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Two Spirits

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TWO SPIRITS

Jory Strong

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Chapter One

The oppressive feeling of having his life completely out of control settled around Trey Masters like a heavy fog. *Could it be any worse?*

His stomach clenched as soon as he thought it. Yeah. Yeah, it could be a hell of a lot worse. He could be in some unmarked grave or at the bottom of the ocean. The Veron family could still be ruining lives with him as an unwitting accomplice and his students or the kids he coached as victims.

Trey closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the cold window of the police cruiser. He wasn't sorry for what he'd done. There'd been no choice but to do the right thing. He was an elementary schoolteacher, for god's sake. What kind of a man would he be if he'd said no when the Feds showed up and asked him to help them bring down a powerful family making and distributing child pornography?

No, he wasn't sorry he'd helped. Even if he'd known beforehand that Patricia Veron made a deadly, vengeful enemy, he would have kept sleeping with her and kept pretending everything was okay because he'd been desperately clinging to the illusion of heterosexuality.

Bile rose in his throat as he wondered if he might eventually have asked her to marry him if the Feds hadn't stepped in. He wanted to believe the answer was no.

Old feelings of self-loathing threatened to return but Trey ruthlessly stomped them down. Pretending, yeah, he was good at that. Pretending and denial had been a part of his life since he was twelve years old and got an erection thinking about his best friend.

He'd been convinced he was going straight to hell then. He'd become certain of it when the fantasies become more detailed and erotic as he grew older.

Fag. Queer. Pervert. The names were knives with the power to shred lives. He'd seen what happened when other kids got labeled. He'd done everything in his power to

avoid it. In high school he'd become a track star, a debate team captain, the boy who never lacked for a date or a girl willing to let him touch her breasts and cunt.

In college it was more of the same. He'd continued to run track though he'd traded the debate team for the school paper. There'd been fewer girls but the ones he did go out with, he'd fucked, wanting to convince himself he was straight.

After he graduated there'd been his first teaching job, followed by a second one when he'd moved back home because his mother was starting to show the signs of the disease that would come to define both of their lives. Even if he hadn't already been steeped in years of denying his core self, he wouldn't have acknowledged his sexuality then, not in his devoutly religious mother's house.

On the outside, he'd been the successful son his mother had wanted. But on the inside, with each year that passed, he'd had to work harder and harder to suppress the truth of what he really was. Gay.

Trey grimaced. What a word. Gay. There was nothing about being homosexual that made him even remotely happy, much less lighthearted and carefree. Then again, when had he ever allowed himself to act on a same-sex attraction? Never.

Maybe it was time to stop pretending. Maybe when this was over and it was safe to involve someone else in his life...

Trey rubbed his chest. The dull ache was still there months after the funeral even though the truth was he'd lost his mother years ago to frontotemporal dementia – FTD to those unfortunate enough to have someone they love suffer from the fatal condition that shrinks the lobes in the brain controlling personality and speech.

It was a relief to know she was at peace now. She would have hated knowing what she'd become. Only his memories of how much she'd loved and sacrificed as she'd raised him on her own had helped Trey hang on as the disease turned her into a verbally abusive and embarrassing stranger.

A flash of lightning followed by the crack of thunder made him open his eyes. The cop driving grunted and said, "They might as well have sent you to Alaska. Christ, who picked this place?"

Trey didn't have an answer as he looked out at Hohoq. It was supposed to be his refuge but seemed more like a dreary prison. He counted five buildings and prayed the mist pressing in on the police car was hiding the rest. A glance was enough to extinguish any hope for a bookstore or a library. He'd probably end up grateful for a TV getting more than one or two channels.

The car slowed to a halt in front of an old-fashioned sign swinging on heavy chains. *Sheriff.*

"Grab your stuff," the cop said as he cut the engine and placed his hand on the door handle. "As soon as I make the official handoff, I'm out of here."

"Sure thing. I know you're in a hurry."

"Bet your ass I am. My wife'll kill me if I'm not back and on the plane to Vegas with her."

Trey rubbed his chest again, this time as twinges of envy slid through him. He wanted what the cop had, a nice heterosexual lifestyle with a wife at his side both at home and out in public.

He wanted it, but he knew it wasn't going to happen unless he was willing to spend the rest of his life living a lie—or unless he stopped letting what others think define how he lived. There *were* cities where it'd be no big deal to be openly gay. There *were* liberal school districts and communities where people understood being gay didn't equal being a child molester—far from it, and the statistics proved the point. Most of the sick scum who preyed on children were heterosexual.

Trey snagged the single duffle bag he'd had time to pack in his mad rush to get out of the house and into an informal protective custody arrangement. Maybe when this was all over he'd take a trip somewhere and...what...hit a gay bar, check out the personals? Yeah, right.

His virgin ass was so obvious it glowed. He'd attract every predator in town.

He opened the car door and was hit with a blast of wet icy wind. It was enough to bring Trey's thoughts clearly back to the here and now.

Survival. That was key. Even with his heaviest jacket on, he felt like he was freezing by the time he made it the short distance into the sheriff's office. His cop escort was already making the handoff to a man Trey figured was the sheriff, though he was surprised at the thick braid accompanying the Native American features.

"He's all yours," the cop said. "No sign of Patricia Veron, but that doesn't mean she won't surface for some payback."

"So expect trouble?" the sheriff asked, the answer lost on Trey as another man stepped into the room.

Trey stiffened, cock-first. He buried his hands in his pockets and was grateful the jacket was long enough to cover a boner that'd scream fag if any of the other men noticed it.

Stop fighting it. If you'd accepted it earlier you'd never have been sleeping with Patricia Veron and none of this would have happened.

Trey ducked his head and tried to get himself under control. *Think small town and just how notorious cops are for being close-minded when it comes to queers*. It didn't help. In that split second of awareness an image had burned into his mind and his cock wasn't going to let him forget it.

Tenino was having a hard time paying attention to the conversation between the city cop and Tekoa. His gaydar was pinging and his cock was at attention and ready to serve in the line of duty. It was the last thing he'd expected when he stepped into the office.

He'd been dreading hauling a stranger out to his cabin, but now...blond hair, blue eyes, a neat ponytail he could already see himself freeing and spreading out across the sheets on his bed... Tenino could hardly wait for introductions.

Ever since his cousins Ukiah and Tekoa had found their mates, he'd been feeling the need to settle. He didn't hold out any hope he'd have a mate in the truest sense of the word, a forever lover who could join him in flight when the storm called and the Thunderbird spirit rose. For that to happen he'd have to find one among The People, which didn't seem likely since not many of them were bisexual, much less one hundred percent gay like him.

His heart ached when he thought too hard about not having that ultimate spiritual connection, so mainly he *didn't* think about it. He lived. He had sex when he could get it. He'd even spent some time as a cop in Los Angeles and San Francisco, but in the end the pull of the land had been too strong. Now he was back to stay and ready to begin and end each day in the arms of a longtime lover, though finding one was proving to be difficult.

Tenino studied the blond who seemed to be trying his best to ignore his presence. Shy? He'd never found it attractive in men though it could be kind of cute in women.

He could make an exception for the blond. Besides, the blond was going to find it hard to stay shy at the cabin. The place was small. They'd be bumping into each other every time they turned around.

Tenino grinned. Bumping and grinding wasn't going to be a hardship.

He tried to remember exactly what Tekoa had told him about his soon-to-be guest. It hadn't been much. Friend of a friend asking a favor, the possibility of some danger so Tekoa didn't want the stranger at his cabin or at the lodge his brother Ukiah owned. Both places had women there now.

That's all Tenino remembered. He shrugged off the need for more information. It'd come. The grin widened. Hopefully he'd come.

The blond looked up at the mention of his name. Trey.

The sound of it stroked over Tenino's cock. He closed his eyes briefly as the image of him lying on top of Trey, whispering the name as he thrust, flashed through his thoughts. Tenino extended his hand when Tekoa made the introduction. Trey's eyes

met his and slid away quickly. His shoulders hunched just enough to make him shrink inside his coat.

Tenino turned to shake hands with the cop. The cop's face was flushed and his expression said it wasn't because of the heat in the office. He'd caught the way Tenino was devouring Trey with his eyes.

Tough shit, Tenino thought. *Deal with it.*

"You going to be okay here?" the cop asked Trey. "If you're not good with this, you can ride back with me."

"I'm good," Trey said, emotion churning in the pit of his stomach while his heart raced like a rabbit's.

The cop didn't waste any time leaving. Trey looked everywhere except at Tenino, until Tenino said, "The cabin's remote, might as well grab something to eat in town. You hungry?"

Trey's eyes met Tenino's. White heat flashed though him along with the skittering, nervous fear that came with standing at the edge of a high dive before jumping to the water below. "Cabin?"

Tenino's smile was pure sin. "Can't put you somewhere it'll be easy for the bad guys to find you. So are you up for some dinner?"

"Yes." It was all Trey could manage and thankfully Tenino turned his attention to the sheriff. "What about you? You eating in town or waiting 'til you get to your place?"

"I don't think food will be on the menu by the time I get back home."

"Torture me why don't you?"

The sheriff laughed. He placed his hand on Tenino's shoulder. "Your turn's coming."

"I'm not like you."

"I never thought I'd find what I needed either. But look what dropped in my lap. Look what happened with Ukiah. Your turn's coming. Maybe it's already here."

Tekoa's glance flicked to Trey and back to Tenino and made the ball of want and trepidation grow in Trey's stomach. His cock grew harder at the words. His breath grew a little short. He'd always considered himself good at reading between the lines – or at least he had until the desire for a straight lifestyle had blinded him to the truth about Patricia Veron and her family. It almost sounded as if –

He shook his head, cleared it, reminded himself he was in a nowhere town with a couple of law-and-order types. Just because he was ready...make that *close* to ready...to accept his sexuality did not mean the first guy who got his heart racing and his cock head slick with arousal was gay.

It was going to be bad enough having to share a cabin with Tenino. The last thing he needed was to act like a sixteen-year-old with a crush. Yeah, Tenino's smile had caused what little blood remained in Trey's head to shoot south, but thinking about it with his big head *instead* of his little one, Trey realized Tenino was probably envisioning inviting some women over and having some fun.

Trey wasn't vain about his looks. He'd never had trouble attracting the opposite sex. He'd just lacked the true desire to do it. And he could see how his blond-haired, blue-eyed appearance was a great contrast to Tenino's darker one.

The color in Trey's face deepened when he realized both Tenino and Tekoa were looking at him, maybe waiting for him to answer some question he hadn't heard. He picked up the duffle, said, "I'm ready."

Apparently it was the right response. They left the office, only stopping long enough to throw the duffle into a Jeep with the sheriff's department logo on the side of it before walking to a nearby restaurant and claiming a table next to the window.

The rain hadn't arrived yet, but it was coming. Flashes of lightning streaked across the sky and the peals of thunder arrived in shorter increments of time. The mist was heavy and gray, giving the town a mystical appearance and making Trey think of Native American myths and rural folktales.

"So what do you do when you're not hiding from dangerous ex-girlfriends?" Tenino asked, drawing Trey's attention away from the strangely mesmerizing scene outside the diner.

"I teach. Elementary school."

Tekoa grunted. "You're lucky the Feds approached you and asked for your help instead of hauling you in as a suspect."

Trey shivered. He fought to keep the bile from rising in his throat and the nightmare scenarios that had him waking in a cold sweat from returning and destroying his hard-earned calm. All it took was suspicion to ruin a reputation and a career, to make life a living hell.

He gripped the menu to keep his hands from shaking. He wasn't in the clear yet, wouldn't know if he'd really survived until he was back home and applying for a teaching job.

The first thing he'd done after the Feds laid out their evidence and asked for his help was to call the principal at the school where he taught and arrange a meeting. They'd agreed on a plan of action, so the school wouldn't be hurt and neither would Trey when the story broke about the Verons.

The Feds had done as promised. They'd made a point of telling the media Trey was never a suspect and had been instrumental in helping them build their case and shut down a child pornography operation.

But there was no going back to the way things were. Trey knew that.

Even though his principal had tried to talk him into staying, Trey couldn't shake the need to move on. It was time to put some distance between himself and the city where he'd grown up denying his sexual orientation. It was time to leave the house he'd inherited from his mother, along with the guilt that came with being gay.

"Yeah, I was lucky," Trey said, putting the menu on the table, his appetite gone.

