boone and me get the center up and running. I think our dear friend Mac is walking proof that we've accomplished a good thing here. Cheers to you, dear friends. Please know that you're welcome in our home always."

The group acknowledged Gabe's toast with a round of "Cheers" as they drank their champagne. When Gabe was surrounded by Boone and Rex, Nicco turned toward the threesome across the tub. "It's Gabe's turn to find his real family now. Somewhere out there is his mother and the three of us won't stop looking until we find her."

Remy nodded at Nicco. "Whatever the five of us can do to help, we'll do." Remy's statement was followed by nods from Cree and Jenny who'd come over to stand beside the hot tub.

Amir shook his head in bewilderment. "I've never seen a group of alpha males that were so close. Most people wouldn't allow anyone to see their loved ones in this particular state of undress. I'm sorry, it just amazes me that you're all so comfortable around each other."

Remy chuckled, "I used to get pretty territorial if any of my friends looked at my women, but now that I know you guys are all together and already taken, I don't feel threatened. Except maybe by that meat I spotted in your skivvies."

Amir actually blushed and scooted farther down in the water. Mac helped keep Amir's cock under control by wrapping his fingers around it.

Jenny climbed in the tub and sat on Remy's lap as Cree made room for himself between Jake's obviously spread thighs. Cree leaned back against Jake's chest and looked across the tub at the three of them. "I guess it just proves that we're all not only comfortable with our own bodies, but secure in our own relationships. That's not to say I haven't done my share of looking tonight, you understand." Cree looked right at Amir. "Don't let Ben see that, by the way. He's gotten used to being the most endowed among us. You might give him a complex or something."

Jake reached around Cree's chest and twisted his nipple. "Ow." Cree rubbed his chest. "What I was going to say was that although we may do our share of looking we'll never touch someone that doesn't belong to us." Cree turned his head and nipped Jake's jaw. "Happy now?"

Jake took over rubbing Cree's sore nipple. "Not really, but if you'll go upstairs with me I'm sure you can fix that."

Cree immediately stood up and pulled Jake into his arms. He climbed out of the hot tub helping the rest of his family climb out as well. "We'll see you guys in the morning." The fivesome headed into the house to continue their night on their own.

Amir looked behind him to see Boone, Rex and Gabe occupied on the lounge. Moving in front of Mac, Amir sat on Mac's lap, and shimmied his hips against Mac's arousal. "Want to play in here or go home?"

Wrapping his arms around Amir, Mac started to run his fingers over Amir's hole but found Nicco's fingers already there. Mac raised a brow at Nicco. "Greedy." Instead, Mac reached over and took hold of Nicco's cock. "I say we finish what we've started then you two can take me home."

Getting off Mac's lap, Amir helped Mac to the side of the tub. Amir took the remnants of his champagne and poured it over Mac's cock. He shivered as Amir's mouth sucked the drops of champagne. "I want in you. I want to fuck you while Nicco takes me to heaven from behind."

At Mac's moan and nod, Amir reached over the edge of the tub to the towel rack sitting beside it. He opened the small box on the bottom shelf and extracted the tube of lube Rex kept there. Lubing his fingers, Amir began to prepare Mac's hole as Nicco took the tube from Amir.

When he and Amir were stretched and ready, Amir inserted the large crown of his shaft inside Mac. Closing his eyes, Mac welcomed the burn as Amir pushed in slowly to the root, and waited for Nicco. Mac heard Amir's intake of breath and knew Nicco was filling him as Amir pushed back into Nicco and sighed. "That's it."

Hooking Mac's legs over his shoulders, Amir pistoned back and forth between the two men. The water in the tub began splashing in waves over the side, drenching Mac. He didn't even notice the water splashing over his body. He was too busy arching into Amir's thrusts while stroking himself. "Soon," he croaked.

