

Loose Id



MEMORIES ERASED

ME REID

MEMORIES ERASED

M. E. Reid

Loose Id[®]

www.loose-id.com

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id[®] e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as

defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Memories Erased

M. E. Reid

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Published by

Loose Id LLC

1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924

Carson City NV 89701-1215

www.loose-id.com

Copyright © January 2008 by M. E. Reid

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared in any form, including, but not limited to printing, photocopying, faxing, or emailing without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC.

ISBN 978-1-59632-607-1

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Crystal Esau

Cover Artist: Croco Designs

Chapter One

Southern California

Why the hell did he keep coming here?

The Silver Fox, a run-down two-story structure set back from the street, resembled the old honky-tonk speakeasy from back in the day. Two small, iron-barred windows straddling the door were nestled high on the wall just below the second level. Each window contained identical, illuminated red lettering spelling out Lite Beer.

The parking area, a recent acquisition, occupied the adjacent lot and stretched out behind the bar. Unpaved and little more than dirt sparsely strewn with gravel, it had sprouted up when the city demolished the building next door.

Most of the surrounding properties were interspersed with dilapidated buildings, half with boarded-up windows, the other half with cavernous holes incongruously gaping at the rapidly vanishing environment. Since the Norton AFB closure, this part of San Bernardino traipsed along the road to deterioration, while gaining a reputation for some serious criminal elements.

From where he lived in Shandin Hills to this side of town, there were dozens of less disreputable areas to haunt...*hell*. Maybe he needed the rush, considering what he did for a living. If the so-called badasses on this side of town decided to challenge him, he hoped they would bring something new. Invent some type of scary shit to break through his kill-factor indifference, which would allow him to hone new skills, give him a little off-duty survivor-skills training.

Fuck.

After Allister -- the little prick -- left, every time Devin came in from an assignment, he ended up hanging at the Fox. And why? What did he expect to find there? It wasn't as if he came there looking for an Allister replacement. His original intent had been to find

someone who piqued his interest enough for a quick lay...some get-over-it-and-move-on sex.

Shit.

He and Allister had been together for five fucking years...statistics meaning very little to Allister. Their last months together...*goddamn it to hell*...where were his intuitive skills?

He had suggested something wasn't right. Allister denied it; he had backed off. Their sex life dwindled to nonexistent. Allister rarely slept at home, had excuses...subbed out to another section...doing Special Ops by request. These were the standard "no questions or details" subjects, so he didn't probe. Then the fucker went behind his back and requested reassignment...overseas.

It had to be that bastard working with Allister. The son of a bitch had hit on *him* when he first joined the team. So why hadn't Allister just said he wanted out of their relationship?

After a whole goddamn month, and still fucking pissed, Devin wavered between two options: to kill something, or fuck the hell out of somebody. The problem: He couldn't make up his mind which activity would afford him the most pleasure. With any luck, both goals were attainable -- Oh...*goddamn!*

Devin's mind hiccupped as he stared at the two men stepping through the door. Voices faded, leaving only the restrained sound of music. For a heartbeat, the shorter one...the dark hair, the stance... Had to be the lighting.

Glancing around, he realized he wasn't the only one checking out physical demographics. Everybody in the place seemed to be staring, and he could only guess the shorter of the two garnered all the interest. Hell. The man had *his* undivided attention. Not taking anything away from the big guy, attractive in his own right, but that shorter one -- like the women at work used to say about Allister -- eye candy in fucking motion. Now *that* had possibilities.

In his present mood, having the object of his attention arrive with someone else... Devin grinned. He did have that two-point option for being in the Fox.

He needed a closer look.

Normal sounds of activity seemed to explode into the room when the patrons resumed their conversations, as if anybody really wanted to take their eyes off the short one. Damn. Who could blame them? Even in the dim lighting, the man's physical attributes were all too clear. Well, they were until the short-shit sat on the barstool.

Maybe Allister had the right of it. His leaving opened up unlimited possibilities that Devin hadn't considered in years, since he'd thought he was in a committed relationship.

For the first time in five years, someone besides Allister had Devin's attention. Someone he hadn't seen up close, yet he felt an intrinsic corporeal link with the man, jacking his libido.

Right on cue, his dick clamored for attention, pressing into the zipper of his jeans, forcing him to shift on the seat. *Damn*. He stretched his legs out in front of him in an attempt to give his cock some breathing room. He kept his eyes on the two men.

They appeared to be arguing. The shorter one stood; the other one grabbed his arm. The short-shit snatched his arm from the hold and headed for the john; the taller one followed. Probably a lover's quarrel to be continued.

Distraction out of sight, Devin leaned back against worn red vinyl and sipped his Chivas while he looked around. For a Saturday night, the rather low-key atmosphere of the place surprised him.

The majority of the noise came from the intermittent laughter of a playfully rowdy group shooting pool at the back of the room. While the moderate sound of music emitted from an old-fashioned jukebox, several patrons, simulating dance, shuffled about the floor to a mellow slow jam. Subdued lighting added to the laid-back ambiance.

Against the back wall, two men hunched over gaily lit pinball machines, the muted *ping-ping* barely audible over the sound of the pool players. Another man, standing in front of one of those stuffed animal cages with the three-pronged crane, was swearing up a blue streak every time he dropped the toy he'd snagged.

Tilting his head to the side, Devin sniffed, then smiled as the smell of fried food wafted toward him, teasing his taste buds. Jason Storm, cook and owner, had arrived.

Normally, Devin didn't indulge in fried food. However, the Silver Fox was probably the last place on earth using fresh-cut potatoes for their fries. So, if he indulged, these fries were his choice. Being able to have fresh cut instead of frozen...salt, pepper, Frank's Red Hot... He shook his head. Those thoughts brought back wistful memories of his childhood.

Back then, he couldn't have been more than six...seven years old, yet he remembered his mom making fries from fresh-cut potatoes. Once his brothers were old enough to cook without supervision, on Saturday, all-night-movies-on-television time, they pooled their allowance to buy five to ten pounds of potatoes. His dad drove his oldest brother

to the supermarket to get them; the kids peeled the entire bunch. Being six years younger than his siblings, they only allowed him to help with the peeling, while his brothers took turns frying up a fresh batch of fries whenever they ran out.

Ensnared in their sleeping bags on the floor of the family room, with fries in hand, they pigged out while they watched television throughout the night. Of course, he always fell asleep first, but he clearly remembered the old black-and-white movies they watched...the monster-fests. His all-time favorite...the original *The Thing*, hell, that movie scared the shit out of him. However, that didn't dissuade him from going out and buying it, his first VHS movie, as soon as he had his own place and VCR. He still watched it from time to time.

Devin smiled, recalling his mom and dad's support of their children's independence. Sometimes, when his parents weren't traveling, they would join him and his brothers. His mother and father never interfered with the cooking, nor did they hassle the kids about the mess. With their sleeping bags on the floor alongside their children, his parents just pigged out right along with the kids.

The memories ended there...nothing...everything --

A sudden loud thump, and the wall behind him vibrating, interrupted his reverie. From previous visits, Devin knew the sound came from the men's room. He looked around and noticed the two men hadn't returned. Suspicious, and curious, he stood and headed for the can. He pushed open the door and found the shorter man, red faced and teary eyed, glaring up at the taller one.

Devin walked to the urinals while keeping an eye on the two adversaries. The big one gave him a quick, frowning glance before storming out; the short-shit pushed into the last stall. He thought he heard a choked-off sob and glanced toward the sound. From beneath the bottom of the door, he saw dark brown Italian loafers and the bottom portion of beige slacks-encased legs standing to the side of the stall.