Their waitress arrived and took Tenino and Tekoa's orders. When she looked at Trey he said, "Nothing for me."

"Get him what Tekoa and I are having," Tenino said. "Otherwise he's going to regret not eating once I get him to my place."

The waitress lifted an eyebrow. There was no missing the speculation in her eyes.

Heat, confusion, the wild pounding of his heart kept Trey silent just long enough for the waitress to collect the menus and leave. He licked his lips, dared a glance at Tenino.

Their eyes met and held. Trey's chest tightened. He fought the urge to grip his penis through the denim of his jeans at the bold, confident look on Tenino's face – as if Tenino *knew*, as if he *wanted*.

Trey glanced away first. Conversation was beyond him and thankfully Tekoa and Tenino seemed comfortable with silence.

A foggy mist settled more heavily outside. The wind created the illusion of movement, caused imaginary forms to take shape in the swirling grayness. A memory pushed to the surface of Trey's mind as a dark, birdlike shadow appeared and disappeared along with a peal of thunder.

Hohoq. It was one of the names for the thunderbird.

Remembering it made Trey look at the scene outside and see it as more than a stark, desolate prison. He loved collecting stories of supernatural beings and occurrences. And over the years, he'd found the promise of a good ghost story, the working of a legend or folktale into a lesson plan, helped his students learn and gave them an incentive for good behavior.

Lightning flashed, followed quickly by thunder. The shadow wings reappeared and seemed to spread further, as if the thunderbird was drawing closer, just as the storm was.

He knew there were a variety of beliefs when it came to thunderbirds. In some cultures they were protectors. In others they were the Creator's messengers. At least one tradition held they lived as men but could take the form of a thunderbird when necessary. In almost every belief system the beat of their massive wings caused the thunder while lightning shot from their eyes.

Trey rubbed his chest as an odd sensation struck, making him think of talons reaching, sinking in, surrounding his heart and taking its measure, choosing to leave him alive and gifting him with a warmth that whispered of happiness and home, that felt like anticipation and hope.

When the waitress returned with a hamburger and fries, his stomach growled. Hunger returned in a rush and Trey started eating, very much aware of Tenino on the other side of the table.

"So what's your take on the situation, Trey? Is there likely to be trouble?" Tenino asked.

Trey looked up to witness Tenino stabbing a fry in a pool of ketchup. It made him think of blood.

"If Patricia finds out where I am, then yes. The Feds now think she might have killed before, more than once, to keep her family's secret safe. She'll feel responsible for bringing them down and she'll want to get even with me for betraying her. Her sister committed suicide when the story broke."

This time Trey couldn't hide the way his hands shook slightly. Patricia had nothing to lose. If she found him, it would end only one way – with one of them dead.

Revulsion filled him. He blocked his mind to the image of himself in bed with her. His hands lowered to the plate, but before he dropped the burger, Tenino reached over and snagged a fry, then a second one.

"Eat up. Weather's getting worse. We need to get out of here."

Trey found himself lifting the burger, eating. He tried not to think about how intimate it seemed to have Tenino casually helping himself to the fries—and failed.

Even without looking at the sheriff's deputy, he was acutely aware of the other man's every move, every glance.

In self-defense Trey turned his head to look out the window. A pickup truck with a camper shell on the back pulled to an angled stop in front of the diner. He had only a glimpse of a beautiful blonde before the man driving pulled her to him and they fogged the car windows with the passion they shared.

Longing filled Trey and made him ache. Finally the couple parted. The man got out, blond and beautiful like the woman. He walked around the truck and opened the door. After helping her out they lingered, kissing again, their bodies pressed tightly together and their arms locked around each other.

Trey's cock pulsed, jerked at the sensuality, the sense of connection radiating from the couple. He barely registered Tenino saying, "Now that Clay and Jessica are back, I guess we shouldn't expect to see you unless there's an emergency."

He barely noticed Tekoa leaving the diner. And then the sheriff was on the other side of the glass.

The woman smiled as she left her blond lover's arms and slid into Tekoa's. Tekoa's lips took hers in kiss every bit as intimate and dominating as the one he'd interrupted and she clung, softened, seemed to melt against the sheriff. He lifted his head, said something to the blond and the blond laughed, leaned in, touched his mouth to Tekoa's.

The brief kiss sent shock waves through Trey, made him grateful the tablecloth hung down far enough to prevent total humiliation as he gripped his erection to keep from disgracing himself. His face heated. His heartbeat became erratic. He felt as though his entire world had just shifted on its axis.

Chapter Two

Tenino's stomach clenched. He doubted Trey had any idea just how expressive his face was. Fuck! He wished he hadn't seen half the emotions Trey revealed.

No wonder his cock was standing at attention and his gaydar was pinging. Trey wanted what Tekoa had, a female lover and a male one.

Tenino polished off the last of Trey's forgotten fries. He tried to keep his eyes from devouring the blond across the table and his imagination from stripping him. It was impossible.

For the first time since walking into the office and seeing Trey, Tenino hoped Patricia Veron got picked up by the Feds soon. Otherwise it was going to get tense in the cabin.

"Ready," Tenino asked, standing abruptly and shooting a scowl at the waitress, a cousin whose eyes were practically dancing and whose fingers were no doubt tingling with the urge to get on the phone and tell everyone he'd left with a delicious blond.

Any other town and he'd have to worry about talk being unsafe for Trey, but not here. The People of the Thunderbird didn't reveal sensitive information to outsiders.

Trey rose and reached for his wallet. Tenino nearly groaned at the sight of the hard ridge pressed against the front of Trey's pants. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Meals are part of the pay here."

They were greeted by rain when they stepped outside. The street was empty save for the Jeep. They hurried to it but still managed to get wet. Darkness was coming close on the heels of the storm, blending in so there was almost no differentiating the dusk with the gray of clouds.

Tenino concentrated on driving. Argued with his cock about acting on the attraction to Trey.

He was a fool. He knew he was a fool. Yeah, he loved watching Tekoa interact with Jessica and Clay. Loved the open sexuality when the four of them got together to play poker or watch a movie. Fuck. He loved Jessica. She was gorgeous, sinfully submissive when her men wanted that from her. She was a wet dream waiting to happen and if he'd been straight or bi, he'd have been green with envy that she belonged to Tekoa and Clay.

Tekoa and his brother Ukiah had both been given mates not originally of The People. Otherworldly cups had appeared almost as soon as they'd met their mates, the mystically created liquid inside proof of the Creator's blessing. Drinking it had united Clay's and Jessica's spirits with Tekoa's, Marisa's with Ukiah's, and allowed for a full joining so they became Thunderbird.

Tenino sighed. He was gay and not straight or bi. It'd rip his heart out to share a lover with a woman. So what chance did he have of gaining a true spirit mate when their physical union would never produce children? How would it serve The People? The Creator?

And still he couldn't stop himself from catching glimpses of Trey out of the corner of his eye. Usually he found the call of the wind and rain irresistible. Usually he couldn't wait to get home, to stretch out in front of the fireplace and let his spirit escape the confines of human flesh to become Thunderbird.

It was the overpowering need to take flight, to feel his spirit deeply connected to the Creator's and to the land The People protected, that had brought him back to Hohoq. But as the air warmed in the Jeep and Trey's scent invaded his senses, images of stretching in front of the fire with Trey, of kissing and touching, soaring with passion instead of with the storm, filled Tenino's mind.

On some level he noticed the scenery as it passed on either side of the Jeep. He was aware of the slashing rain, the wind, the thunder and lightning, the presence of Thunderbirds high above them. But on another level, it was like driving through a tunnel with home marked by a light at the far end.

He rolled to a stop in front of the cabin. The rain was coming down in sheets, the blackness of night complete.

Tenino slid from the Jeep and raced to get under the porch roof. He had the door open by the time Trey grabbed his duffle and got to shelter. A flick of his hand over the switch and the inside of the cabin lit up.

His eyes went to the fireplace mantle and the Thunderbird image Ukiah had carved into it. There was no half-filled cup waiting as there had been for Tekoa when he took Clay and Jessica to his home.

Tenino swallowed his disappointment. Reminded himself he'd been a fool to hope there would be one – especially since Trey had a thing for women.

He stripped his jacket off and hung it on a peg next to the door. "I'll get a fire started," he said, the smallness of the cabin closing in on him with a coziness that promised an unrelenting ache in his cock unless he came to terms with Trey's presence there.

For the most part it was one room with the kitchen separated by a counter and the start of the bedroom delineated by a carpet. The couch was oversized, plush, the TV an energy-consuming extravagance that had made more than one of the elders shake their head and mutter about the foolishness of youth, especially when they saw the collection of video games making up his "library".

Tenino pointed toward an open door. "Bathroom's there," he said, crossing the wooden floor and kneeling on the thick, woven rug in front of the fireplace.

Even with his back to Trey, Tenino was acutely aware of Trey taking his jacket off. In his mind's eye he went further, saw Trey peeling down the wet jeans, then the rest of his clothing before stretching out in front of the fire in a sexual offering.

Yeah, this was going to be a problem, Tenino thought. He got the fire going, the task second nature, so often performed it didn't require nearly enough of his attention.

Trey disappeared into the bathroom, came out barefoot and wearing sweatpants. He stopped by the duffle he'd put on a chair and dug out a book.

Tenino's jaw clenched when Trey claimed a spot at the end of the couch closest to the fire. He needed to figure out a way to handle this. For the next week or so, this was his job, keeping Trey safe. But short of having a tracking device on Trey, there was little chance of Patricia Veron finding him—which meant there was little danger of anything except dying of blue balls.

His hands curled into fists as he fought the urge to unzip and give himself some relief. Fuck!

An icy-hot bolt shot through his cock at the word. Tenino closed his eyes, took a deep breath then regretted it as the light scent of Trey's cologne made his chest tighten.

Deal with it, he told himself. *There are two choices here.*

Kick back, have some fun. No commitments. No expectations. Just go with the flow, take what was offered even though doing casual with Trey would only make the cabin seem empty and the loneliness worse when he was gone.

Or he could hold out. He could fight the attraction and spend a lot of time jerking off in the shower.

Tenino grimaced. Yeah, that idea held a lot of appeal.

He turned away from the fire. Trey's head was down, his attention seemingly on the book he was using to shield his erection. Tenino was willing to bet his badge that if he asked, Trey wouldn't be able tell him what he was reading.

Why couldn't Trey be butt-ugly? Or a flamer? Either would have made things easy.

Instead Trey was perfectly masculine. He was lean, mouthwateringly fit without the muscles of a guy who did serious bodybuilding. And the blond ponytail was about to drive Tenino crazy. He had a thing for long hair. He loved freeing his braid and having a lover comb his fingers through it. He loved doing the same to a lover.

Tenino shook his head slightly and admitted to himself he didn't have a clue how to proceed. Say something about the chemistry that had him harder than he'd been in a long time? Don't say anything?

It's not like they were in a gay bar or set up by friends. They were snugged up in his cabin with one bed, one sofa and a whole lot of togetherness. Which meant he was going to be totally miserable in his own place if something didn't give.

Tenino took a deep breath, opened his mouth and let the first words that presented themselves out. "Look. No surprises here. I'm gay. I-"

"I'm not," Trey interrupted, swamped by deep-seated panic and reacting with denial before he could stop himself.

It was a stupid thing to do. As soon as the words were out Trey regretted them.

He was wearing baggy sweats and using a book to shield his hardened cock from view. Did he think Tenino was so clueless he hadn't noticed?

"Okay, bi then," Tenino said.

Trey managed to look up. To meet Tenino's dark eyes. "I'm not bi."

Even *he* heard the absolute truth in those three words. And the force with which he'd delivered them was like slamming a conversational door shut.

Tenino's eyebrows went up. Trey's heart thundered. His face flamed and his thoughts raced.

Maybe it's time to stop pretending, a small internal voice whispered. *Here's your chance. The two of you are going to be sharing a cabin. He's safe, a lot safer than anyone you'd meet in a bar or online.*

Trey's fingers tightened on the book. His breath grew shorter. Sentences formed, dissolved, reformed. But his throat closed, preventing any possibility of retracting his earlier denial, of openly admitting his sexual preference. He closed his eyes and ducked his head, not wanting to see himself labeled a coward in Tenino's eyes.

Shock. Heat. Lust. A nearly overwhelming need to dominate scorched Tenino and just about cost him his control.