When Amir lost his rhythm it totally screwed up Nicco's. All three men seemed to come simultaneously. They collapsed on top of Mac on the outside of the tub. When their breathing returned to normal, Amir reached for three towels. Mac was glad at least Amir had the energy to do something. Mac felt like the incredibly loved, sated man that he was.

Amir dried both Mac and Nicco, who in turn took care of Amir. They searched around the end of the patio for their clothes and got dressed. They looked over to Gabe, Rex and Boone but the threesome was sound asleep in a pile of arms and legs.

Mac picked his crutches up off the table. "Let's go home, loves." Remembering just how long this relationship took to come together, Mac was filled with happiness. It hadn't been an easy road, but the wait had been worth it. Now he just needed to get the three of them settled into their new life.

Nicco and Amir put their arms around Mac as they walked back to the cabin. "Where exactly are we going to live in Albuquerque?" Amir asked, brushing his hand over Mac's butt.

Mac looked from Amir to Nicco. "Have faith. We'll find something that'll be perfect for all of us."

Chapter Thirteen

Two weeks later, Nicco walked into his mom's kitchen and found her cooking breakfast. Bending, he kissed her cheek, "Morning."

"Good morning, Nicky. Did you have a nice evening?"

"It was okay. We spent most of the time driving around looking at land. We finally found fifty acres that Mac thinks might work for the facility. Now we just have to strike a deal, hire a contractor and build the place. Oh, and find somewhere to live." He shook his head. "Am I being selfish to ask them to do this?" He'd asked himself that question a million times since they left the center.

"Not at all," she said. "They love you, and just want to see you happy. Besides, I think both those men enjoy having a surrogate mother around to spoil them. Speaking of, where are they? Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes."

"Mac was on the phone with Bram when I came down, and Amir was in the shower." Filling a coffee cup, Nicco set it on the table before going back to get the plates and silverware. "We've got an appointment with the realtor in about an hour. She's found us some buildings to look at for the office space we need. Of course then we'll have to find a house." He rubbed his eyes. There was so much to do. Watching his mom move around the kitchen humming softly, Nicco knew why they were all uprooting and replanting. His mom was an amazing woman. He learned more about her every day. Like the fact that she seemed to have something going on with the horse trainer who took care of her babies.

His thoughts were interrupted by a pair of studs as they walked into the kitchen. Both Amir and Mac stopped to kiss his mom. Mac was doing much better, using only a cane to support himself. Stairs were still hard for him though, which was why they needed to find another place to live. The small apartment over the garage was nice, but the stairs were pretty steep and Nicco didn't want to take any chances with Mac's recovery.

"Morning," Mac said as he kissed Nicco. "Bram said to tell you hi."

"How's he doing?" he asked as he received a kiss from Amir.

"Grouchy. He said the business is going well though." Nicco knew it must be hard on Bram, being in New York without Thor or his friends. He only hoped Bram would get his head together and fight for the happiness he deserved.

Lilly brought over a platter of scrambled eggs, bacon and biscuits. "I hope you boys are hungry," she said, going back to get the coffee carafe.

"Always," Nicco replied.

* * * * *

So far, all the buildings they'd looked at would work, but none of them excited him. Mac looked around the newest space, and sighed. Turning to Amir, Mac shrugged. "What do you think?"

Shrugging back, Amir looked around him, "It's an office. They all look alike to me."

"Exactly. I just pictured something a little different. We're in Albuquerque, I was hoping for something a little more authentic." Mac looked at the gray walls and gray carpet and shook his head, another utilitarian office.

Nicco looked at them, obviously listening, before turning back to the realtor. "Do you have anything more authentic for sale in town? Maybe something a little older? We can always do renovations if we need to."

Tammy started to shake her head. "I've shown you most of the office space available. We have a couple of other buildings, but they've never been used in that capacity."

"Show us," Mac urged. Anything would be better than this. When they'd decided to give up living in New York City, he thought he was finished with sterile environments. This though, he thought, looking around, could easily be transported to the city and be right at home.