Done taking a piss, Devin flushed and moved to the sink. Surprised to find soap in the dispenser, he took his time soaping and washing his hands; lingering paid off. The stall door opened, and the young man stepped out, glancing his way, attempting a smile.

Wait a minute. Didn't he know this person? Well...didn't *know* him, but he'd seen him around the agency. Shit...where? Wasn't part of the boy's club, or they would have interacted. He didn't work the Ops floor...hell, it would come to him.

What a pisser. Did Allister's desertion weigh so heavily on his mind and rule his every waking thought, it never occurred to him to check out the potential right under his nose?

Goddamn.

The man may have resembled Allister from a distance, but up close, this man would win any competition.

Slightly bowlegged and pigeon-toed, the man moved toward him with a sexy-as-hell, swiveling hips-in-motion walk. Like gravitational pull, his gaze was drawn -- dead-on -- lower abdomen...*bam!* Ground zero...center mass... *Shh-yit!* The man's dick might as well have waved and winked.

Continuing his perusal as the young man moved across the floor and stepped up to the sink beside him, Devin took note of ink black hair, luminous green eyes, and dimples. Baby-boy's slim, toned physique didn't reach six feet. He appeared to be young, mid to late twenties, packed *all* right and tight in those beige slacks accentuating slim hips and a first-rate ass.

Reluctantly, Devin raised his eyes; their gazes converged in the mirror.

"Sorry... Didn't mean to stare," he said, taking note of the red-rimmed eyes and finger marks on one cheek. "You okay?"

"Oh, sure. Nothing new." The kid tried to smile. "I'll be okay."

Devin's gut tightened right up at those words "nothing new." *Fuck!* Along with the disparity in height, the other man had at least fifty-plus goddamn pounds on this one.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" He extended his hand. "My name is Devin...have we met? I know I've seen you some place before."

"Hi..." The young man tried for a chuckle, which came out more like a breathy sob. He moved to the sink, washed his hands, then extended one. "I'm Ewyn, with a y. Nice to meet you, Devin. And yes, I work at the shop...Information Services. We must pass dozens of times in the hallways. You always seem so...uh...preoccupied."

"I'm not any kind of occupied at the moment. Are you on your own now?"

"For now," Ewyn mumbled. "Wishing it were permanent."

Devin grinned. "Come on, let me buy you a drink. You can tell me about it, if you want. How does that sound?"

"Best damn offer I've had all night." Ewyn reached into his pocket and palmed his cell phone. "Let me put this on vibrate."

They headed for the door with Devin trailing behind, taking inventory.

A riot of loose curls, Ewyn's gleaming black hair came just past collar length. At five-nine, maybe five-ten, being somewhat shorter than Devin's six-three frame made Ewyn an ideal size for Devin. Allister was the first and only man Devin had been with who almost matched him in height and size.

Reaching around baby-boy to open the door, a distinctive smell inundated Devin's senses. Something musky-sweet, *all* male, like sweat, cologne, and some unknown heady scent, which had to be entirely Ewyn... *Shit*. When the fuck had he become all over sensual?

Baby-boy started through the door; their eyes met when Ewyn's cock brushed against him as Ewyn passed. Clearly, Devin wasn't the only one jonesing, because he read intent in Ewyn's dancing green-eyed gaze and that sexy-ass smirk shifting the contours of a mouth straight out of a wet dream.

Damn...he wanted a taste of that.

Fuck if Devin didn't feel heat strafe his cheeks. At two years shy of forty, he couldn't remember the last time he'd blushed, acting like an untried adolescent.

"Want something to eat...drink?" Devin asked as soon as they reached his booth. "They do a mean chicken strips with fries or potato salad here, although I recommend just the fries. Or, we could go somewhere else, if you're hungry."

"Just a drink. Grand Marnier, please."

Devin smiled and strolled away rather than hang around for the waiter. He needed the time to regroup before he embarrassed himself. He was *not* leaving there with a big-ass spot staining the front of his jeans.

"Hey...Mick." He nodded at the bartender. "Chivas on the rocks and one Marnier." He turned and leaned back against the bar, his eyes on Ewyn.

"You need to watch yourself with him," Mick Tavis said while he prepared the drinks.

"Oh..."

"Hey, Devin... Man, I know you can handle yourself, and the baby is no problem. But his partner... Badass son of a bitch. Connected. The Russians... I'm not sure on what level. Can't remember his name, but if you need me to, I can find out before you get too hooked up with the kid."

“No problem.” Devin never took his eyes off Ewyn. “I’ve got it covered.”

For years, he and Mick kept running into each other at the various clubs he frequented. Whenever they met up, they slipped into the habit of talking shop, so to speak...nothing specific. He assumed Mick did undercover police work, and Mick probably assumed the same about him; neither probed. Hell. Mick retired and started working at the Fox before Devin discovered who Mick’s employer had been.

Mick had retired from the FBI.

So, yeah, Devin figured Mick had the straight scoop about Ewyn’s partner. However, as interesting as those tidbits of information might be, it wouldn’t deter him.

“As long as you know what’s what,” Mick told him and slid a business card across the bar. “Let me know if you run into any trouble. I still know the right people.”

Devin turned, grinning. Oh yeah. Mick had the hookup. Mick’s significant other...still FBI.

“Thanks.” He took the card and slipped it into his pocket.

Hell. It never hurt to know all kinds of people, in every type of venue.

* * * * *

Ewyn couldn’t believe his luck. The second he’d entered the bar, he’d spotted Devin, surprised to find him in the Silver Fox.

Shit. Right after he joined the agency two years ago, he’d noticed Devin. Seeing Devin around on several occasions, he had made a fool of himself trying to get Devin to notice him. Devin had always looked right through him, as if he didn’t exist. So he wrote Devin off as the epitome of the straight-and-narrow macho prick.

Tonight, he’d almost creamed his briefs thinking of the potential Devin’s presence at the Silver Fox suggested. He hadn’t been able to keep his eyes off the man, which sparked the argument between him and Gareth. Hell. What did Gareth expect? He’d had enough. He’d been saving money for months so he could move out.

If only he’d known. The realities of living on his own...what a cultural shock.

He’d spent his entire adult life spending his money on partying, clothes, and any damn thing he wanted. He’d never saved a cent; it had never occurred to him that he should. Money had always been there for him, everything given to him by the family, without question. Then, once he’d secured a good job, making good money, he’d thought he

was so independent. He'd cut himself off from the family, wanted out from under the familial dictates, and wanted to prove he could do everything on his own.

Now, when he needed money... If he could touch his trust fund without the family getting involved, he'd already be in the wind.

What a naive asshole he'd turned out to be.

The first time he and Gareth met, he fell hard for Gareth. Hell. What did he know? It was his first time on his own and away from his overprotective family. Gareth was his first real relationship. His one liaison in college had been experimentation; he had finally acknowledged his sexuality. Then along came this older man, and he stupidly traded his family's overprotective control for Gareth's dictatorial control. The only difference...his family never hurt him when he didn't conform.

When the abuse started...oh, he fought back in self-defense, and in an attempt to protect himself from serious harm, but he was no match. The relationship rapidly deteriorated to nothing but abuse; Gareth literally got off on it. And it was Ewyn's own fault.

Finally coming out, desperately wanting to be loved for who he was, he fed into the abuse by accepting it as Gareth's conditions for love. He stupidly believed the lies. Gareth always seemed so sincere when he apologized, and pampered him outrageously afterward. He stayed because *he* cared, and he wanted to believe when Gareth said he loved him, and it wouldn't happen again. He wanted to believe Gareth loved him enough to stop, to change.