Tenino stood abruptly, before he gave in to the temptation to force the truth out of Trey. Gay. Not just gay, but probably a virgin.

Tenino retreated to the bathroom, admitting to himself he was very close to having most of his brains reside in his cock. Most of his blood was already there.

He stripped and stepped into the shower stall, went for hot water because there were only two cures for what ailed him and in his mind, taking a cold shower wasn't an option. He lathered his hands, gave in to the fantasy it was Trey's hand circling his erection, Trey's hand cupping his balls.

Fuck, he had it bad. But short of handcuffing Trey -

Exquisite agony raced through Tenino's cock as the scenario of cuffing Trey to the bed and gaining a confession played out. Shit, it'd be the sweetest confession he'd ever heard, made in the midst of gasps and pleading and moans.

Tenino groaned as he imagined using his mouth and hands to work Trey into admitting the truth. He'd take it slow at first, build the need, the anticipation, make Trey's first time so good the only place he called home was the cabin and the only bed he wanted to be in was the one in the next room.

There were teaching jobs close enough to Hohoq for Trey to commute back and forth. It could work, for both of them.

Tenino closed his eyes, slid his hand up and down on his cock. His buttocks flexed. His thighs bunched. The need for release built.

He began panting, thrusting through the tight fist of his fingers, the movements growing sharper, more violent, finally gained relief as his semen escaped in ropy jets, coating his belly and chest.

Tenino swayed, lightheaded. He freed his cock and testicles in favor of pressing his palms to the tile of the shower wall until he regained his strength.

Damn, if that was what happened when he came just fantasizing about Trey, then the reality of coming *with* Trey was probably going to make him pass out. A husky laugh escaped. He'd deal with it. Because one thing was for certain, Trey wasn't staying a virgin for long. And if Tenino had his way, Trey's first male lover was going to be his last one.

Tenino pushed away from the shower wall and lathered his hands again, this time to clean up the semen on his chest and abdomen. Now that he'd gotten a little relief he could think again, though he was very careful to keep his thoughts from straying into fantasy.

He needed a plan. The trouble was, he'd never been in a situation like this one. His past lovers had all been experienced, some openly gay, others more discreet about it — but none of them in denial about wanting another man as a partner instead of a woman.

Growing up, his sexual preference wasn't an issue, at least among those belonging to the Thunderbird. There was even a name for it among The People. Two Spirited.

He'd never denied his sexuality. Yeah, he'd kept it private when he was a cop in LA, and to a lesser extent when he was in San Francisco. It'd just been easier that way. So he didn't hold Trey's denying being gay against him.

Hell, the guy had just helped the Feds bring down a family dealing child pornography. Trey was probably terrified it was going to destroy his career despite being innocent of anything but sleeping with a woman and pretending he was straight. On top of that, he had his female ex-lover out to kill him.

He was willing to cut Trey some slack. *Some* being the operative word. A phone call might come in tomorrow morning saying Patricia Veron was in custody. He had to make every minute count.

Tenino grinned. He could do that. In fact, he'd consider it his personal mission to get Trey so hot and bothered he had to retreat to the shower and jerk off—either that or face up to the chemistry between them and let Tenino show him just how much pleasure there was in accepting his sexuality and letting another man touch him.

A pulse of need went through Tenino's cock with the thought. He hardened again. For a split second he was tempted to take himself in hand and give in to the fantasy of imagining Trey on his knees, blond hair freed from his ponytail, mouth delivering sweet torture and mind-blowing ecstasy as the water cascaded over them.

The grin turned into a grimace as the need built and Tenino realized his plan was going to involve a whole lot of suffering – for Trey *and* for him. He turned off the water and got out of the shower, toweled off briskly then frowned at the jeans.

No way was he putting them back on. He wrapped the towel around his waist. *Don't want to spook the schoolteacher,* he thought, the grin returning.

How perfect was that? A cop and a schoolteacher paired up and playing house together?

A snicker escaped. It was better than a moan of pain. 'Cause as soon as he opened the bathroom door and saw Trey look up long enough to get an eyeful, fire streaked through his cock and up his spine.

Tenino crossed to the area that served as his bedroom and quickly put on some sweatpants. He left the shirt off, mainly because *more* clothing didn't seem desirable and the thought of the material touching his skin was unbearable. And then there was the fact he had a good body and he wanted Trey to see it – up close and *very* personal.

It wasn't vanity speaking, just self-awareness and a confidence that came with being completely comfortable in his skin. The Creator had blessed him with nice looks to begin with. Being a cop and taking physical fitness seriously had honed that body into something other men had found attractive in the past, though what he really wanted was for one particular man—Trey—to find him irresistible in the present and the future.

Tenino rubbed his palm over his nipple. His penis jerked and his abdomen quivered. Oh yeah, this plan was going to involve a whole lot of suffering.

"You play video games?" Tenino asked, plopping down on the couch, guessing he was right on the edge of violating Trey's personal space.

Trey closed the book. It was absolutely pointless to pretend he could read a single word, much less a complete page with Tenino in the room, shirtless and sitting so close.

"Some," Trey admitted. He didn't prefer them over reading, but he enjoyed them and they gave him a way to connect with his students, especially the boys. From time to

time he'd found it very useful to take his PlayStation in and use minutes of playtime as part of a reward system for achieving certain academic and behavioral goals.

"What about a game then? We can even keep it tame, something like racing cars."

"Yeah, sounds good," Trey said, hyperaware of Tenino's smooth bare chest and tiny, hardened nipples, of the erection not any more hidden by sweats than his was.

Tenino rose from the couch to cross the room for the game controllers. Trey took a shaky breath. He felt exactly like what he was, a virgin on a first date.

Just go with it. Just ease into it. Let Tenino make the first move. Because there was no doubt in his mind Tenino would make a move. He may have backed off for the moment, but Trey didn't think it would last – he hoped it wouldn't last.

Nervous anticipation fluttered in Trey's belly. Fantasies had assailed him the entire time Tenino was in the shower. He imagined himself going into the bathroom, stripping, stepping underneath the hot spray of water and admitting he was gay, admitting to the attraction as soapy hands explored and lips touched for the first time.

He'd be a fool to ignore this opportunity, to keep denying the truth about his sexuality. He wasn't a kid anymore, didn't have to worry about schoolyard bullies. Hell, at the moment he didn't have to be scared about what acting on his fantasies would do to his career. He was unemployed, in hiding—free for the first time in his life to accept who he really was, and act on it.

Tenino returned to the same place he'd claimed previously, close enough Trey was swamped with heat and the scent of soap, with renewed images of Tenino as the water caressed his body. Trey took the offered game controller, looked away quickly when Tenino stretched his legs out and used the coffee table for a foot rest, his relaxed position making his erection press boldly against the front of his sweatpants.

Trey's fingers tightened on the game controller. He saw a subtle dare in Tenino's gesture, a blatant acknowledgement of attraction. But he couldn't make himself lift the book off his lap and place it on the table next to the couch. Instead he used it as a shield, a place to rest his forearms as he manipulated the game controls.

His face flamed when Tenino laughed softly. But thankfully Tenino seemed content to talk about the game, to guide Trey through an overview so they could begin racing.

Trey relaxed, found himself smiling, joking, letting his competitive spirit rise to the surface. He lost, more than once, but made Tenino sweat for his victories.

It was past midnight when they finally quit, when Tenino tossed his game controller onto the coffee table next to Trey's then reached over and plucked the book from Trey's lap.

Trey's breath caught at the intensity of Tenino's gaze, the purpose written on his face. His heart thundered in his ears as his lips parted slightly and his penis pulsed. He didn't fight when Tenino pushed him backward onto the couch cushions. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world to stretch out, to have Tenino position himself on top, groin to groin, hard cocks lined up, separated only by soft material.

"You still want to claim you aren't gay?" Tenino asked, his lips a breath away from Trey's.

Chapter Three

Trey shivered, nearly moaned as exquisite sensation surged through him in molten waves of needy heat. His hips lifted, his cock rubbed against Tenino's in silent acknowledgement, but Tenino didn't relent.

"I can cuff you, work a confession out of you if that's what it takes," Tenino threatened, his breathing a little ragged, his hips bucking. "Answer my question, Trey. You still want to claim you aren't gay?"

"No," Trey whispered and couldn't stop himself from admitting everything though he knew Tenino was smart enough to have guessed. "I'm gay. But I've never acted on it before."

Tenino's smile was dark, nearly feral. "You ready to?"

Trey answered by lifting his head and pressing his lips to Tenino's, by swallowing Tenino's moan of surprised pleasure.

Firm lips yielded but Tenino made Trey fight for control of the kiss. Tongues slid against one another, cocks straining, leaking.

Emotion swamped Trey. If there'd been even a hint of a doubt about his sexuality remaining, it burned away in the heat scorching him.

It felt so good to have Tenino lying on top of him, their cocks pressing together as their tongues thrust and retreated, tangled. It felt better than anything he'd ever experienced, so profoundly right he knew he'd never look for pleasure in a woman's arms again.

His hands went to Tenino's hair, undid the braid. His heart thrilled at the way Tenino shivered at having his hair played with.

Trey swallowed Tenino's groan and wanted to coax more of them from him. His fingers combed through black, silky locks, the tips sliding over deeply tanned skin and firm muscles.

Tenino's hips jerked in response. He roughly freed Trey's ponytail, his elbows sliding forward so more of his weight was on Trey. His fingers tangled in Trey's hair, their grip radiating power, desire, possessiveness as his tongue grew more dominant, more insistent.

Trey moaned, shuddered. Lust pulsed between the two of them in time with the rapid, thundering beat of their hearts. His hands slid underneath the waistband of Tenino's sweats, encountered only taut, smooth buttocks.

Tenino lifted his mouth from Trey's. "You're driving me crazy," he said, rolling onto an elbow, reaching down to grab the bottom of Trey's t-shirt and pull it up.

The need to feel skin against skin had Trey's hands leaving their exploration of Tenino's buttocks. The shirt was tugged off. Pure pleasure coursed through him when Tenino reclaimed his earlier position and their chests touched, heated flesh to heated flesh.

More arousal escaped through the slitted tip of Trey's penis. He wanted to push his sweats downward, do the same to Tenino's. For the first time in his life, Trey felt empowered, emboldened by the rigid length of his cock, the erection he'd gotten because of another man.

Tenino's lips covered his again, the kiss carnal, forceful, and Trey speared his fingers through Tenino's hair, loved the way Tenino didn't hold back. Tiny hardened nipples touched, rubbed against each other, sent icy-hot spikes of torturous pleasure straight to Trey's penis. He groaned when the kiss ended, nearly whimpered when Tenino kissed downward, found an ultrasensitive nipple and bit.

"Please," Trey gasped, arching his back, tightening his fingers on Tenino's hair, not even sure what he was asking for.

Dark satisfaction glittered in Tenino's eyes. His smile said he understood what Trey wanted and intended to give it to him.

Tenino's tongue swirled over the nipple, his teeth demonstrating just how close pain and pleasure were to one another.

Trey's hips jerked. He spread his legs and felt his face heat at the unconscious invitation to be fucked he'd just issued. Feelings of vulnerability fluttered through his chest but didn't have time to spread as Tenino's firm lips and wet tongue continued to trail downward.

Anticipation built, a need so pervasive that when Tenino's hand reached the waistband of Trey's sweats, he lifted and in one smooth movement his pants were off and his cock was free.

"Please," he moaned again as Tenino's breath struck naked flesh. Repeated it when a firm masculine hand gripped him.

"I like the sound of you begging," Tenino said, tightening his fingers, making Trey's buttocks clench and his hips surge upward so he thrust through the fist of Tenino's hand.

Tenino's silky hair caressed Trey's thighs, teasing over his belly. It made Trey lightheaded to see Tenino between his legs, mouth so close to where he was desperate to feel it.

Trey moaned, remembered the times he'd closed his eyes when a woman took him between her lips, the times he pretended it was a man instead, then felt guilt and shame afterward when he was limp, spent. Never again, he promised himself. Never again.

He cried out, shuddered as Tenino's tongue lashed him, as Tenino's mouth closed around his cock head. There was no hesitation in Tenino. There was nothing soft in his touch, in the stroke of his tongue or the pull of his lips.

Take no prisoners.

The thought came to Trey as Tenino sent wave after wave of exquisite agony and unbearable pleasure through his cock, as he panted, writhed, tangled his fingers in raven-black hair and began begging again, uncaring about anything but gaining release.