Piling back into their truck, Nicco turned to Mac. "I guess we could always just build everything we need on the fifty acres we saw last night."

"Yeah we could," he scratched his jaw. "I just wanted the training facility separate. It'll get noisy with the firing range right next to the office, but if that's what we have to do." He shivered. "Anything to keep from working in a place like that again," he said, motioning toward the building they'd just left.

Nicco followed Tammy across town to an older section on the edge of the city. She pulled up to what appeared to be an old school. Looking at the building, Mac smiled. Now this was more to his liking. "I want it," he said, looking at the golden-colored stucco building. He looked up and was pleased to see a red terra cotta tiled roof.

Chuckling, Amir punched him in the arm. "We haven't even seen the inside."

"I don't care," he said looking around the neighborhood. It was quiet, and although the buildings and houses appeared to be rather old, they were neat and well cared for. Getting out of the truck, they went to stand in front of the amber-colored building.

"It's been for sale for a little over eight months, but it's been empty for years," the realtor was saying. Mac didn't really listen to her because it didn't matter what she said, he wanted this building. He felt a hand on his elbow as Amir helped him up the five steps to the front doors. Looking at the bank of four front doors, he could see leaving two in the center and then having an area craftsman come up with a stained glass design for either side.

Amir pulled Mac's arm and turned him, placing a kiss on his lips. "Calm down, you can't seem too anxious."

"Why? Hell, for this place, I'll pay full price."

After unlocking one of the doors, Tammy led them into the common room of the old school. Calculating in his head how much office space they actually needed, he knew this place was way too big, but maybe they could hold some of the classes here or something.

Once they started touring the classrooms, he was suddenly struck. He turned to Tammy. "How's this building zoned? Can we work *and* live here?"

"Uh...it's not set up that way, but we could try to talk to the zoning commission. Because the building is owned by the city and has been vacant, we might have a little leverage."

"Excuse us for a minute," Nicco said, pulling Mac into another classroom with Amir in tow.

Putting his hands on his hips, Mac looked at Nicco. "I'm sorry, I know we haven't discussed this, but look at this place. Think of all the possibilities. It's big enough for a nice-sized office and home."

"But it's really old, Mac. It'll cost us a fortune to fix it up enough to live in it," Nicco reminded Mac.

"Not really, I like it the way it is. I mean, I'd knock out a few walls and stuff, but this place makes me happy."

Nicco looked at Amir. "What's your thoughts?"

Looking over at Mac, Amir turned back to Nicco. "When's the last time you saw him this excited and happy about something that didn't take place in the bedroom?"

Sighing, Nicco looked around the room. "I'll have to call the accountant back in New York. See what he thinks."

Clearing his throat, Amir stepped closer and wrapped his arms around them both. "I hate to be the one to remind you both, but we're three fairly rich men. My suggestion is that the three of us buy the building and lease it to JB Protection Agency. We get the zoning squared away and look for a good contractor."

Mac could see the wheels turning in Nicco's eyes. "I guess after the roof is redone and the plumbing is checked out we could always live in a few rooms while the others are being updated."

Yes, Mac thought, tempted to pump his arm in the air. He felt like a kid on Christmas morning. "I wanna call Cree and ask him to come down and look at it. I bet he'd have a ball coming up with design ideas for the house and office spaces."

Nicco handed over his cell phone. "So call him now. It would be better if we got his opinion before we make an offer and talk to the zoning board."

* * * * *

Several days later, Nicco was talking to Bram on the phone when Cree walked up, sketchpad in hand. Saying his goodbyes, Nicco hung up and turned toward Cree. "So what do you think?"

"It's a great place, solid, but it'll need some cosmetic work done and I'd suggest updating the electrical system."

"Please tell me it's doable without costing us a fortune?"

A smile spread across Cree's face. "Oh, it's very doable."

Nicco knew that particular look, and rolled his eyes. "You're as excited about this as Mac, aren't you?"

"Hell, yeah, look around you. This place is awesome."