Only recently, when reality set in, did he acknowledge the relationship was totally one-sided. He finally admitted to himself that Gareth's apologies and temporary respites of abuse were going to be the norm. Gareth must have suspected he was nearing the breaking point, because the last few weeks, Gareth had backed off and made good on his promises.

Yeah... He let Gareth pull his dumb ass right back in, until he received another dose of reality, tonight...in public. If his brother ever found out that he'd stayed with someone who beat on him, Greg would kick his ass.

Hell. He had grown up in a world known for its violence, but that didn't mean he had a taste for it. It also didn't mean he had to like it. Nor did he accept the ideology that violence had to become a mainstay in his life because of his heritage.

Sure, as a kid, he held his own, and considering the family history, he felt the family expected it of him. Still, he never liked it...his stomach knotting up, the vomiting afterward. Back then, he had to profile and put up a front so he would live up to the

family's expectations; he wanted his brother to respect him.

How desperate and pathetic he must have seemed, clinging to the belief that Gareth meant it when he said he didn't mean to hurt him. His dumb ass let it go on for way too long, before he made the decision to leave.

Well, he'd reached his breaking point. He couldn't...no, he wasn't going to put up with Gareth's bullshit anymore. Just because he didn't like violence did *not* mean he wasn't capable of violence, if it came down to a life-or-death struggle. *Shit*. He might have thought he was in love, but to stand idly by and let Gareth beat him to death... He didn't possess that much love. Determined he wasn't going out like that, he had to cut the ties before one of them died. Fuck if he needed the kind of grief or the limelight killing Gareth would bring.

Moreover, Gareth, the stupid son of a bitch, didn't have a clue. If word hit the street about Gareth abusing him, Gareth's life wouldn't be worth spit.

Of course, Gareth threatened to hunt him down and kill him if he left. Gareth thought he had him so intimidated he wouldn't leave.

Not.

Hunt *him* down...kill *him*?

Gareth better let him go before the abuse became noticeable and people started talking. Hell. He wouldn't even be involved; Gareth would be taken care of for him. He'd tried his damndest not to go that route, knowing the complications...the job and the family. Conversely, once he had enough money, had his own place...let the bastard bring it. The mental deviation from his roots wasn't hardwired into his psyche. On the q.t., he'd put the word on the street himself. Then for sure, there would be one less abusive bastard taking up space.

For a time, he'd lost his fuckin' mind, letting that SOB beat on him as if that qualified as some exponential of love. Well...no more. Now, he just wanted out; he needed to reclaim his self-respect. One more month and he'd have enough money to make the break.

Ewyn toyed with Devin's empty glass. Picking at the napkin underneath, every now and then he glanced toward the bar and noticed Devin watching him. Clearly, he wasn't alone in his need to test-drive something different, and damn if Devin didn't fit the qualifications for diversity.

Not classically handsome, Devin reminded him of the Russian ballet dancer, Alexander Godunov. He had long blond hair tied back with a strip of black leather and brushed

away from strong, chiseled features. All over golden, Devin had sexy amber eyes, which left no doubt about what the man wanted. Ewyn could get lost in those need-you tiger eyes framed by long, sandy blond lashes.

In his right ear, Devin wore a gold earring the size of a tiny, intricately worked, narrow wedding band, accompanied by two gold studs and a gold ear cuff riding up along his outer ear. Gauging Devin's age to be late thirties...oh, yeah, a child of the eighties, when sexual orientation had tags.

Shit.

A more definitive *hell-lo* sign he couldn't imagine. How come he never noticed those at work? Oh...wait. Devin didn't always wear his hair tied back from his face, or maybe he didn't wear the earrings at work.

Sporting a Fu Manchu with a neatly trimmed five o'clock shadow thing going on, Devin had the nerve to have dimples, and his firm, nicely shaped mouth had a delectable bottom lip begging for some Hoover action. His contagious smile made you want to grin even if you were in a shitty mood. That smile alone could fuckin' melt Ewyn's ass into a wet stain, and the enticements didn't stop there.

Devin had a slammin' body.

Each time Ewyn's eyes strayed toward Devin, they focused on Devin's crotch and what lay hidden yet clearly defined behind the rugged material of those fitted jeans. *Shit.* If his perusal had started at Devin's crotch, nothing could have bribed his eyes to go higher.

Ewyn jumped; the vibration of his cell phone startled him. He started to reach for it, then ignored it. Gareth would have to wait for their next go-round, and with any luck, it wouldn't be tonight.

* * * * *

Devin watched Ewyn fidget with the empty glass and napkin. He saw Ewyn jump and reach toward his pocket, then return his hand to the table.

Damn!

Was he losing it or what?

Only seconds before Ewyn walked through the door, he'd sat there mooning over Allister. Now, jonesing for Ewyn's ass...*shit.* Sexy behind notwithstanding, getting involved with this one meant taking on the associated baggage.

Oh yeah. He recognized the signs. Ewyn's body language screamed victim. Why anyone would want to abuse something that fine, he couldn't imagine. Nevertheless, he had a hard-on for Ewyn, and if the only way to get him meant taking out an abusive asshole... Done deal.

Ewyn seemed rather young, and fuck if it didn't frost his ass to imagine Ewyn afraid, cowering, and insecure. Ewyn should be enjoying life with a partner who appreciated him.

Like you.

Aw...shit.

With his last relationship still dogging his every thought, he didn't need this. Yet something about Ewyn...damn if long-term commitment and thoughts of Ewyn weren't meshing. Never in his wildest imagination could he conjure up this scenario. He never thought he could feel so strongly about anyone, much less so quickly.

Perhaps Allister did him a favor, after all.

Devin picked up their drinks, smiled and nodded at Mick, then headed back to the table just as the dulcet tones of Marvin Gaye emitted from the old-fashioned jukebox. *Hot damn.* Music for people his age. He enjoyed old school, which brought to mind more memories of his family. Another plus for the Silver Fox.

Maybe he could coax Ewyn into dancing with him.

* * * * *

Watching Devin's approach, Ewyn groaned when Marvin's soulful sound came to life in the semiquiet atmosphere. Oh...*shit* yeah. "Sexual Healing"...way appropriate. He liked old school, one of his reasons for hanging out at the Fox. Hell. He lived way the fuck over in Rancho Cucamonga, a far cry from old San Bernardino.

Back in the day, while striving to find his inner self, an associate hooked him up with this place. The quiet, the anonymity, and the music kept him coming back. Then, to find Devin there... Thank God, he'd insisted on coming tonight. Gareth had wanted to go to Misty's in Ontario. With Gareth's notoriety well known over there, he hadn't been in the mood for all the fanfare.

Ewyn wondered if Devin danced, or if Devin danced in public. Shit. It couldn't hurt to ask. Well... Most of the time it didn't hurt to ask.

* * * * *

Devin set the drinks down and surprised himself by saying, "Ewyn...want to dance?" He watched a sparkle light up those sweet green eyes as Ewyn stood, grinning up at him.

"I'm glad you asked. I wondered the same about you."

Smiling, they moved to the dance floor.

Devin's arms encircled Ewyn's body, hands moving down over the little round ass as slim arms crept up around his neck. Ewyn's face snuggled in under his chin; hot breath tickled his skin. That hip-swiveling action of Ewyn's stride easily transmuted into cock-stroking motions when Ewyn danced. Devin could feel Ewyn's heat, baby-boy stoking a rising intensity in him. Hell. His cock was so hard, he expected it to unzip his jeans and take what it wanted.

Devin slipped his hands into the back pockets of Ewyn's slacks in an attempt to slow those addictive gyrations...*hell*. Fuck the drinks. He had to take this somewhere private.