Trey thought he might die when Tenino's free hand found his testicles, prevented him from spewing his seed. "Let me come," he gasped.

Tenino answered Trey's pleas by sucking mercilessly, by rubbing his tongue over Trey's cock head. He knew what was driving him, what was making him draw out every sound of pleasure he could from Trey.

His instincts were dark and primitive, something he'd never experienced with any other lover. He wanted Trey. Now. Forever. And if making Trey a slave to passion was what it took to keep him there after Patricia Veron was taken into custody, then so be it.

"Let me come and I'll go down on you," Trey said, his breathing fast, his voice husky.

The promise of having Trey on his knees, of fucking through utterly kissable lips as he gripped long blond strands of hair, shredded Tenino's control. He took Trey deeper, swallowed, reveled at the way Trey's body shuddered, jerked in violent release before going lax, his thighs still spread, a virgin yet to be taken.

Tenino rolled to his feet, stripping the sweatpants off. He stayed standing as blue eyes traveled over him appreciatively, grew heated at the sight of his cock full and proud against his abdomen.

Without a word Trey slid from the couch, his movement smooth, masculine, reminding Tenino of a lithe, golden panther. Trey's fingers gripped Tenino's cock. His breath whispered over the exposed tip and sent lust roaring through Tenino.

"You're not circumcised," Trey said.

A drop of arousal escaped, winked from the tip of Tenino's penis as the foreskin pulled back further. He was tempted to ask if being uncircumcised bothered Trey, but Trey killed the words by ducking his head, licking over Tenino's ultrasensitive cock head.

He grunted, dug his fingers into Trey's hair as he'd fantasized about in the shower. "Don't tease," he said, and knew it was the wrong thing to say when Trey smiled.

"What? Don't return the favor?" Trey asked, rubbing his thumb against the tip of Tenino's penis, tightening his grip, pumping, the foreskin heightening the sensation and making Tenino moan.

Liquid heat pooled in Tenino's belly, his testicles. His buttocks flexed, his thighs bunched. He trembled with urgent need as Trey tormented him, proving the saying that payback was hell—though in this case, it was torturous ecstasy.

Tenino hunched over and scraped his fingernails over Trey's much lighter skin. He commanded. Threatened. Finally begged as Trey did to him what he'd done moments earlier, took him to the edge of release time and time again, only to make him wait as the lust returned, built, became a raging inferno leaving him convinced he'd die if he didn't come.

He nearly passed out when Trey relented, couldn't have controlled the violent jerks of his hips or held back his shout of victory if he'd wanted to. He might not have managed to collapse onto the couch if he hadn't been standing next to it.

"Damn," Tenino said, arms going around Trey, shifting so Trey lay on top of him, their mouths nearly touching. "You sure you've never been with a man before?"

"I think it's something I'd remember," Trey said.

Tenino grinned, loving the way Trey blushed just enough to make him look adorable, loving the way Trey was sensitive, maybe even a little shy, without being the least bit feminine.

He couldn't resist lifting his head, pressing his mouth to Trey's, coaxing Trey's lips into parting, his tongue into coming out to play. He didn't usually like being on the bottom, didn't typically let himself be fucked, but as the heat built between them, Tenino knew he'd let Trey go where few other men had gone, he'd let Trey take him anally because what he wanted with Trey transcended the physical. What he wanted from Trey originated in the soul. He wanted a spirit mate, a forever lover.

Tenino's hands glided over Trey's back, stroking, caressing, putting into touch what was too early to put into words. His legs widened, his cock hardened to rub against Trey's.

It was a guilty, probably perverse pleasure, but he loved a circumcised cock when it came to a lover. He just didn't want to be a circumcised lover himself.

"I'd ask if that was okay for you," Trey said, laughter in his voice, "but you're looking very pleased with yourself. You remind me of one of my students whose gotten away with something and can barely stand to keep it to himself."

"One of your students, huh? Tell you what, if you get a wild hair to pull out the paddle and play teacher, I'm going to pull out the cuffs and play cop."

He laughed when Trey reddened. But Tenino's cock hardened completely when Trey said, "That's the second time you've mentioned cuffing me. Do you... I mean... Is that something you like to do in the bedroom?"

Images of having Trey completely at his mercy pressed in on Tenino. Until he'd met Trey, bondage hadn't gotten much screen-time in his repertoire of fantasies to jerk off to. But now...

Tenino looked at the blond Adonis above him, shivered at the feel of the hot body lying along the length of his. He didn't need to see or be a shrink to figure out why cuffing Trey really appealed to him. The thought of Trey leaving, going back to his life somewhere else made a knot of cold dread form in Tenino's chest.

Trey's expression changed to a mix of hesitancy and budding confidence, mischief and carnal intent. It mesmerized Tenino so he didn't realize what Trey was up to until Trey's fingers encircled both of their penises, held them together so they throbbed, burned, sent heated shards of pleasure up Tenino's spine.

"I have ways of making you talk," Trey joked, stroking from base to tip.

"Do your worst," Tenino managed, short of breath after only a single torturous touch. "Just remember, payback is a bitch."

"A bitch you say? Look who's on the bottom."

Tenino's hips jerked as Trey used his hand as if it were a sheath fucking both of them at the same time, as Trey made sure he felt the way their testicles touched, Trey's position and weight saying he was the alpha male in the relationship.

A moan of pleasure escaped from Tenino. If Trey wanted to be the aggressor this round, it worked for him. He'd already accepted he would let Trey fuck him if Trey wanted it, needed it.

Tenino speared his fingers through blond hair. He guided Trey's head down and took his mouth in a kiss demonstrating the one on the bottom still had plenty of power.

Thoughts of the lubricant and condoms stashed in the coffee table drawer flickered through his thoughts, but what Trey was doing felt so good, so right, Tenino couldn't put a stop to it.

His testicles pulled tight against his body in warning. White-hot need built. Seared. Burned away control.

He came in shuddering surges that seemed to last forever, that felt as if they'd been wrenched from the depths of his soul. He knew absolute joy when Trey's movements mimicked his own, when ropy jets of Trey's semen mixed with his own so chests and abdomens held evidence of the pleasure they'd found with one another.

Tenino had never experienced anything like it. The beginnings of love settled into his heart in an irony he was self-aware enough to appreciate. In the past, the mention of any emotion beside the desire to fuck like rabbits early on in a relationship would have sent him running, same as it'd probably do with Trey.

"Shower," he said, not wanting to spook Trey with too much too soon.

Trey followed Tenino to the bathroom, didn't even consider they would take separate showers. The view from behind was every bit as enticing as the one from the front, every bit as tempting.

He loved the color of Tenino's skin, the firm muscles created by genetics and honed by choice and dedication to his job. Everything about Tenino was gorgeous, lustinspiring. And as Trey studied the curve of Tenino's buttocks, the sleek shape of them, he felt the blood rise to his cheeks at the same time far more of it flooded his cock.

The night had already proved better than any fantasy, more satisfying than any other sexual experience. He couldn't imagine ever needing a glossy pin-up or gay porno flick to make him come, not when he had the memory of Tenino to make him hard and help him find relief. And yet...he was curious about fucking, about being fucked.

Tenino turned and caught him staring. With the sweep of his eyes downward, Tenino made him realize his hand had unconsciously gone to his cock, that he was fondling himself as he wondered about taking Tenino anally and being taken the same way.

"Insatiable, huh?" Tenino joked, stepping forward, covering Trey's hand with his, guiding it up and down Trey's cock. "Glad to know I have that effect on you."

Trey moaned softly when Tenino kissed him. He closed his eyes, basked in the sensation coursing through him as their tongues slid against one another in an imitation of a far more carnal act. His heart flooded with emotion, rejoiced in the easy camaraderie that settled around him so trust wasn't an issue between them.

"I'm not usually on the receiving end," Tenino whispered against Trey's mouth long moments later. "But for you I'll make an exception. Is that what you want, Trey? To fuck me?"

Trey's cock throbbed, grew fuller, responded with escaped arousal. He answered the question honestly, knew the time for denying his desires, his sexuality was long past. "Yes, I want to fuck you."

"Then consider this foreplay," Tenino said, opening the shower stall door with his free hand and reaching in to turn on the faucets before using their joined hands on Trey's penis to guide him underneath the heated water.

They kissed. They explored with soapy hands, neither of them in a hurry to leave the steamy intimacy of the shower.

Trey savored every moment, committed each touch to memory as the lust between them built until he was panting, shivering. "I'm going to come," he said, buttocks clenching, fighting against it, his hand circling his cock and tightening painfully to prevent it.

He was barely aware of getting out of the shower, of drying off and somehow making it to the bed. He moaned when Tenino came down on top of him.

Trey spread his legs, welcomed the feel of hard cock against hard cock, of heated skin and smooth, firm muscle. Soft, desperate sounds escaped as he thrust upward, slid his erection along Tenino's as his mouth sought and found a masculine one.

Tenino's groan was music to Trey's ears. The slick wetness and throb of Tenino's cock, a victory for Trey and an aphrodisiac that tempted him to roll Tenino to the bottom, to kiss downward so he could use his lips and tongue, the suction of his mouth to make Tenino come.

Insatiable, Tenino had called him, but Trey knew it was more than that. What he was feeling transcended just the physical. Being in Tenino's arms was like coming home.

Trey parted Tenino's lips with the thrust of his tongue, speared his fingers through Tenino's hair and held him tight, loving the feel of Tenino's weight and heat. He wanted to be fucked. He was ready for it. Needed it. With a moan Trey canted his hips, offered himself and knew without a shadow of a doubt that taking the next step was as necessary to him as breathing.

Hot, primal lust invaded Tenino. It filled his mind with a red haze and his body with feral, clawing hunger. He felt savage, possessive – so close to being out of control it scared him.

Every instinct was to take, to fuck, to dominate. The sounds Trey probably wasn't even aware of making were driving him crazy, feeding a predatory instinct Tenino usually felt only when he became Thunderbird.

He deepened the kiss, settled more heavily on Trey. He fought the desire to pin Trey's hands to the mattress and force promises from him.

The faint rhythm of a drumbeat worked its way into Tenino's consciousness, pounding to the beat of his heart and pulsing through his penis in warning. His foreskin retracted. His cock head throbbed and grew slick with arousal.

He panted, fought the urge to find the tight rosette of Trey's anus and enter virgin territory. He wanted. *Needed*. But the drumbeat grew louder and the ancient singing began, bringing hope—and fear.

He'd never heard the call to free his Thunderbird spirit and join with the storm while making love to a partner. If he gave into the lust riding him, he risked a revelation that might freak Trey out and send him running.

It took supreme willpower to roll away. But doing it made the phantom drumbeat and song fade away, leaving only the harsh sound of his own breathing and Trey's low moans of pleading.

Tenino's skin was coated in a fine sheen of sweat. His hands shook slightly as he opened a drawer and pulled out condom.

"I'm safe," Tenino said, hating the idea of anything separating the two of them, but knowing he had to do this right, for Trey.

He opened the condom, nearly had to take himself in hand to keep from coming when Trey's hips arched off the bed as if pleading with him to hurry up and slide the latex over engorged flesh. "This will make your first time easier," Tenino managed, trying to throttle back, ease away from the wild emotions buffeting him like storm winds. "It is your first time fucking something besides a woman's cunt, right?"

"Yes," Trey admitted, feeling panic threaten to ruin the moment with performance anxiety and leave him totally humiliated.

Tenino leaned in and initiated a kiss. "I could make it easy for you. I could take you instead, but since you've driven me crazy from the first moment I saw you, I'm going to make you wait, maybe even make you beg before you get my cock inside you."

Trey was already there, willing to beg. He opened his mouth, but the words were lost in a shudder of vicious pleasure as Tenino expertly slid the condom over his shaft. He clenched his buttocks, tried to suppress the moan and the telltale blush that had Tenino's eyes flashing with surprise and his face becoming a mask of feral satisfaction.

"First time anyone's done that for you?" Tenino asked.

Trey's testicles pulled more tightly against his body. Raw need through his cock in reaction to the predatory purr in Tenino's voice. Somehow he managed to say, "Yes."

Tenino pulled a small plastic bottle from the drawer. Trey's fingers clutched the sheet as Tenino coated the condom with lubricant. He shivered in anticipation, barely recognizing himself. The need coursing through him was tangled with so many different emotions, with a desire to experiment, to play a different role.