"You know, you really should think about designing full-time. I never see you get this excited about pulling over drunks and breaking up fights."

"I don't have an architecture degree, man. Who's going to hire someone without that? Well, besides my friends, of course."

"You might be surprised." Nicco took the pad out of Cree's hands and looked at his sketches. After looking at Cree's work he nodded. For the first time he could see himself living here.

"Well, it looks like I have a zoning board to meet with," Nicco said, handing Cree back the pad.

Chapter Fourteen

They'd worked out a pretty good deal with the city. Although the board put a limit on the square footage they were allowed to occupy as living space, the rezoning passed fairly quickly.

Now with a new roof, the threesome was moving into one corner of the building. It would only be temporary until their actual living quarters were completed, but they had a makeshift bathroom, kitchen, living room and, most importantly, bedroom.

"Hey, Amir, could you help me with this?" Mac yelled down the hall.

Walking into the bedroom, Amir watched as a still-unsteady Mac tried to put the side rails into the headboard of their new bed. "In a bit of a hurry, are you? We don't even have everything unloaded yet."

"Yeah, well, I figured once we did, we'd all want a good nap. Besides, it's not like I can help you all carry stuff up those steps out front. I'm doing good just to make it up them on my own without carrying heavy boxes." He gestured toward the footboard. "I just need you to help me get the rails in place. I'll do the rest."

"You're cute," Amir chuckled. And Mac was. Amir didn't think he'd ever seen Mac like this. No matter what the cost, Amir and Nicco had decided it was worth it. They'd all agreed to keep Amir's apartment in New York and sell Mac's and Nicco's. His had the most appreciation potential and they knew they'd still need to go back to the city occasionally for business.

Other than a few pieces of furniture, Nicco and Mac had put their apartments up for sale furnished. Which meant hours of shopping for new stuff, but with Mac's enthusiasm so far it had gone well. The bed was one of Mac's favorite pieces, heavy wood with black scrolled ironwork. Mac had made a few suggestions about getting some handcuffs to decorate the black iron. Smiling to himself, Amir finished helping with the bed and stood back. He had to admit, it was pretty.

"Thanks, I can get it from here," Mac said, coming up to Amir to give him a deep kiss. And with kisses like this, Amir knew he was going to enjoy having a bedroom down the hall from his office.

"Just get the sheets on and as soon as we can get rid of the Triple Spur gang, Nicco and I'll help you test it out." Amir ran his hands down Mac's back to smooth over his ass.

Stepping even closer, Mac rubbed his hardened cock against the front of Amir's jeans. "I'm looking forward to it," Mac whispered, biting him on the neck.

Groaning, Amir pulled away. "You're trying to get me in trouble." Amir didn't really mind though, so instead of walking away, he tilted his head to give Mac better access.

"Always," Mac said, sucking up a bruise. Amir felt the pull off Mac's lips in his balls. Damn, this man could set him on fire in no time.

Amir heard Nicco yelling for Amir and turned his head toward the door. Placing his hand over Mac's cock, he squeezed. "Save it for me?"

"You know it." Mac squeezed Amir's in return.

With a groan, Amir pulled away and went to find Nicco. "What's up?"

"Where've you been, we've almost got everything unloaded," Nicco said, setting down a box.

"Mac's making up the bed," Amir winked. "He needed a little help."

Nicco smiled, "I'll just bet he did. That artist just brought the new stained-glass inserts we ordered. We may have had to pay through the nose, but getting them here on moving day was worth it. I thought maybe you could keep Mac occupied for a couple of hours while they're installed. I'd like to surprise him."

Rubbing his chin, Amir grinned. "I'm sure I can think of a thing or two to keep Mac busy. What do I tell him when he asks about you?"

"Tell him I'm taking the rest of the gang out to lunch for helping with the move."

Moving in, Amir pulled Nicco into his arms and kissed him. "I'm going to miss you. It'll seem odd being in bed without you there."