Head lowering and lips nudging Ewyn's ear, he whispered, "Where do you live?"

Ewyn's thoughts must have been running along the same line. "Can't go to my place. How about yours?"

Devin grabbed Ewyn's hand and practically dragged him to the door, only pausing long enough to toss Mick a tip. Damn the getting-to-know-you foreplay.

The moment they stepped outside, Devin felt Ewyn tense and try to pull his hand away.

"What? Changed your mind?"

"No. Gareth's car is across the street."

"So what? If the asshole comes over, he's mine. Relax."

"You don't understand. Gareth's dangerous, a gutter rat. Connected, Dev. His friends...he's Russian..."

Ewyn's voice died away. Devin watched him nibble on that pouty bottom lip for a few second, before Ewyn spoke again.

"Devin, Gareth is connected. You're no match."

"Ewyn... I work for *your* employers, and unlike you, I am *not* a computer geek. So what

do you think?"

"Oh...yeah. Okay." Smile iffy, Ewyn's tense posture eased.

"You don't sound so sure," Devin remarked as he led Ewyn around the side of the building to his Escalade. "Baby-boy, I am *damn* good at my job."

Devin opened the passenger door. He waited for Ewyn to settle in and fasten the seatbelt before closing the door. Likewise, he gave Ewyn's dumb-shit friend time to catch up. Moving to the front of the vehicle, he paused, then bent and unsnapped his ankle holster. He retrieved his Beretta Bobcat and shoved it in the back of his waistband.

Hell yeah, let the bastard bring it. His need for Ewyn's ass presently outweighed his ethics. Especially since it involved an abusive SOB who ranked right up there with the usual scum he dogged. So, Gar...Garf...Graf...whatever goddamn name Ewyn said...yeah, let the asshole get in his way.

Devin walked to the driver's door and opened it; the man appeared next to the vehicle.

"Want something?"

"You have something of mine," the man growled in heavily accented English.

"Not. So I suggest you back the fuck up off of me."

"Devin..." Ewyn unbuckled his seatbelt. "It's okay, I'll go with Gareth. I don't want any trouble."

"Ewyn...stay. Do *not* get out of this truck, no matter what happens." Devin never took his eyes off the man in front of him. "Understand?"

"Dev..."

"No, Ewyn... *Understand?*"

"Okay! Fuck it!"

Devin's eyes remained locked on Gareth, but he so wanted to smile. For a victim, Ewyn jumped all over attitude in a heartbeat. Possibly the reason Ewyn and the asshole butted heads? *Go, baby-boy*. He definitely looked forward to some one-on-one with the kid.

"I'm not leaving without Ewyn," Gareth stated.

Devin snorted. "Yeah, you are. And because I'm in a generous mood, you get one warning before I break your face just for the hell of it." He grinned. "So, if you want to continue breathing without artificial support..."

He saw the glint of metal a second before Gareth lunged. He blocked the thrust with his left forearm, grasped the man's wrist with his right hand, and twisted. The man's cry of pain coincided with the knife clattering to the ground. Devin yanked his gun from his jeans.

"Now" -- Beretta pressed against Gareth's temple -- "we both know I can have you arrested for assault, correct?"

Gareth nodded.

"Hell. That wouldn't be any fun. I'd rather you go for me again, I'd kill you...drama over tonight."

Motioning with his gun, Devin prodded the man toward the front of the building, back around the corner, and out of Ewyn's hearing and line of sight. Whatever else happened, he didn't want a witness.

"Assume the position. I'm sure you're familiar with it."

Gareth placed his hands flat against the wall and spread his legs.

"Not so tough with someone your size, are you?" Devin did a quick once-over search, then stepped up close.

"If I hear of you being within a hundred-yard radius of Ewyn...ever" -- he spoke close to the man's ear, already decided that Ewyn wouldn't be going back to the asshole -- "I'm coming after you, and I'll make you disappear. Trust me on this."

Gareth nodded.

"Get the hell out of here, and be grateful for Ewyn's presence, since it's the only thing keeping you alive right now."

Heading back to the Escalade, eyes on Gareth, Devin watched the man clamber into his car and peel out, dust and gravel flying. He bent, shoved his Beretta back in its holster, picked up the knife, and then he turned toward his vehicle. He almost knocked Ewyn over.

"I thought I told you to stay -- *oomph!*" Ewyn launched himself at him. He tossed the knife behind the driver's seat, then wrapped his arms around the quivering body.

"Hey..."

Just then, Devin realized he had been prepared to kill for Ewyn, and he hadn't even tasted him yet. He resolved that issue when baby-boy smiled up at him. His mouth slammed down over Ewyn's with purpose.

Holy shit!

Soft little tongue darting in and out of his mouth, teeth nibbling his bottom lip, the tip of his tongue; they were all over spit exchange. Sweet.

For this... Killing that bastard would have been the resolution to one of his initial reasons for being at the Silver Fox. Ewyn... Absolutely the other.

Oh... Fuck yeah. This ass is mine.

Groaning, Devin sucked the hot little tongue into his mouth.

* * * * *

"Hi. Followed them to some dive in San Bernardino. Half hour after they arrived, the Russian came storming out of the place. Alone."

"Why...what do you think happened?"

"Don't know. Couldn't go inside; Ewyn would have spotted me. The Russian's sitting in his car right now. I'll have to assume he's waiting for Ewyn."

"Shit. Don't let him hurt Ewyn."

"No problem. Out here, on this side of town, I'll have a shot at him...take care of him for good. No one will... Wait a minute."

"What?"

"Ewyn just came out with somebody...big fuckin' dude. They're heading around the side of the building... Oh, shit! The Russian is going after them." He climbed out of his car.

"Do something!"

"Hold on...I'm right behind... I'll be damned." He pulled up short and stayed in the shadows.

"What? What happened?"

"Whoever Ewyn is with took care of Varvarinski... Fuck me. The Russian just took off, practically running."

"Where's Ewyn...is he all right?"

"Oh yeah." He watched the big guy pull Ewyn close. "I'd say Ewyn is just fine." He headed back to his car. "Don't worry. I'll follow and see where this man takes Ewyn."

"Call me when you know."

Chapter Two

Ewyn slanted glances at Devin as they walked toward Devin's building. What must Devin think of him? First, Devin arrived at the tail end of his altercation with Gareth in the bathroom, followed by Devin's exchange with Gareth in the parking lot.

Shit.

Tired and hungry, working strictly on nerves, he hadn't eaten since... Damn. Yesterday?

He would have taken Devin up on his offer at the Fox, except he didn't think he could do greasy on a jittery stomach. Now, maybe he could scrounge a meal, have some serious sex, try to explain, and then disappear.

The whole fucked-up situation would be laughable if Devin hadn't been on his wish list since way back. Hell. Even when he'd written Devin off as a macho prick, it never stopped him wanting.

So there he stood, next to Devin, waiting for the elevator, his body vibrating with anticipation, while his nourishment-deprived mind fumbled for plausible explanations. No goddamn way could he tell Devin the entire truth about himself and his relationship with Gareth.

The elevator arrived, and as soon as they stepped inside and the doors closed, Devin's strong arms wrapped around him. He huddled in and relaxed. His face nestled against the base of Devin's throat.

Oh...goddamn!

Ewyn slipped his arms around Devin's waist and sighed, inhaling the strong, musky scent combination of sweat mingled with cologne, and...his tongue snaked out. Devin tensed, then relaxed with a groan as Ewyn licked a trail up to a spot behind Devin's ear.