His lips parted immediately when Tenino straddled him and bent down for a carnal kiss that had Trey's hips lifting off the mattress, his cock searching for a tight orifice to fuck. "Please," Trey said.

"Yeah, that's a good start," Tenino said, reaching between them, his hand gripping Trey's cock and guiding it so the head pressed against the tight ring of muscles Tenino rarely let another man breach.

Heat scorched through Trey. He panted, lifted, fought to push through Tenino's firm grip and into the tight heaven he was so close to.

"Let me fuck you," he said, shivering, knowing even though his penis was the one that would gain the relief of penetration, he wasn't the one in control.

Tenino's rough chuckle validated the thought but it also freed Trey from helplessness by serving as a challenge. He released his stranglehold on the sheet and took Tenino's cock in hand.

Trey loved the feel of hot satin over throbbing hardness, the wetness of arousal and the knowledge that he was the reason for it. "Better start moving up and down on my cock or you're going to lose your chance to be on top," he said, amazed he could tease when all he wanted to do was thrust until he came.

"You think you can take me?" Tenino asked.

"Anytime, anyplace."

The challenge had the desired effect. "Do it then."

Tenino rolled away in a smooth movement. He spread his legs and Trey positioned himself on top.

Reality telescoped in. Time seemed to stop for an instant, as if in recognition of the importance of this particular moment.

Dark eyes met blue ones. Hearts beat in sync.

Black hair spread across the sheets. Blond hair hung down to form an erotic curtain enclosing the two of them, trapping them in an intimacy that made the breath catch in Trey's throat.

He touched his lips to Tenino, craved a deeper connection as he began working himself into Tenino's anus. It was exquisite, nearly unbearable. Trey panted, grew slick with sweat as he worked himself in one slow inch at a time, let Tenino's reaction control the depth of penetration, the speed and force of it.

He loved having Tenino's cock trapped between them, fevered velvet over hardened desire. He loved having his own cock held tightly inside Tenino.

Trey shuddered when he was all the way in. Instinct took over.

He began thrusting. Slowly at first, then faster—harder, his heart soaring as he swallowed Tenino's guttural moans, as he reduced Tenino to thrashing, fighting, coming.

Afterward they showered again then returned to bed, sliding under the covers this time. Wood crackled in the fireplace, the glow of flames providing light as well as heat, a comfort that felt like home.

Trey closed his eyes and fell asleep almost immediately. Tenino rolled to his side, looked down at the blond in his bed.

A soft chuckle escaped. Damn, Trey'd blown him away tonight, going from denial to glorious acceptance of his sexuality. Now all he had to do was convince Trey to stay. Everything inside him insisted that he had to keep Trey in his world.

It was crazy. They barely knew each other even if the chemistry between them was explosive, more powerful than anything he'd experienced before.

Instinct? A gut read like he used in the line of duty? Was that the reason he felt so sure about Trey? So determined to keep him in Hohoq and share as much of his life with him as he could?

Hope rose inside him as he remembered both Tekoa and Ukiah telling him how desperate they'd been for a physical and spiritual union as soon as they first saw their mates. Didn't he already crave the same thing with Trey?

Tenino's cock stirred, partially filled. But before his thoughts could veer to the carnal, a ripple of uneasiness passed through him as his eyes went to the Thunderbird image carved into the fireplace mantle.

He'd prayed for a sign from the Creator, had wanted to return to the cabin with Trey and find a cup waiting, filled with the honey-gold drink that would allow Trey to become one of The People. He'd hoped it would be for him as it'd been for Ukiah and Tekoa. Only now he realized that Ukiah had found Marisa slipping over death's edge and chased her spirit back into her physical body, Tekoa had found Clay gravely injured, had done a sing for him, touched him with spirit energy and the power of their ancestors.

Tenino rubbed his hand over his chest, tried to recall the legends about the Creator changing those not born of The People. There weren't many of them. Then again, in the

days when the Thunderbird flew freely and widely, the land had yet to be invaded and conquered by people fleeing Europe. The cultures and way of life giving birth to the Thunderbird and to those who could see and join with it in spirit flight had yet to be decimated and nearly destroyed.

A shiver slid down Tenino's spine, spread into his gut with the fear the cup might only appear if Trey were gravely injured or near death. He looked down at Trey and knew he'd do everything to keep him safe, even if it meant they might never fly together, their spirits one with the Thunderbird.

Chapter Four

Trey woke to the smell of bacon cooking and coffee brewing, to a masculine voice talking quietly on the phone and memories guaranteed to cause a morning erection. He opened his eyes as Tenino ended his call. Need coiled in his belly and pulsed through his cock when Tenino turned toward the bed.

"Sun's up," Tenino said.

"So am I."

Trey felt the telltale heat slide into his cheeks, guessed it was probably going to take a while for him to be totally natural when it came to interacting with a male lover. Tenino's appreciative chuckle was positive reinforcement. And the dark hungry look that came after had Trey's heart rate speeding up as Tenino crossed the room to stop next the bed.

"So you're claiming to be up with the sun," Tenino said, grabbing a fistful of covers and pulling them back, exposing Trey's nakedness and the throbbing truth of his hardon.

Tenino took possession of Trey's cock, measured the length of it as he slid his hand up the shaft. "Damn, you make me crazy," he said, fingers tightening so Trey's hips lifted in silent pleading.

Without warning Tenino put a knee on the bed and bent down. Firm masculine lips claimed Trey's penis. The wet heat of Tenino's mouth and relentless command of it chased every thought from Trey's mind, obliterated every need except to come.

He gripped the sheets, panted, fought to make it last. But he was no match for Tenino or the clawing hunger raking his insides. He gave up the battle with a cry, shuddered in release before settling into a weak heap of sweat-slick skin and lax muscles.

"You don't expect me to get up after that," Trey said when his breathing steadied.

Tenino laughed. "You're lucky I've got breakfast cooking on the stove, otherwise I'd take that as a personal challenge. Trust me, I could definitely get you up again if I set my mind to it."

Trey grinned. He knew he probably looked like a teenage boy experiencing his first crush but he couldn't help it. He'd never really allowed himself to think about what it might be like to live with a male lover, to actually have a relationship. When he'd allowed himself to confront the truth of his sexuality at all, it'd been more like a quick, illicit fuck, a short fantasy engaged in while he was sleeping, or if he was awake, then when his mental resistance was too low to prevent it from happening.

Now he was finding he enjoyed the camaraderie, the teasing banter, the being with someone where there were no pretenses. He liked it just as much as the sex.

He was heading for heartbreak by falling in love with Tenino. Trey knew that. He'd made the classic mistake, fuck first and wonder what it means afterward. But it's not like they'd met under normal circumstances. And a guy like Tenino... If he'd wanted a live-in lover, he'd have one already.

"You're thinking too much," Tenino said and Trey was glad to have his meltdown interrupted.

"Comes with being a teacher."

"Better get dressed. I'm about to throw some eggs on. How do you like yours?"

"Over easy."

Trey snagged the sweatpants from where they lay near the couch then hit the bathroom before joining Tenino at the kitchen counter. "Looks good," he said, taking in the egg, bacon and toast piled on two plates.

Tenino pointed to the coffee maker. "Help yourself. There's some milk and OJ in the fridge."

Trey got some coffee then grabbed his plate and took a seat at the table across from Tenino. "So what's the plan for the day?" he asked, contemplating for the first time that while he was bare-chested and wearing only sweats, Tenino was dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt.

"You know how to handle a gun?" Tenino asked.

"If you mean other than very, very carefully? No."

"Then that's first up. I want you to know how to protect yourself."

Trey's stomach did a funny little flip-flop at the same time his heart flooded with something that could only be labeled hope.

"Sounds good," he said, ducking his head, concentrating on eating for fear his expression would reveal his rapidly escalating and out-of-control feelings for Tenino.

They finished breakfast, their conversation intermittent, ranging from discussing Xbox games and football to their jobs.

Despite Tenino's claim the sun was up, it wasn't visible through the clouds shrouding the land. "How cold is it outside?" Trey asked, drying his hands on the dishtowel and studying the scene outside the window above the sink as Tenino put the last dish away.

"Not too bad. You can probably get by with a t-shirt and a long-sleeved one over it. We're not going far, just to the other end of the clearing. If you get cold, you can come back for your jacket."

Trey draped the towel over the rack and returned to his duffle bag. He fished through it, pulling out articles of clothing and smiling when his hand touched the smooth surface of a ceramic pig.

He hefted the pig out with both hands. The thing was heavy. It was also eyewatering yellow and decorated with purple flower-shaped spots.

Tenino snorted from across the room. "I don't believe it," he said, leaving the gun safe he'd unlocked and walking over to stand next to Trey. "That your emergency stash?"

"Could be. It's full of dollar coins. Only way I can keep myself from accidentally using them as quarters."

"Yeah. I hate that. More than once I've tossed a quarter into a tip jar then realized it was a dollar." Tenino reached out. "Let me hold that thing."

Trey handed it off.

"Whoa," Tenino said, pretending he could barely hold the pig up. "I can see why you packed it. And the paint job, great camouflage. Who'd guess a yellow pig with purple flowers would hold a fortune?"

Tenino turned the pig in his hands, laughter giving way to quiet seriousness when he read the words written in childish script. *For Mr. Masters. The world's best best best teacher. From Tanya K. Ward.*

"She died over Thanksgiving break of a type of kidney disease that runs in families," Trey said, remembering a little girl with a bright smile and a hundred tiny braids. "Her older sister is still alive thanks to a transplant, but her younger one didn't reach three. I couldn't risk leaving it in my house and having Patricia come back and destroy it. I can hardly believe it survived the first time."

Tenino's expression became all cop. He set the piggy bank on the floor, in between the chair legs. "What do you mean by 'You can hardly believe it survived the first time'?"

Trey's eyebrows drew together in puzzlement. But his stomach did the same funny little flip-flop it'd done when Tenino said he wanted him to be able to protect himself.

"Patricia trashed my place. That's why I'm here. The Feds don't need me to testify as a witness or anything. They'd pretty much made their case before they approached me. But there were a couple of links in the distribution chain they couldn't pin down.

Finally they figured out it was because the guys only dealt with Patricia. That's what I did for them mainly, glued myself to her side, passed on anything I heard or saw.

"They weren't even sure how deeply she was involved in the business until they raided the place. Mainly they were after her father and two uncles. When the Feds missed Patricia, they thought she'd flee the country, or at least go into hiding.

"But day before yesterday I came home to find almost everything important to me destroyed. All my pictures – of my mom, of me, of the classes I've taught – were burned in the fireplace. Anything that couldn't be burned was ruined some other way. The pig escaped because somehow one of my shirts ended up on top of it. Patricia knew it meant something to me. She went to Tanya's funeral with me."

Trey didn't resist when Tenino's arm slipped around his waist and pulled him close. "You did the right thing helping the Feds, even if it cost you."

"I know," Trey said, leaning into the embrace, accepting the comfort offered and feeling closer to Tenino than he'd ever felt to another person—male or female. "I'd do it again. The Verons needed to be stopped."

He sought Tenino's lips, found them. Said with his kiss what he didn't dare put into words.

Tenino's moan was a sweet harmony. The press of his erection against Trey's hard cock was a validation that touched his soul. Fantasies of spending the rest of the day in bed started to take root until Tenino said, "Target practice first, fun second. And if I remember correctly, today is the day you're going to beg me to fuck you."

"What if I start begging now?" Trey asked, his hands curving around Tenino's muscular buttocks, his fingers digging in, preventing Tenino from stepping away, from escaping the rub of hard cock against hard cock.

Tenino laughed, had the advantage because Trey was naked from the waist up. His fingers found Trey's nipples, squeezed and sent icy-hot flashes of painful ecstasy streaking through Trey to make his hips buck, his penis leak.

"Start begging now and I'll think you want to come any way you can, even if it means having to change your pants," Tenino said.

"What about payback being a bitch?"

"I think I proved last night I can take it. Didn't I?"

Images flashed through Trey's mind, of lying on top of Tenino, of thrusting, fucking another man for the first time. Coming.

Trey's hands dropped away from Tenino's ass. He stepped back. His cock pulsed in protest but his heart soared when Tenino's expression revealed that the loss of contact cost him too.

"Let's get going," Tenino said, voice husky, face taut.