"I know, but this surprise is really important to me," Nicco said, licking Amir's bottom lip.

"I realize that, it's one of the reasons I love you so much," Amir took one more kiss before turning back toward the bedroom. "Come wake us up as soon as it's done."

"Count on it," Nicco replied.

Once Amir was out of eyesight of the rest of the group, he took off his shirt and shoes and left them in the hall. Unfastening his jeans, he walked into the bedroom to see Mac finishing up the bed. Their new ice blue comforter looked cool and inviting. "Nice, too bad I'm about to mess it up."

Mac glanced up just as Amir pushed his jeans down his hips. Stepping out of them, Amir walked toward the bed. Crawling into the center, he spread his arms and legs and looked up at an openmouthed Mac. "Well? You going to join me?"

Wasting no time, Mac quickly undressed and wrapped himself around Amir. "I think we should get under the covers in case someone walks in."

Smiling, Amir kissed him. "When did you suddenly become modest?"

Mac blushed, "Well, to be honest, I'm more concerned about messing up the new bedspread."

Finding that even funnier, Amir started laughing. "Oh God, are you going to turn into one of those obsessive house husbands?"

Narrowing his eyes, Mac straddled Amir's torso. "You know, I haven't tried kicking your ass in a long time."

"Nope, you haven't. We've been more into kissing than kicking lately." Amir grabbed the back of Mac's neck and pulled him down for a kiss. "I prefer this to fighting, don't you?"

"Reach under the pillow and get the lube," Mac growled against his lips. Leave it to Mac to make the bed up right, lube and all.

* * * * *

A warm hand rubbing across the skin of his ass woke him. Mac turned his head and smiled at Nicco. "Is the surprise ready?"

"Yep, everyone's gone but us. Get dressed while I wake up Amir." Drifting over to the other side of the bed, Nicco started kissing Amir awake. Damn, Mac knew he'd never get tired of watching the two of them together.

Feeling his cock begin to fill, Mac turned away and got out of bed. There would be plenty of time for that later. Right now, they had a man to set at ease. Nicco had come up with the perfect way to distract Amir while the windows were being installed. Mac smiled to himself. Amir had no idea he'd been set up. Sliding on his jeans, Mac thought back over the last several months and how much his life had changed. Deciding the neighborhood would appreciate him wearing a shirt outside, Mac walked over and found his box of clothes. Digging out a red t-shirt, he put it on and walked back to the bed. Nicco and Amir were engaged in a heavy-duty make-out session and he stood to watch for a few moments before interrupting. "Hey, you two."

Breaking their lip lock, Nicco looked over his shoulder and smiled at Mac. With his lips red and swollen, Nicco looked like a fantasy. Mac ran a hand over his erection and shook his head. "You're trying to distract me."

"Not at all," Nicco said, getting off the bed and pulling Amir up with him.

His stomach chose that moment to growl. "I'm hungry. Did we bring anything with us to eat?"

"No, but there's some beer in the fridge and I can call and order pizza." Nicco said, re-tucking his shirt.

"Better do it now, before we get sidetracked," Mac said, looking straight at the bulge evident behind Nicco's fly.

Bending over, Nicco picked up Amir's clothes and tossed them over. "Get dressed, stud-muffin."

* * * * *

After Nicco ordered their dinner and Mac and Amir had gotten dressed, the three of them walked out of the bedroom.

"So what's this surprise you have for me?" Mac asked Nicco.

"Not telling, you'll have to see it for yourself."

When they made it to the front doors, Amir saw the new windows had heavy paper taped over them. Good thinking, Amir thought.

"Amir, why don't you and Mac go outside while I pull the paper off the inside windows."

Amir nodded and led Mac outside with his arm wrapped around Mac's waist. Looking around while they waited for Nicco, Amir smiled. "I wonder how long it will take for the neighbors to get used to the idea of having three gay men living amongst them."