Oh, yeah. Something all Devin flavored his tongue.

Shit. He never wanted to let this go; it felt too right. Cocks nudging...if he moved just right... "You know, you may regret coming to my rescue."

"I don't think so. I'm already having perks." Devin smiled, eyes crinkling at the corners. "Besides, I probably wouldn't have met you, or been able to get you away from that asshole, in any other circumstances."

"Oh, I don't know." Ewyn looked up into soul-stirring eyes. "Under the right conditions, who knows?" His hips shifted.

"Hmm...maybe." Devin held his stare. "However, baby-boy, there is one thing I'm goddamn sure of."

Ewyn's eyebrow arched.

"If you don't stop looking at me that way, and if you keep dry-humping my dick...oh yeah...I'll take your bad ass right here in this elevator." Devin winked and trailed his thumb across Ewyn's bottom lip.

Eyes widening, Ewyn stared. Sure as shit, Devin's smoldering gaze said "serious intent." With a choked off laugh, Ewyn pulled away.

Perfect timing -- the elevator stopped.

"Smart move," Devin mumbled.

Still chuckling, Ewyn hurried through the doors; his feet came to a stuttering halt. They were on the twelfth floor, top floor, yet there were only two doors on each side of the hallway at opposite ends. Hell. Devin's place must be huge. He couldn't wait to see it, already imagining it had Devin stamped all over it.

"Who lives in the other condo?"

"A retired couple who travel quite a bit. Their son checks on the place periodically."

Ewyn trailed behind Devin, watching a first-rate ass in form-fitting jeans that hugged well-defined muscular legs and thighs that wouldn't quit. Devin's knit shirt molded nicely to distinct upper-body contours...hell. The situation called for an appreciative whistle; he refrained.

He didn't *even* want to see Devin's feet. With everything else about Devin damn near perfect... He had a thing about nicely shaped, sexy feet with cute little suckable toes. In

addition, Devin belonged to that small percentage of the population who were left-handed. Something about left-handed men jacked his pulse.

He waited while Devin unlocked his door and stepped inside, into a small foyer, then flicked a switch; recessed lighting strategically bathed the room beyond in brightness. He followed Devin inside, feet gliding across pale gray tile before sinking into deep, plush charcoal gray carpet as he moved across the room. *Ooo...* He couldn't wait to walk barefoot across that.

Ewyn gazed around in appreciation. Black, white, and gray colors merged nicely with the chrome, glass, and leather decor, while splashes of light blue and pale mauve relieved the place of clinical starkness. Pearl gray walls brought the entire setting together in smooth, clean lines as an uncluttered arrangement.

A floor-to-ceiling wall of glass, with French doors leading out to a balcony, looked out over the city. Situated in front of this vista, a black lacquered bar, with three black-cushioned, chrome bar stools standing sentry, reflected the overhead recessed lighting off its surface.

Planters with ficus trees, philodendrons, and tall vases with silk flowers dotted the room.

"You live here alone?"

"I do now. Want something to drink?"

From Devin's curt tone, Ewyn surmised questions about why Devin lived alone were off-limits.

"If it's not too much trouble, I'd rather have something to eat."

"You're hungry? Why didn't you say something back at the Fox?" Devin's eyes narrowed. "When was the last time you ate?"

Heat infused Ewyn's cheeks. "Yesterday...I think."

Devin mumbled several foul expletives, then sighed. "Come on." He led the way into his kitchen. "Sit."

Only one word could describe the world Ewyn just entered. Immaculate.

He stared in awe at the spacious white-walled room with black marble countertops, gray tile floors, black and stainless steel appliances, and ash cabinets with stainless steel knobs. Recessed lighting beamed over the counters and appliances, while three black-

shaded pendulum lights dangled above the center island. The eating area had a chrome and glass four-chair dinette set, seat cushions in black, and place settings for two. On the other side of the kitchen, he noted a formal dining room.

Hell. Devin's condo seemed larger than some houses he'd visited.

Despite the flawlessness of the surroundings, an atmosphere of comfort and home had Ewyn kicking off his shoes and settling at the table. His gaze followed Devin about the room.

He watched muscles ripple and flex as Devin removed Chinese food containers and fresh fruit from the refrigerator. He had a glimpse of toned abs when Devin reached up for a stainless steel stir-fry skillet from one cabinet and vegetable oil from another. After pouring a few dabs of oil into the skillet, Devin dumped in food from each container and did a quick stir-fry thing, divvying up the meal onto two plates.

Inhaling the tantalizing aroma wafting around the room, Ewyn's taste buds salivated with expectation. *Shit*. He moved his fingers to the corners of his mouth to make sure he wasn't drooling.

He watched Devin pick up a knife and, with smooth expertise, he deftly cut and removed the rinds before neatly slicing cantaloupe and honeydew melon into sections.

Hell. In the parking lot, he had been worried about Devin. Maybe his concern should have been for Gareth. Not. Devin could have killed the bastard, and he wouldn't have blinked an eye, nor said a word about it...ever. If he hadn't known Devin could legally get away with the killing, he would have helped dispose of the body.

Devin put equal amounts of fruit in two dessert bowls and placed all the food on the table. Then he returned to the refrigerator, took out a bottle of wine, uncorked it, and half filled two glasses.

"You want whipped cream with your dessert?"

"Mmm" -- Ewyn winked -- "maybe after."

"I'll hold you to that." Devin grinned and settled across from him. "Okay. You want to give me the lowdown on the action at the Fox? You and the dumbass are...what? Long term, mere acquaintances...*shit*. Do you live with him?"

"I'd love to tell you it's a long story, but we haven't been together quite a year." Ewyn shrugged. "And yeah...dumbest thing I've done in my life, so far; I moved in with him."

"Then it's time you moved out."

“Yeah...”

Devin remained quiet. He toyed with his food and sipped his wine while he waited to hear more, but Ewyn just chowed down, ignoring him for the more favorable sustenance. With nothing else forthcoming, he relaxed and enjoyed the scenery, studying Ewyn while he ate.

The man damn near qualified as pretty, with those long dark lashes framing brilliant green eyes, and a mouth...*damn*. He didn't *even* want to go there, not now.

He watched Ewyn polish off the stir-fry and start on the fruit. Baby-boy must have been some kind of hungry; Ewyn never touched the wine.

Eyes drawn to Ewyn's mouth and that pouty bottom lip, Devin watched Ewyn suck on a slice of melon, slide part of it between his lips, then slurp off excess juice with a slow withdrawal. He couldn't resist staring when the tip of Ewyn's tongue peeked out to stab at droplets of liquid forming at the corners of that mouth -- *goddamn!*

Constriction in the crotch of his jeans had Devin squirming, cock filling and pressing against metal. He leaned back, stretched out his legs, and slipped his feet out of his Top-Siders. He never took his gaze off Ewyn's mouth as it worked another piece of fruit, sliding it in and out, little tongue spending several seconds lapping at the juice on both sides before Ewyn bit off a piece.

Devin's mind zoned.

He already knew the taste of that mouth, but a mental picture of what those lips and mouth might be capable of, what they would feel like wrapped around him... His ass shifted again.

Hauling said mind kicking and screaming back to the matter at hand, Devin lowered his eyes to his glass as he set it down. He wanted answers. He needed to know how involved Ewyn and Gareth were, how serious Gareth's connections to the Russians were, and, curious as hell, he had to know how Ewyn became involved with that particular criminal element.

Devin took his time getting his libido under control. He forked food into his mouth, and then he washed it down with a few sips of wine as he returned his gaze to --

“*Fuck!*”

His surprised exclamation, while trying to swallow...not a good move. Liquid went down the wrong way, he inhaled too deeply to keep from choking, snorted shit up into his

nasal passage, and started coughing. He swiped up his napkin to prevent spewing food and wine all over.