Trey dressed in warmer clothing while Tenino gathered what they needed. At the doorway Tenino thrust a bag containing aluminum cans into Trey's hands, along with a rifle.

They stepped outside. Trey followed Tenino around to the back of the cabin, laughed when he saw the size of the satellite dish. "And who says bigger isn't way better."

"Hey, I live alone in the middle of nowhere. I get tired of playing with myself."

Trey gaped. Found it difficult to imagine Tenino surfing live porn sites to jerk off.

Tenino read his expression and grinned. "Get real. I don't pay to peep and I don't hook up online to masturbate. I'm talking Xbox live. World gaming. You've got a dirty mind for a teacher."

"You set me up by saying you got tired of playing with yourself," Trey grumbled.

Tenino stopped. He hooked his fingers into the waistband of Trey's jeans and pulled him forward. "Yeah, well now that you're here, playing with myself isn't going to be necessary—unless I do it so you can watch. I don't intend to make it easy for you to leave." He delivered a quick, hard kiss that left Trey dazed.

Did Tenino mean what he said? Did he want more than a short-term hookup? Trey's thoughts and emotions bounced around like a ball while his cock pleaded with him for release.

He licked his lips and would have shoved his hands into his pockets, or better yet into the front of his jeans to give himself some relief, if he hadn't been holding a sack of cans and a gun. The thing with Tenino had happened so fast, blown a lifetime of denial away.

Trey felt totally out of control but it didn't scare him. He felt alive, truly alive. Now if only he had the courage to actually ask Tenino straight out what he meant, where he wanted this thing between them to lead.

They walked in silence though the land wasn't silent. Birds called in the damp mist. A breeze whispered through trees, making shadow figures dance and merge.

The pounding of Trey's heart seemed to be echoed by the distant beat of a drum accompanied by chanting. He shook his head, smiled at his own flight of fantasy. Laughed silently as an internal voice intoned, *Blond-haired, blue-eyed Anglo schoolteacher relies on Native American warrior for protection in a remote wilderness*.

How clichéd was that? Even if the warrior wore a badge and dressed in flannel and jeans instead of buckskin and beads, and the teacher was male instead of female.

At the far end of the clearing was a tree stump, tall and wide enough to serve as a table. Tenino put the ammo bag and guns he was carrying on it then headed to where two wooden frames waited for targets to be clamped onto them.

Trey followed with the sack of aluminum cans. As Tenino unrolled and put up the paper targets with their human-shaped torso image in the center, Trey placed the cans on small logs.

When they returned to the stump, Tenino was all business. He was as tough as any instructor at a police academy firing range and Trey fell a little bit more in love seeing that side of him.

Trey thrilled each time he made an aluminum can jump into the air or skip across the ground. He basked in Tenino's praise each time they stopped to check the paper target and found he'd hit it.

Time held no meaning. The outside world was far removed as they shot a wide variety of guns and enjoyed each other's company.

"So where's the closest bookstore?" Trey asked after they'd fired the last round of bullets and removed their ear protectors.

"Are you hinting you'd rather be reading a book than shooting guns?"

Trey slapped his hand over his heart, tried for an affronted expression. "What! You think I don't enjoy manly pursuits like decimating aluminum cans and pretending to kill people? Next you'll be expecting me to wear pink and put on mascara."

Tenino snickered and snaked an arm around Trey, pulling him against the front of his body. "I bet you look good in pink," he said, pressing his lips to Trey's, sliding his tongue in for a very thorough, very arousing kiss.

Trey groaned, rubbed his cloth-covered erection against Tenino's. The phantom singing he'd imagined as they crossed the clearing returned, only louder this time. The drum beat in time to his heart, in time to the need pulsing through his cock.

In his mind's eye, Trey saw the two of them standing bare-chested in this spot under a summer sky, shedding their clothing, driven by a sudden urgency to fuck after target shooting. He shivered and ran his hands over Tenino's back.

"Damn," Tenino said when their lips parted to allow for breath.

"Should I start begging now?" Trey asked.

Oh yeah, Tenino thought, teaching Trey how to handle a gun had definitely flipped some switches he hadn't known were there. "Let's get back to the cabin first," he joked, because if he didn't get some relief soon, he was going to be the one begging.

They packed up the guns and spent ammunition, collected the shredded aluminum cans and took down the bullet-ridden targets.

"I like it here," Trey said as they retraced their earlier steps.

"Wait'll you see the rest of it." Tenino remembered Trey's earlier question about a bookstore and wondered how far would seem too far, then shrugged it off. The internet was a great equalizer.

They stepped into the cabin. Tenino sighed when he realized that as much as he wanted sex, he couldn't turn his back on years of training or fail to show Trey the right way to do things. "Put the guns on the kitchen table. I'll get the cleaning kit."

The distinctive smell of solvent and gun oil soon filled the air. Tenino loved the scent of it, usually found it relaxing, but watching Trey working the cleaning rod, thrusting it in and out of the gun barrel along with the bore brush was torture.

Erotic images crowded in, memories of the night before. Yeah, he wasn't usually on the receiving end when it came to his partners, but the intimacy of having Trey above him, of watching Trey's face as it showed every emotion, including how much he liked to fuck, had made it incredible, something Tenino could see himself doing, again and again.

He stood up as soon as the guns were clean. Kicked off his shoes and unbuckled his belt, nearly panting when he saw the heat in Trey's cheeks, the flash of lust.

"There's something about guys and guns," Trey joked, sliding out of the chair and onto his knees.

Tenino nearly came when Trey finished what he'd started, unbuttoned the top button and pulled the zipper down, freed his cock so it stood full and proud, more than ready to see some action.

"Now," Tenino managed, thoughts of making it to the bed or the thick rug in front of the fireplace gone in an instant as he thrust his fingers through Trey's blond hair and urged him to close the distance, to suck the organ he'd so thoroughly aroused and then exposed.

"Is that an order?" Trey teased.

Tenino gasped, shuddered as heated breath followed by the quick flick of a tongue sent delirious pleasure through his shaft. "Do it," he managed, applying pressure with his hands, promising retribution with his voice. "If I have to cuff you, you won't be able to wear pants or sit for a week."

Trey snickered and the sound of it made Tenino grin despite the way his cock throbbed with savage eagerness and his balls were tight, aching with the need to empty.

"Sounds like you do have a fetish for bondage," Trey said. "Maybe I'll even let you indulge in it."

Whatever Tenino might have responded with was lost as Trey's hand circled his straining length, as Trey's mouth claimed everything his fingers didn't. Tenino moaned, thrust. There was no thought, no chance to reclaim it. Need tangled with desperation and hope, allowed for only one response, the yielding of all control.

He panted, shuddered. Whispered Trey's name as he fucked through a fisted hand and knew the ecstasy of masculine lips and a carnal tongue, of giving himself over to someone who seemed perfect for him, someone he was determined to keep in his life for a long time.

Tenino's hips bucked. His thighs bunched. He tried to draw it out but Trey made it impossible.

Trey's lips and tongue seared him. Drove him into a frenzy that could only end one way.

Tenino shouted as he came. Lava hot waves of exquisite ecstasy shot through him as jets of semen erupted, leaving him lightheaded, swaying, his heart thundering in his chest and his fingers clenched mercilessly in Trey's hair.

"Damn." He wished he could do better but he couldn't. He was lucky to manage the one word.

Trey's hot mouth left him. Pride kept Tenino from whimpering, or worse yet, passing out from the pleasure still resonating through him like a tuning fork.

"Damn, you're good," he said, this time managing a grin as Trey stood, face flushed, blue eyes holding knowledge and confidence, so different than what they'd held when the two of them first met.

"You make it easy."

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to pull Trey forward, to capture the lips that had just blown him away. He tasted himself, reacted to it by hardening again, by guiding Trey to the bed.

Tenino was barely aware of sliding the handcuffs from his back pocket, of locking them onto Trey's wrists then using a piece of cloth to secure them to the headboard.

Chapter Five

Trey knew he should be freaked out, shocked at being tethered to the bed, his arms raised above his head, his back against the mattress. But the look on Tenino's face, the hunger and relentless determination, the burning lust was enough to have him lifting, making it easy for Tenino to strip the jeans and underwear away.

His breath caught when Tenino opened the drawer of the nightstand, pulled out a condom and the lubricant. His anus tightened defensively, like a virgin afraid of penetration.

He noticed he was shivering, but the race of his heart, the wild pounding in his cock didn't let him label what he was experiencing as anything other than anticipation.

Tenino dropped to his side. His shirt was unbuttoned, as was Trey's. His eyes roved over Trey's bare skin, caressed it with a heat that almost made Trey whimper. He moaned when Tenino's fingers found his nipples, tightened on them, sending shards of painful pleasure to a cock already leaking.

"Payback's a bitch," Trey joked, only to pay the price as his balls tightened in remembrance of what it was like to lie on top of Tenino, to thrust into a tight, dark place.

"You could say that."

Tenino's hand moved downward, claimed Trey's cock. He loved the way it throbbed against his palm, leaked, jerked.

Part of him wanted to lean down, suck it into his mouth and reduce Trey to mewling whimpers. But the part of him that'd cuffed Trey to the bed was after something else—complete and total submission, complete and total acceptance of the relationship being forged between them.

Yeah, he'd enjoyed letting Trey fuck him and they'd revisit the scenario again – maybe even often because he was finding he could be more flexible than he'd thought possible – but fundamentally he wasn't wired that way. At his core he was dominant.

He wanted to be the man on top, the man shoving his cock into his partner's ass, making him scream and come.

Tenino brushed his thumb over Trey's cock head. He smeared the liquid arousal over the smooth head, silently calling himself a pervert for liking Trey's circumcised penis, for thinking it made Trey seem more vulnerable—as if Trey's virgin status wasn't more than enough to bring out some primal urges.

Damn. The thought of being Trey's first was mind-blowing.

The thought of anyone else fucking Trey was enough to make Tenino crazed, and told him more clearly than the constant erection and ever-present threat of a terminal case of blue balls that this attraction to Trey was serious, different than anything he'd ever experienced.

He'd never been the jealous type. He didn't like to look closely at it now—but there'd been stretches in his life where a quick, anonymous fuck or blowjob suited him fine.

No names. No commitments. Nothing except a physical release that didn't involve his own fisted hand.

Tenino wrapped his fingers around his own cock. He slid up and down, worked his penis in the same rhythm he worked Trey's and seriously thought about letting go and coating Trey's belly with come.

He reduced Trey to writhing, begging. But truth be told, he brought himself close to doing the same.

How torqued was that? Trey was the one in cuffs while he was the one who was supposed to be in control.

Tenino just about lost it when Trey willingly spread his legs, started begging to be fucked. It took heroic effort to release Trey's cock, then his own, so he could squeeze lubricant onto his fingers.

Trey jerked when Tenino pressed lubricant-coated fingers to the tight ring of his anus. "You could have warmed the stuff up first," he joked in an effort to hide his sudden nervousness.

"It'll warm up soon enough," Tenino said, eyes so fierce they reminded Trey of a bird of prey. "Bear down. Push out."

Trey's cheeks flamed but he complied. He moaned as Tenino breached him, opened him, stretched and prepared him, Tenino's fingers finding a place Trey hadn't known could be the source of so much pleasure and stroking over it until he was panting, fighting the restraints.

He almost cried out when Tenino rolled away. But his heart rate sped up as he watched Tenino put on a condom.

Nervousness dimmed the haze of passion. Trey shivered when Tenino settled on top of him, pressed a condom-encased cock head to his entrance.

His buttocks clenched protectively while his penis pulsed in eagerness, responding to the expression on Tenino's face, the determination. "Don't fight it," Tenino said, his fingers going to Trey's nipple, tightening hard enough to make Trey moan and ache for something more.

Trey forced himself to relax, to push out as Tenino pushed in. It was exquisite, nearly unbearable. Earth-shattering.

He tugged against the restraints. He used them to keep from tensing up again even as he wished his hands were free so he could spear his fingers through Tenino's hair.

Trey shook as inch by inch Tenino slid into him, took him. Only Tenino's hand returning to Trey's cock, taking control of it, kept him from coming before Tenino was all the way in.

No erotic fantasy could compete with the sight of Tenino above him, his face a mask of agonized pleasure, his tanned body coated in a thin layer of sweat, straining to go slow rather than to give in to the urge to fuck.

There was no going back. No return to denial.