"Not long, I hope, because I don't plan to move any time soon," Mac said, licking at the bruise he'd created on Amir's neck.

Nicco came out and stood beside one of the windows. "Okay, you both need to close your eyes while I unveil this side."

Mac looked at Amir, eyebrow raised. "Is he serious?"

"Play along," he said, bumping hips with Mac.

He closed his eyes and thought of the look he was sure to see on Mac's face when he saw the new stained glass windows. Nicco had told him he was having the insignias for the Navy, Marines and even the British Army incorporated into the design.

"Okay, on the count of three, open your eyes." Amir felt Nicco come up behind them and wrap an arm around each of them. "One, two, three..."

Amir opened his eyes and looked at the windows. The first thing he saw wasn't the insignias however. It was the name of their business. "Three Partners Protection Agency," he read the words out loud. Turning, he looked from Mac to Nicco. "You changed the name of the company?"

"Why wouldn't we? We officially have a new business partner now. Of course it'll take a little while before we get the office in New York switched over to the new name, but this," Mac gestured to their new home, "this is ours."

Yes, it was. For the first time since he was a small boy he felt like he had an actual home. Amir walked up to the window and traced the scrollwork with his fingers. Done in jewel-toned glass, the windows were stunning. Going over to the other window, he was pleased to see the British Army insignia next to his name. He turned back to Nicco. "This guy did an amazing job. They're beautiful."

"Yeah, I gave him a nice fat bonus for getting them done so quickly," Nicco said, coming up behind Amir to wrap him in his arms.

"Thank you," Amir whispered. "You'll never know how much this gesture means to me."

"It was the only tangible way Mac and I could think of to make you understand our commitment. Now, every day you can walk out here and see for yourself that you belong with us." Nicco began kissing Amir's neck.

"Hey, guys? I think we should move the party inside," Mac said.

Nicco looked back at Mac, who gestured to an old woman walking her dog. Smiling, Nicco opened the door and pulled them both inside. "Let's get a cooler for the beer so we can take it into the bedroom. I plan on a long night."

"I'll wait here for the pizza guy," Amir said. "No sense getting started only to be interrupted." Nicco and Mac walked toward the kitchen and Amir leaned his forehead on the edge of the window. He watched the lady with her dog change from red to green to blue before disappearing from sight. Brushing his cheek against the cool glass, Amir closed his eyes. He knew it was stupid, but Nicco was right, he did need something tangible to help him believe in the future.

The fact that two such wonderful men loved him was the greatest gift of his life, but this window...came a close second.

The pizza guy pulled up outside and walked up the steps. Amir opened the door, money already in his hand.

"Wow," the kid said looking at the windows. "This place looks great. Love the windows."

"Thank you, we just got them installed." He told the kid to keep the change and carried the pizzas to the bedroom. He laughed as he walked through the doorway to see heavy bath sheets covering the bed. Looking over at Nicco, Amir winked. "He's going to have us wearing paper slippers over our shoes by the time the floors get sanded and stained."

"Stop making fun of me and get over here," Mac scowled.

Setting the pizza boxes down, Amir undressed and sat cross-legged on the bed, facing Mac and Nicco. Mac passed him another towel. "Better cover up your bits and pieces. I plan on using them for the next fifty or sixty years, and I'd hate to see you burn them."

Holding the towel, Amir leaned across the pizza to kiss both men. "I love you two, and I like the sound of fifty or sixty years together."

"So do we," Mac said, kissing him again. "Now eat so we can get to the dessert portion of the evening."

"Ooh, dessert, my favorite." Amir licked his lips, feeling almost giddy with happiness.

About the Author

I've been a reading fanatic for years and finally at the age of 40 decided to try my hand at writing. I've always loved romance novels that are just a little bit naughty so naturally my books tend to go just a little further. It's my fantasy world after all.

When I'm not being a mother to a five-year-old and a six-year-old, you can usually find me in my deep leather chair with either a book in my hand or my laptop.

Carol welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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