Once he calmed down, he looked over at Ewyn. Sure as shit, he saw the intent in the steady regard of twinkling green eyes, the deliberate tease. Baby-boy had been screwing with his mind.

Adding credence to Devin's belief, Ewyn finished off the last bite of cantaloupe; green-eyed gaze locked with his, baby-boy slowly sucked on each finger before lowering his eyes to the plate. That goddamn, sexy-ass smirk teased the corners of Ewyn's mouth, while baby-boy further emphasized the issue by cutting up the remaining fruit in the bowl, then eating each small piece with his fork.

Oh yeah. Baby-boy had played him.

Devin cleared his throat. "Do you want to tell me about it now? *If* you're through fucking with me."

Hard-pressed not to burst out laughing, Ewyn lowered his eyes to his bowl. The way Devin kept watching his mouth, he couldn't resist taunting him, and *daaaamn*... The man had it going on, jump-starting his pulse with that sizzling look, and those predator eyes stalking every move of his lips and tongue while he sucked on the melon. Hell. If thought transference were tangible, Devin would have been fuckin' the shit out of his mouth with that lick-him-all over pink tongue.

Now, as if they hadn't just finished a mind-fuck, Devin wanted a casual conversation about his problems. *Oooh-kay*. The man didn't do postcoital cuddling.

Ewyn picked up a napkin, wiped his mouth and hands, sighed, and stood up. He moved around the table and straddled Devin's lap. Arms draped loosely over broad shoulders, his fingers toyed with stray tendrils of soft blond hair. He placed a kiss on the tip of the narrow nose. "I'd rather be doing something else with my mouth besides talking."

He latched on to Devin's bottom lip, nipping, licking, and nibbling before sucking it into his mouth. *Fuck*. Cock snug against Devin's abs, ass wriggling until positioned just right for maximum mutual pleasure...he could do this all night. Devin's taste, combined with the semisweet flavor of wine, had it going on.

His teeth captured the tip of Devin's tongue, lips circling, inch by appetizing inch, he sucked that hot tongue into his mouth. His fingers moved Braille-fashion over Devin's face, trailing across mustache, skimming along five o'clock shadow -- he expected bristly, not almost as soft as the hair on Devin's head.

The steady gyration of his hips had ass and balls stroking the cock snuggled beneath

him.

Shh-yit...

Ewyn pulled back and stared into passion-drunk amber eyes. "Dev..."

Mouth reclaimed, large hands clenched his ass as Devin stood, the powerful body not hesitating or straining under his weight. Well, hell. Compared to Devin's six-three, probably two-twenty-plus pounds, he must seem like a featherweight at one-thirty-five, one-forty when he wasn't stressing and ate right.

Ewyn tightened his arms around Devin's neck, and his legs encircled the trim waist. They moved from kitchen to bedroom, where Devin released his mouth and dumped him on the bed; his hold pulled Devin down with him.

"Mmm..." He cuddled up, his hands crawling under Devin's shirt. His fingers traced the various ridges of scar tissue dotting Devin's abdomen, chest, and back, had him thinking battle scars. "Want to feel all of you," he whispered, teeth and tongue teasing the fine mouth.

Devin rolled and stood in one fluid motion. Light streaming in from the other room allowed an adequate view of Devin removing his clothes. Ewyn gawked like a starstruck fan.

His heartbeat picked up its pace when Devin revealed a lot of golden skin covering a wide expanse of chest tapering down to a narrow waist and ripped six-pack. His breathing developed a hitch when Devin unfastened the jeans and lowered the zipper; Ewyn stared in fascinated wonder at curly blond shorthairs peeking out. His sudden intake of air reminded him that he held his breath in anticipa -- *Oh...fuck!*

Made for human consumption.

Seven to eight inches of lick-me-now edible with a slight curve, Devin's cock had a smooth, engorged head, the ridge an uneven flow veeing into the shaft. A tiny pearl-drop of precum dotted the slit. The man clearly sunbathed in the altogether.

Damn.

He so wanted to run a course around that ridge with his tongue, before dabbing at the slit to lap up the true essence of the man. He knew better. Although... With the rigid standards of their employment, both should always be clean. *Hmm...* Again, maybe it wouldn't hurt to ask.

Ewyn never took his eyes off Devin and all that muscle shifting and rippling as Devin's

fine naked self moved about the room lighting candles. A scent similar to Devin's cologne wafted toward him, the flickering lights and the aroma heightening his senses. This romantic aspect to Devin came as quite a surprise.

His gaze followed Devin across the room to the bedroom door. Devin flipped a wall switch, which extinguished the light from the other room, and left the bedroom bathed in the soft glow of candlelight.

Ewyn chuckled at the sight of Devin moving back toward the dresser, totally nude except for his ankle holster. Opening a drawer, Devin pulled out a small metal box with a black combination lock; he fiddled with the knob, then opened the lid. He bent and removed his holster, tossed it inside the box, closed the lid, and spun the dial.

Chin resting on his hands, Ewyn's eyes stayed on Devin as he went from the dresser to the armoire, where Devin opened the doors to expose a TV and a high-tech stereo setup. Devin flipped a switch. The system came to life, and he put a few CDs in the player. The seductive sound of Smokey Robinson filled the room.

"Ooo..." Ewyn stood and started peeling off his clothes, tossing them in the direction of the chair. "You like old-school too."

"Is there any other kind?"

Ewyn laughed. "Well, some of the new country sound has it going on; jazz can hold its own."

"True. From time to time, I listen to those too."

Ewyn watched Devin make himself comfortable on the bed. Devin's hand went to his cock, stroking, while his eyes roamed over Ewyn's body, and then his ass as it came into view when he shimmied out of his briefs. Devin's cock pulsed.

He wondered what Devin was thinking. He knew he wasn't in Devin's class. He wasn't bulked up like Devin, but his small stature, although lean, was accentuated by a defined upper body tapering down to a trim waist, slim hips, and taut, round ass cheeks. He worked out.

Ewyn moved to the end of the bed while watching the flickering candlelight dance in the golden-eyed gaze ranging freely over his body. He peeked at Devin's feet and toes and shivered. Delectable as they were, his hunger for another anatomical delicacy had his mind focused as his eyes skimmed up over *looong* legs, caressed the length of thick cock, and roved over one slammin' physique.

Toes would be dessert. After all, he did have a promise of whipped cream.

Hands and knees, Ewyn crawled onto the bed. He straddled Devin's legs and inched his way upward. Liquid heat seeping from Devin's cock painted his chest and abs as he licked, kissed, nibbled, and sucked his way up to Devin's mouth, his own dick leaking a pearlescent trail.

"Fuck! You're something." He breathed the words against Devin's lips.

"Not bad yourself." Devin stroked Ewyn's pudgy, nicely shaped cock. "Surprisingly, much more than I expected." Skin as smooth as silk sliding across his palm...baby-boy damn near matched him in length. His fingertips glided across the head and down the shaft before moving up over tight abs to trace circles around Ewyn's tiny nipples. He rolled one soft bud between his fingers, feeling it pebble; his mouth fed on the softness of Ewyn's lips.

"Mmm..." Ewyn shuddered. "Baggies?"

"Table drawer."

Ewyn reached over and opened the drawer, snagged the lube and a foil-wrapped condom, then laughed.

"Mmm...yum. Banana. My fave."

Brow furrowed, Devin stared.