Trey felt disgust in himself for all the years he'd wasted. For the lie he'd lived and the dishonesty he'd brought to his relationships with women. But he didn't wallow in self-recrimination. There was no point in it and on some level, he knew all the choices of his past had led to this moment, this man.

"Kiss me," Trey managed, wanting the ultimate intimacy, needing it, knowing he was lost when Tenino's lips touched his, when their tongues tangled as Tenino forged deeper and deeper.

Sensation rode Trey. Emotion consumed him. Hope overwhelmed him.

He was helpless, the handcuffs only symbolic. He wanted Tenino, now and forever.

One moan after another followed as Tenino began thrusting. Trey couldn't have fought the pleasure even if he'd wanted to. Nothing had ever felt as good, as right as having Tenino on top of him, fucking him, finally letting him come before coming himself.

The sound of rapid breathing filled the air. Beneath it a phantom drumbeat echoed and raced in time to Trey's heart.

He forced his eyes open and found Tenino's face inches above his. Their gazes held as Tenino's cock softened inside Trey, neither of them speaking, as if they both wanted to hang on to the closeness and delay the moment when their physical connection would end.

"You okay?" Tenino finally asked, his voice whisper-soft, rough-edged.

"Yeah. Better than okay."

"Good." Tenino dipped his head, planted a quick kiss on Trey's lips before rolling to his feet and disposing of the condom then freeing Trey from the handcuffs.

"I need a shower," Trey said, grinning as he sat up. "So does the sheriff know you use police-issue equipment like that?"

"I got a little carried away," Tenino admitted, his face reddening just enough to make it totally endearing to Trey.

"Well, I won't say anything," Trey managed with a straight face. "But I'm thinking my silence should come at a price."

"Oh yeah?"

The rough dark edge to Tenino's voice had Trey's cock stirring, ready to harden again. "Yeah. Like next time you're in the mood to play a little bondage game, you're the one who gets cuffed."

White teeth flashed in a face made erotically savage by the look in Tenino's eyes. "Any time you think you can take me down, go for it."

Heat coursed through Trey. Images of wrestling naked, fighting for the dominant position had him taking himself in hand.

Tenino's cock hardened in response. His hand mimicked Trey's, slid from base to tip. Made Trey want to go down on his knees the way he'd done when they'd finished with the guns.

"I thought you were hot to get to the nearest bookstore," Tenino said, the rough timber of his voice like a phantom hand reaching inside Trey, stroking.

It took Trey a second to remember asking where the closest bookstore was when they'd finished shooting. He circled his cock head with his thumb, rubbed over the slit, challenged. "Guess it can wait until this gets old."

Tenino snorted, leaned down and found Trey's testicles with his free hand, took possession and made Trey gasp as pleasure spiked through him. "You think this could ever get old?"

Trey fought the urge to flop backward, to cant his hips and spread his legs. One fuck and he already felt like an addict where Tenino was concerned.

The phone rang, saving him from himself though he shuddered, ached when Tenino's hand left him.

"To be continued," Tenino said, pressing a quick kiss to Trey's lips. "That's probably Tekoa checking to make sure everything's okay. If we're staying here, one of us should bring in some of the wood stacked outside so I can get the fire going in the fireplace. It'll cut down on how long the generator has to run later to charge the batteries."

Trey laughed but stood so he could get dressed. "One of us being the poor city slicker who you think doesn't know how to deal with a fire in the fireplace."

"Do you?"

"How hard can it be?" Trey said, choosing those particular words with care.

Tenino's grin made heat flare in Trey's chest. "Good question. We'll have to see just how hard things can get."

Tenino walked to the desk, totally at ease with his nakedness. Trey remained motionless, unable to look away from the firm muscles and autumn-brown skin of the man he hoped would be his first lover, and his last.

As if sensing Trey's eyes on him, Tenino picked up the phone, turned, took himself in hand even as he spoke into the receiver, said, "Oh yeah, the schoolteacher and I are getting along just fine. Any word from the Feds?"

Trey blushed, quickly pulled on sweatpants and a shirt, then his shoes. The rumble of thunder greeted him when he stepped outside. He found the wood and gathered an armful of it, inhaled deeply, loving the smell of clean air and evergreens, damp earth and the approaching storm.

He'd spent most of his life in the city though he'd hiked in areas set aside as preserves. But compared to here, those places seemed...tame, refined, less...

Trey frowned, struggled to pinpoint the difference and found it when the low clap of distant thunder was followed by the phantom drumbeat, as if this land was so

ancient and primordial it had a heartbeat, as if it was a place of magic like those captured in legends and folktales.

He'd underestimated it when he'd gotten his first look at it through the window of the police car. Now it spoke to him, called to him in a way he couldn't ignore and didn't want to.

Tenino was hanging up the phone when Trey stepped back inside.

"Any news?" Trey asked, going to the fireplace and setting the wood on the hearth.

"Nothing good, at least when it comes to Patricia Veron gunning for you."

Trey stood, turned to watch as Tenino came toward him. "What does that mean?"

"A fight broke out in the prison cafeteria a little while ago. One of her uncles was shanked while the guards were distracted. I think it's safe to say he was probably the target all along. Child molesters aren't popular. Doesn't look like he's going to survive it."

Trey started to ask which uncle but didn't. He had met both of them, liked them. But that didn't make him feel bad about one of them being attacked in prison.

A long time ago they may have been the innocent victims, but they'd grown up and ruined lives. They'd perpetrated horrendous crimes on children.

Trey glanced down Tenino's still-naked body and saw the phone call had impacted him just as thoughts of Patricia and her family had killed his erection. He turned, reached out to touch the thunderbird carved into the mantle, changed the topic. "I can see how this land gave birth to the thunderbird. There's something about it, something almost mystical. I keep imagining I'm hearing a drum, and sometimes there's chanting."

Surprise ripped through Tenino, followed by sheer happiness. Both Ukiah's mate Marisa, and Tekoa's mate Jessica, had heard the heartbeat of The People before drinking from the Creator's cup.

"We call it singing," he said, keeping his voice level, matter-of-fact, when what he really wanted to do was question, cross-examine, secure every bit of evidence proving Trey was meant to be his permanent partner.

"Sorry," Trey said, heat rising to his cheeks, making Tenino curse silently in fear of shutting the conversation down.

"No offense taken." His fingers settled on the mantle next to Trey's. "Ukiah made this."

"Your cousin, right? The sheriff's brother?"

"Yeah. He's an artist. Also operates a lodge, complete with private cabins, for people who come here to hike and rock climb but don't necessarily want to rough it in tents. These days he's got a waiting list and there are always people begging to stay during the winter when he closes down.

"The land has a way of holding you, making it almost impossible to leave. I managed it once. Worked as a cop in Los Angeles then in San Francisco. But I couldn't stay away. I won't leave again."

Trey nodded, ducked his head so his blond hair completely hid his expression. Tenino wanted to reach over, pull the strands of gold back, or better yet, pull Trey against him and prevent him from hiding. Shit, it'd all happened so fast. It was way too soon to talk about something that transcended the pleasure of fucking and was more about the spirit than the body.

He grimaced. In a minute he was going to start reciting poetry. How fast would Trey run if he started doing that?

Trey surprised him again by saying, "Hohoq is one of the names of the thunderbird, isn't it?"

"Yeah. The Thunderbird is important to those of us who live here. Roughly translated, we're called People of the Thunderbird."

"There are a lot of different beliefs when it comes to them." Trey's voice held a hint of a question as well as caution, as if he didn't want to risk saying or straying into something sensitive.

Tenino couldn't stand it. He curled his arm around Trey's waist, forced him to turn so they could look into each other's eyes. "Don't pussyfoot around and worry about political correctness with me. I'm a gay cop. You think I can't handle anything you can dish out?" He leaned in, tempering the words with a kiss meant to tell Trey he'd endure a hell of a lot of accidental insults in order to keep the lines of communication open.

Trey met his kiss with equal passion. Nearly drove him to the rug with desperate longing.

Tenino fought the lust, knew this conversation was more important than physical release—even if his penis didn't agree. "What is it you want to know?" he managed, needing to close his eyes for a second so Trey's lips and the feel of their cocks touching—hardened once again even if they were separated by the thin material of Trey's sweats—didn't distract him.

"Just wondering what the thunderbird means to you, I guess," Trey said.

Tenino wasn't sure how to answer, wished now he'd spent at least a few minutes thinking about something beyond sex with Trey. "The Thunderbird serves the Creator by guarding the land, just as The People protect and care for it."

It was the best he could do, the truth as much as he could tell it. Once his people had been so much more, but...

Tenino turned his thoughts away from anger and bitterness. The past couldn't be forgotten. Neither could it be changed or those who lived today be held responsible for what their ancestors had been a part of or allowed to happen. He was one of The People. He was Thunderbird. But he was also American. A cop. A man who enjoyed technology yet still revered the natural world.

"I want to show you something," he said, the impulse riding him as if it were the Creator's wish.

Tenino moved away, got dressed then went to the table. He picked up several guns and took them to the gun safe. Without a word, Trey collected the rest of them and came to his side, handed them to him so he could put them in their proper places.

"Does the sheriff's department have budget problems?" Trey joked. "Looks like an arsenal in there."

Tenino laughed. "Hazard of the trade. I don't know a single cop who settles for just his on-duty piece." He closed the safe.

"Won't do you much good if you have to get to them quick," Trey said.

"If I need this much fire power, I'm in deep shit. I've got my service piece and the shotgun in the patrol car. The chance of someone breaking into the cabin is remote but I don't like to take unnecessary risks. Last thing I want is for one of my guns to turn up at a crime scene."

Tenino picked up a shoulder holster he kept on top of the safe next to the on-duty one holding his service piece. He put it on then slid the .45 caliber from its usual holster, checked the safety before placing it into the shoulder piece. He didn't expect trouble, but that didn't mean he wouldn't be prepared for it.

He started to step away from the safe, thought better of it and laughed at the strange twists and turns of falling in love. His hand went to the keypad on the safe, hit a series of codes before asking, "When's your birthday?"

Trey told him and Tenino keyed in the number. Felt ridiculous at putting so much meaning into trusting Trey with access to the guns, but there was no avoiding it. The only other person who knew how to open the gun safe was Tekoa.

"Just in case I'm not here and you need protection, it's keyed for your birthday," Tenino said, managing to sound casual. "Just hit TM first so it'll match the user with the code."

Trey shivered visibly. "Hopefully that's not information I'll ever need to use."

"Yeah, well, that's the plan. Better grab your jacket. A storm is moving in. I think we can make it to the place I want to show you and back before it hits."

Chapter Six

Curiosity ate at Trey as he followed Tenino outside. He expected them to take the Jeep with the sheriff's seal on the side but instead Tenino stopped only long enough to retrieve the shotgun from its rack before proceeding to a stand-alone garage.

The doors opened sideways rather than rolling up. "ATV's on this side," Tenino said, grabbing the handle on the left, pulling to create an opening just wide enough to get a four-wheeler out.

"Just one?" Trey asked, his cock reacting to the idea of riding with his arm around Tenino's waist and his front pressed to Tenino's back, even if the little kid in him wanted his own ATV.

"A guy can only ride one at time. But if you hang around, there's room in the garage for two."

"Sounds good," he managed, his voice little more than a croak.

Tenino nodded, just enough to let Trey know he'd heard the admission that the thing between them extended beyond staying safe from Patricia Veron.

The shotgun went into a sheath secured to the ATV. Tenino rolled the four-wheeler through the open doorway.

Trey closed the door. The ATV engine rumbled to life. He slid onto the seat behind Tenino, felt aroused and excited, happy in a way he couldn't ever remember feeling – like everything was falling into place and he was where he was supposed to be.

Within minutes Trey understood why they'd taken the ATV instead of the Jeep. They headed upward on a steep, narrow trail. It was dark in places, the path shaded by evergreen trees. He grunted when they hit a low spot, sending a shower of muddy water over their legs and making him wish he had jeans on instead of sweatpants.

"This is a shortcut," Tenino said a while later, slowing at a curve. "It'd take a couple of hours over fire roads and then some walking if we used the Jeep."

"I like it." Trey couldn't resist placing a kiss on the bare skin of Tenino's neck. "But I still want my own wheels."

Tenino laughed, gunned the engine. It felt like they were heading straight up the side of a mountain.

Trey's breath caught when they cleared the trees. Below was a valley, its vast tracks of old-growth forest containing redwoods that had probably been alive for thousands of years.