Flavored condoms had been Allister's thing, and, until recently, he thought he'd thrown out all the fruity shit. He'd been surprised to find some of the damn things still there, stuck in the back of the drawer. Hell. He and Allister hadn't used condoms since their first few encounters. The shop implemented mandatory testing right after they met. With Allister's desertion, he figured he needed to acquire a new stash of condoms, since he'd been browsing outside the shop community.

Besides, with that in mind... Devin's hand moved over the silky texture of Ewyn's cock. He should be back on safe ground, the way the powers that be closely monitored testing for the boys' club. Whether Ewyn was aware of it or not, he *was* a member of the club, and the stringent guidelines for employment at the shop required regular testing for the geeks too. Some of the nerds went on deployment as much as the Ops; he'd been in the field with a few.

Moreover, with the recent introduction of rapid HIV testing, producing very quick results -- usually in five to thirty minutes -- there was no reason for any of them not to play it safe. Of course, because of budget constraints, the agency still used the standard HIV antibody-screening test, the EIA, results available in one to two weeks, mandatory

testing done on a regular rotation.

Hmm... On the other hand, baby-boy had been with the Russian. He put no faith in that dirtbag being faithful, or clean.

"Not my idea, probably expired," Devin grumbled. "Grab another one."

Baby-boy tossed the lube on the bed and leaned forward, tongue pushing between Devin's lips for several minutes before scooting backward.

"You know, I'd rather go without the raincoat."

"Ewyn..." Damn. Devin stared into the depths of those sweet green eyes. It was almost as if baby-boy read his thoughts.

They stared at each other for what seemed an interminable amount of time before Ewyn spoke.

"Dev..."

"What about Gareth?"

"What! No fuckin' way...hell. I thought I was in love, not insane...well... Never mind. Always used protection with Gareth. The man's a player, and surprisingly, fastidious in the extreme about being clean and safe...practically manic about it."

Ewyn paused, his gaze exploring the depths of sparkling amber eyes, all over loving the chameleon spectrum of those sexy-ass eyes, which clearly defined Devin's emotional state. What more could he say without revealing his stupidity?

Besides, safety aside, once the beatings started, Gareth rarely needed him for sexual pleasure. Gareth seemed to get off on the beatings, leaving him to his own devices. And didn't that just make him every kind of a fool...hell. The last few weeks, with Gareth doing his best-behavior thing, they weren't even sleeping in the same bed.

Ewyn ran his thumb across Devin's bottom lip. "I've been with the agency for two years, Dev...tested on regular rotation. I had my last test three weeks ago. I have the results in my wallet. I'm clean. Gareth and I haven't *even* been busy since way before then."

Devin frowned.

"I know what you're thinking," Ewyn said. "You're wondering why I carry my test results on me, and that's a whole other story." No way could he tell Devin that he kept his personal papers in storage without revealing the truth about himself. Not now...not so

soon.

"Yeah... Well, I've been with the shop way too long, last test a month ago. No action since, between being in the field and...well, no action." With Allister being a little shit, Devin had remained celibate. Hell. Why wouldn't he abstain...considering himself in a committed relationship right up until the end?

"You trust me, Ewyn?" Devin searched sincere green eyes, which spoke volumes, giving him his answer without words.

"In more ways than I should." Ewyn tossed the condom back in the drawer. "Still, if you doubt my veracity...just to be on the safe side... You have a computer here? I can get into the system and show you all my test results...check you out."

Devin smiled and gazed into the warm, heavy-lidded green eyes sparkling down at him, baby-boy's sexy-ass smirk altering the contours of that tantalizing mouth. "You can do that?" Eyebrow arched. "It's legal?"

"*Shh...* You never heard it from me." Baby-boy winked, knees pushing between Devin's legs.

Devin couldn't understand how the hell he had gotten to this place with Ewyn so fast. He and Allister had danced around for months before getting busy, and it didn't have anything to do with being clean. Yet the moment Ewyn stepped into the Silver Fox, baby-boy fucked up his psyche.

Damn if he wasn't acting like a lovesick asshole, letting his little head rule.

Devin bucked beneath Ewyn's touch when sharp little teeth nibbled, an agile tongue teased, and one skilled mouth sucked on the skin along his inner thighs before mouthing his balls. Slim fingers teased his ass. He actually whimpered when that nimble tongue licked up and down his shaft, never touching the tip.

Ewyn's tongue licked a course up over his abs, then paused to trace the various scars dotting his body. The exploration ended at his nipples, circling, alternately drawing each bud between his teeth, Ewyn nipped and pulled for several tormenting seconds before the moist heat moved higher.

"Oh, fuck... Ewyn..."

"Mmm-hmm."

Ewyn shimmied his way further up Devin's body, continuing his manipulations. His fingers kneaded all over the sinewy muscle. With Devin's liquid heat coating his skin...his

cock's response, and their bodies sliding together...*hell*. Ewyn liked prolonging the inevitable, made the buildup *so* goddamn awesome.

Face hovering, Ewyn licked and teased Devin's lips; hands running over Devin's shoulders and neck into his hair, he loosened the leather strip holding it together. His fingers raked through the thick, baby-soft strands, mouth easing along Devin's jaw to the pulse point in his neck. He nibbled and sucked, his teeth grazing before he leached on.

"Oh...shit!" Devin grabbed the ink black curls and tugged, pulling Ewyn's head away. He took custody of Ewyn's mouth, tongue delving deep. With cocks pressed between them, hips gyrating... Devin tensed; Ewyn pulled back.

"Mmm, not yet." Ewyn grinned. "Not letting you off so easily."

"Goddamn it, Ewyn," Devin growled. Muscles tight as fuck, he strained for control. He wanted in that ass or mouth when he came. "Stop teasing."

"Mmm-hmm..."

Tongue trailing down over Devin's body, Ewyn peppered the skin with kisses as he made his way toward his goal. He settled between Devin's legs, both hands resting at the base of Devin's shaft. He toyed with curly blond hairs and waited for Devin to look at him.

Smoldering amber eyes met his, said what needed to be said... *Goddamn!* He could fuckin' drown in that golden-eyed gaze.

Ewyn's hands enveloped Devin's cock. All ten fingers wrapped around silken skin covering a steel core, not touching the head.

Devin thought he'd go ballistic when Ewyn slowly and softly moved his hands back and forth around his cock in opposite directions, much like twirling a stick. Gently squeezing, Ewyn's hands glided up and down his shaft with light, finger-stroking motions. He watched baby-boy lean forward, mouth opening wide enough to accommodate the entire head of his dick, yet not touching any part of it; warm breath huffed out.

He tightened his thighs against Ewyn's sides while grappling with the temptation to snatch Ewyn's bad butt and violently fuck the hell out of it.

Then Ewyn's mouth closed over his cock. Lips pulling gently, tongue...soft licks, teeth...light nibbles; Ewyn brushed the head across the roof of his mouth and stroked it along the insides of his cheeks. All over contact.

"Goddamn it...*fuck!* Ewyn... Baby, please." Devin's hips pushed up into the touch.

Ewyn hummed his agreement, tip of his tongue moving back and forth, gliding along the V-shape where shaft met head.

Devin's hips picked up their rhythm.

Tongue twirling and lapping more firmly along the V-spot, Ewyn settled his hands at the base of Devin's cock, all fingers touching. He eased the cock deeper in his throat as his hands moved to caress Devin's balls, his fingers ghosting the tight asshole. Head bobbing, his tongue licked up and down along the ridge on the underside of the shaft. Devin started to tense; Ewyn pulled back.