In front and around them, snowcapped mountain ranges stretched out. Tenino wheeled the ATV around and cut the engine. Trey slid from the seat, Tenino followed. They stood on a small rocky plateau that felt like an ancient gateway.

In the distance the storm gathered. Dark clouds formed and reformed, served as a backdrop for splintered bolts of lightning as thunder rolled across the land. Power vibrated through the air, primal, unstoppable, uncontainable – destructive and yet also life-giving.

There were no the words to adequately describe what Trey saw, what he felt. He could only nod when Tenino said, "Thunderbirds fly in this place."

The first drops of rain hit them, cold, gentle, though Trey guessed water would soon come down in violent, stinging sheets. In silent accord they both turned to the ATV. Tenino straddled the seat first. Trey slid on behind, wrapped his arm around Tenino's waist again, heard the phantom drum beat and looked backward as the ATV kicked forward.

He saw an old man on horseback where no man or horse could be—feathers braided into hair and horse's mane. Both man and beast otherworldly, the land personified. And then the image was lost to the darkness of the trail and wildness of the Tenino's descent.

Trey was clinging to Tenino by the time they got to the smooth, wide trails leading into the small valley where the cabin was. His heart raced with the same exhilarating fear a roller-coaster ride gave him.

The adrenaline spiking his system needed an outlet and he knew just what form it should take. His arms loosened so his hands could go to the front of Tenino's jeans.

"I take it you like living on the edge," Trey said, exploring the bulge he found, deciding one wild ride deserved another.

"Shit," Tenino said, voice catching, a groan escaping as Trey measured the length and hardness of the erection protected by denim, then found the snap, the zipper, and freed them.

The four-wheeler slowed, bucked with the unintentional application of brakes. Sped up when Trey's hand slid underneath the waistband of Tenino's Jockeys and wrapped his fingers around Tenino's cock.

"Unfair," Tenino panted.

Trey laughed. "Definitely fair. Any jury would rule in my favor considering what you just put me through."

"You enjoyed it."

"And you're enjoying this," Trey said, exploring the soft skin and wet tip of Tenino's cock.

Tenino responded by hitting the gas, racing toward the cabin as if their lives depended on it. Trey laughed, decided to ease back because it would definitely ruin the day if one or both of them ended up in the hospital.

The rain was coming down with a little more determination by the time they reached the cabin. The flashes of lightning were closer, the thunder louder.

With a final stroke, Trey freed Tenino's cock, slid his hand from the warmth of the Jockeys. Tenino stopped the ATV in front of the closed garage. Trey got off, grabbed the door handle, pulled.

There was the sound of a gun firing.

Tenino jerked, fell forward, blood soaking into his jacket.

Trey reacted without thinking. He grabbed Tenino and dragged him into the garage.

The rain began falling in earnest, beating on the roof. It was muted by the thunder of Trey's heart, his frantic, harsh breathing.

Blood poured from a hole in Tenino's chest, leaked from the corner of his mouth along with bubbles of air. *No*! Trey cried, stripping his jacket off, covering the wound, applying pressure though he feared that just as much blood might be pooling underneath Tenino.

Footsteps sounded. Too late he thought about the shotgun in its sheath on the ATV.

His hand shook as he found Tenino's .45, took it from the shoulder holster. He needed to get to a phone, a car, to—

Patricia's voice interrupted. "You betrayed me. You ruined my life and destroyed my family. Now you're going to pay."

Trey found the gun's safety and pushed it into the disabled position. His hands were covered in blood. His mind became a white haze consumed with the will to survive, the absolute need to do whatever it took to save Tenino.

She never considered that he might have a gun and know how to use it. And even when she saw it in his hands, she didn't think he was capable of taking a life.

Patricia laughed, a sound holding a deep well of hatred, a thirst for violent revenge whose origins were anchored in the abuse she'd suffered as a child at the hands of her father and uncles. She smiled savagely as she brought the hand holding the gun up.

Their eyes met. Held for a surreal instant—all veneer stripped away—ended when Trey pulled the trigger of Tenino's on-duty piece.

A sob escaped, not for Patricia as she dropped to the ground and didn't move, but for Tenino who was also motionless. "No!" Trey shouted, the gun slipping from his grip

as he bent down, pressed his palms to Tenino's torn and bloody chest as his mind scrambled for the right thing to do.

He covered Tenino's mouth with his own, forced his breath into Tenino's lungs. He worked frantically, felt the fabric of his soul rip with each exhalation of breath, with each press of palms against unresponsive chest.

The coldness of reality, of loss, brought agonizing pain and chaotic emotion, unchecked tears and audible sobs. He wished it were him who'd taken the bullet instead of Tenino, would have gladly given up his life if it brought Tenino's back.

"His spirit flies now," a voice said and Trey jerked, looked up and found the old man he'd seen earlier, feathers and beads braided into the hair on either side of his face, his deeply tanned skin bare except for a loincloth and moccasins.

"Help him, please help him," Trey said, knowing he was in the presence of a being tied to this ancient land, a primordial force given a physical form so he could comprehend it with his human eyes and mind. "Let me take his place."

The old man offered a wooden cup. "Your spirit calls to his, and his to yours. Drink and you will be able to find him. Your spirits are meant to soar together."

Trey took the cup between bloody fingers, drank the honey-gold offering without hesitation, uncaring that he didn't fully understand the old man's words. All that mattered was Tenino.

There was a wrenching sensation, followed by gray cold nothingness, and then by awareness of movement, as though he was the wind sweeping over a land shrouded by fog. He felt a presence, a mass of air moving to his side so they became twin jets of air streaming through nothingness together until slowly they merged and melded, became one—and the beating of a drum began behind them, its rhythm steady and insistent, commanding spirit back to flesh.

The pain was almost unbearable, a death and birth. Voices joined the sound of the drum. Heat burned away the chill of nothingness as the song rose and fell, reached a

crescendo—stopped as Trey gasped, opened his eyes and cried at the sight of Tenino bending over him, his chest smooth where once it had gaped and bled out his life.

Tenino's gaze held raw emotion, making words unnecessary. He lowered his head, pressed his mouth to Trey's in a kiss that was primal, consuming.

Trey's arms went around Tenino, pulled him down so limbs tangled as tongues thrust and slid against one another, cocks filling with the frantic desire for physical intimacy. They were panting, shuddering when the need for air forced their lips apart.

Slowly Trey became aware of the rain pounding the roof of the garage, the thunder, the lightning flashes drawing his attention to the open doorway and Patricia's body. He thought he should feel a backlash of guilt and horror, but he felt only relief.

It was over.

"We need to call this in," Tenino said.

Trey shivered, wanted to protest when Tenino lifted off him but he knew Tenino was right. "Do you remember what happened?"

"Yes." Tenino offered his hand. Trey took it and was pulled up and into Tenino's embrace. "I know you came after me."

Tenino's mouth claimed Trey's again. The kiss started savage but moved seamlessly into a gentle melding of body and soul. It reached into Trey's chest and wrapped around his heart like the phantom talons he'd felt when he was sitting in the diner and watching the wing shadow of an imagined thunderbird.

Tenino pulled away just enough so they could look into each other's eyes and see the emotion there, the word neither of them was quick to say but each felt. Love. "You brought me back. Which means you're stuck with me."

"I can deal with that," Trey said. "There are worse things."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah." Trey's gaze strayed to Patricia's body. He felt a stirring of pity, for the victim she'd once been. But it was overridden by horror at the monster she'd become, if

not an abuser herself, then a person who knowingly lived on the wealth gained from child pornography, who willing participated in the business of selling it.

He shuddered, relived for a moment the horror of Tenino's death, of taking a life – revisited the nightmare path he'd ended up on because he denied his sexuality, pretended to be straight.

Oh yeah, there were worse things than ending up in Tenino's life, Tenino's bed. His heart swelled with happiness, with the promise of a future together. "Isn't there a Chinese proverb that says if you save someone's life, you've got to care for them forever?"

"You're the teacher, you tell me." Tenino grinned. "But if that means you do the cooking and housecleaning, I'm all for living by Chinese proverbs." He closed the distance between them touched his mouth to Trey's. "Let's call Tekoa and get this behind us. There's more about me you need to know, but I can't show you until after this is handled."

Tekoa arrived a little while later, after Tenino and Trey had showered and dressed in clean clothes. He listened as Tenino spoke in their native language, wrote down what would become their official statements, what the law and those not of The People could understand and accept as truth. He took photographs before bagging Patricia's gun and Tenino's service piece, as the coroner, a grizzled bear of man who arrived behind Tekoa, bagged the corpse.

"Any idea how she found you?" Tekoa asked as they stood in the cabin after the coroner's vehicle had driven away with Patricia's body in it. "You make any phone calls out? Tell anyone where you are?"

Trey shook his head. "No calls."

"Only way she could have found us is with a tracking device," Tenino said.

"The pig," Trey said, understanding in that instant how the bank had survived Patricia's rage when nothing else of sentimental value had.

He'd thought she missed it because one of his shirts was draped over it but instead she'd known he'd take it with him when he returned to find his house trashed.

Tekoa's eyebrow lifted when Trey retrieved the ceramic pig and returned with it. He held it belly up, removed the stopper then held the bank over the table.

Dollar coins spilled out first, rolling and bouncing and clinking, empting from the bank to reveal a GPS tracking unit.

"Damn," Tenino said. "I held the thing in my hands and missed the possibilities."

Tekoa bagged the tracking unit and left a few minutes later, just as the violent edge of the storm reached them.

Lightning flashed, splintered the sky above. Thunder shook the cabin.

"Alone at last," Tenino said, need as powerful as the storm filling him.

It took sheer willpower to keep his clothes on and his hands off Trey long enough to light a fire in the fireplace, but he managed it—just.

"You know you drive me crazy," Tenino said, standing, reaching for Trey, pulling him forward and groaning when their cloth-covered erections touched.

"Me? I'm not the one who died."

Tenino felt Trey tremble, heard the catch in his voice of delayed reaction setting in. He crushed it with a kiss meant to leave no room for anything but lust.

Tongues battled. Hands roamed, tormenting and teasing until driven to work in fevered accord so clothing was stripped away and skin touched.

They sank to the floor to the thick rug, rolled, wrestled, built the passion with rough and tender caresses, with wet tongues and heated lips, the sting of teeth and scrape of nails.

Hair slid from its binding, added to the sensuality until they were both panting, anxious for release.

Tenino could feel the storm raging outside, issuing the same ancient call first answered by his ancestors. He guided Trey onto his hands and knees, used liquid

arousal to prepare the way until Trey was rocking backward, his voice and body telling of his willingness to be entered.

It was ecstasy, a joining of flesh and spirit as Tenino slid into Trey, his cock unsheathed, free of any barrier. He reached around, gripped Trey's penis, loved the way Trey moaned, pulsed in his hand, gave himself completely over to a passion he'd denied before arriving in Hohoq.

"There's no going back," Tenino said, remaining still, fighting the urge to thrust.

"I don't want to."

"Good."

Tenino began moving then, sliding in and out, fighting for breath, for closeness, for the merging of two into one, for the ultimate release.

It came as semen jetted through his cock, through Trey's, heralded by the roar of rain as spirit sheared away from flesh with a clap of thunder.

They became pure energy, power gathering until it took the form of brightly feathered Thunderbirds, their wings outstretched, riding the thermals in the valley they'd seen through human eyes earlier.

This is real, Trey said, his mental voice awed, humbled, excited.

As real as the cup you accepted and drank from.

Tenino reached out and touched Trey's feathered back with his talon. You asked what the Thunderbird meant to me. Now you know the truth of it. In the eyes of The People, you're one of us now. My partner and lover.

With those words, desire stirred in Trey and he became aware of his human form lying on the rug in front of the fireplace, Tenino curled around him in a silent embrace. He faltered, felt the powerful, winged shape start to become insubstantial, torn between the call of the storm, the exhilaration of flight and the need to talk, to meet Tenino's eyes and hold him, to rejoice in both of them being alive.

We have a lifetime to fly together, Tenino said, turning, guiding Trey back toward the cabin, wings moving in sync, hearts beating in unison, two spirits made whole and forever joined.

About the Author

Jory has been writing since childhood and has never outgrown being a daydreamer. When she's not hunched over her computer, lost in the muse and conjuring up new heroes and heroines, she can usually be found reading, riding her horses, or hiking with her dogs.

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