"You like..." He blew softly on the slit. "Want more?" he taunted, fingers easing down the creases of Devin's thighs and stroking his balls before slipping between Devin's cheeks. He teased the tiny hole, prodding the taut ring of muscle. Smiling, his tongue circled the head of Devin's cock, then dipped into the slit, teasing and licking before easing the cock back into his mouth, loving on Devin's flavor.

Devin opened his mouth...brain not firing, no sound, only staccato breathing. He couldn't believe... No one had ever fucking blown his mind like Ewyn. No one had ever taken him this far, so quick...*fuck*. Ewyn sucked his cock all the way in, tight throat muscles and heat surrounding him before Ewyn moved his mouth back to the head.

Holy fucking shit!

The same goddamn kissing, smacking noises Ewyn used on the fruit, he now used to lick and suck up precum. The entire time, Ewyn's prismatic green gaze remained locked with his.

"Goddamn, Ewyn... *Shit!* Baby-boy, I can't...you have to..."

"Mmm-hmm..."

Ewyn had never enjoyed giving head as much as he did right at that moment. He shifted so he straddled one of Devin's thighs, his cock cuddled up against the heat, his own orgasm building. He let Devin's cock slide deeper, the head pressing his soft pallet. Increasing suction, tongue in motion and head bobbing, his fingers tightened on the exposed shaft; hand and mouth worked in tandem.

Surprised to find himself so involved with a stranger and so in tune with Devin's need...his own need...

"Ewyn..."

Ewyn felt Devin's hands clutch his hair, fingers tightening in the curls. Devin's hips kept pace, fucking Ewyn's mouth with intent. Eye contact steady, Ewyn swallowed him down, deep throating, never breaking stride.

"Shit. Ewyn, I'm going to..."

Ewyn relaxed, letting the long, thick cock slide deeper, pressing firmly along the base of his tongue. Wetting his fingers, he eased one into Devin's ass, pushing past the ring of muscle, withdrawing...slipping back in. A second finger soon followed.

"*Fu-uck*, Ewyn...just... *Goddamn!*"

Devin's hips matched the tempo of slim fingers and capable mouth. The low noises Ewyn made in his throat became soft vibrations around his cock, jacking his libido to its limits. Ass contracting and muscles straining, tremors shook his body. His hands fisted the loose curls, and his eyes locked with the steady green gaze, "*Baby...shh-yit!*" Cum shooting, green grayed as his world faded.

Spastic swallowing allowed Devin's spunk to ride smoothly down Ewyn's throat. With his prick snug against Devin's leg, piggybacking the frenetic movement...*oh, fuck!* Heat infused his body and sparked along his spine; his brain disconnected all perceptions but one. Pleasure. His seed pumped out in pulsing spurts over Devin's leg.

Totally drained, Ewyn slumped against Devin's sturdy form, lips sliding to the head of Devin's cock, he continued to suckle long after Devin's spasms ceased. Humming, soft licks, light nibbles, bringing them both down, his nose nuzzled Devin's pubes; he inhaled the unique scent.

Damn if Devin's cock didn't remain semihard as it slipped from his mouth. His tongue made one last swipe and stab at the slit to lap up the brackish flavor, before he crawled up the hot sweaty body. Mouth to mouth, his tongue pushed between Devin's lips.

Devin latched on to Ewyn's tongue, drawing off the lingering taste of his own essence. One hand moved over Ewyn's body, head to ass; the other hand reached for the lube. He slicked up his fingers. One moist finger teased the tightness of Ewyn's hole before two fingers delved into the snug little opening. Ewyn pushed back and seated himself more firmly, riding his fingers, their cocks sliding together.

"*Shh-yit!*" Ewyn hissed and pulled away.

Head lifting, Ewyn had the goddamn nerve to wink and smile before he sat up. Then baby-boy scooted back along his body and straddled his thighs while eyeing his erection, which stood at half-mast. Gripping the bottom of his shaft, Ewyn gently worked both

hands up to the tip before slipping back down; remnants of spit and sperm facilitated ease of movement.

“Goddamn!” Devin pushed up into the touch, cock hardening. “Baby...”

“Mmm-hmm... Love your flavor.” Ewyn leaned forward and licked a trail down Devin’s cock, the residual, bittersweet taste of sperm seasoning his tongue.

Devin shot upright and grabbed Ewyn’s hands, placing them on his chest, he trapped them between their bodies. A lot of good that did when Ewyn’s hips kicked right into a slow, rhythmic rocking. His cock, now hard as hell, rode the crease of Ewyn’s fine little ass.

“Ewyn,” he whispered against the dark curls before dropping back on the bed and pulling Ewyn down on top of him. Baby-boy relaxed against him, Ewyn’s face snuggling up against the side of his neck, breath hot against his skin, and the little tongue teasing.

“You think that was something?” Ewyn rose up to look at him. “I can tie a cherry stem with my tongue.” The tip of said tongue peeked out from between swollen lips. “Imagine the possibilities.”

“Fuck.” His fingers traced Ewyn’s soft lips. “A mental image I did not need after watching your performance with the fruit, then this...hell. I am so primed for round two.”

“Ooo, yeah...feels good.” Ewyn grinned and stretched his legs out on either side of Devin’s body, hips oscillating. “I’m ready when you are.”

Hand cupping Ewyn’s chin, Devin lifted the almost-too-pretty face, mouth hovering. “I could get used to you, Ewyn... *Shit*. I don’t even know your last name.”

“Calderone,” Ewyn whispered just before his mouth covered Devin’s, smothering their laughter.

Ewyn thought he’d go off just from the sensuality of Devin’s kiss. Another thing Devin had going on.

Devin’s tongue teased his lips before running smoothly over his teeth, then plunging deep, withdrawing. Devin sucked on his bottom lip before snagging the tip of his tongue, Devin’s lips closing around it. Devin sucked his tongue into all that moist heat; their tongues danced...the rhythm slow and sultry.

The whole lip-lock, spit exchange seemed a jointly gratifying enterprise, if the moans and whimpers, echoing within their mouths, were anything to go by. Hips rocking, cocks

sliding, Ewyn closed his eyes and fed into the sensations, loving on Devin's taste.

Devin wrenched his mouth away.

Chapter Three

Devin shifted and eased from beneath Ewyn, then straddled his legs. Cock resting on the backs of toned upper thighs and nudging the tight little behind, he worked his hands up and down the trim back. Hardly as calm as he tried to appear, hands trembling, he smoothed them across Ewyn's firm, round ass.

He reached for the lube. Separating Ewyn's legs, he settled between them. "I need a taste of this."

Baby-boy nodded, a low whimper escaping as the cute little butt writhed beneath the touch of his slick fingers trailing along its crease. He inserted one finger, pushing into taut muscle -- snug goddamn fit. Cock bobbing as he shifted, he inserted a second finger. *Shit*. Two fingers stretched Ewyn, filling him.

"Goddamn! You are so fucking tight."

Devin bent low over Ewyn's slim frame. Licking and sucking on a spot behind Ewyn's ear, he had Ewyn squirming like a hyper puppy. He nipped then sucked on Ewyn's lobe before his tongue ran a course around Ewyn's outer ear, mouth returning to nuzzle the slim neck.

Mmm...

Beneath the lingering odor of sex, that scent uniquely Ewyn's assailed his nostrils. The same scent he'd noticed at the bar...hypnotic, drawing him in, while pervading his mind and soul. *Damn*. The entire scent-to-sense thing had his gut tightening with apprehension, forcing him to acknowledge how quickly Ewyn crept in under his defenses.

Snuggling closer, cock nudging Ewyn's balls, his fingers worked the tight little hole, baby-boy's sweet-as-hell moans jacking his pulse. Ewyn's ass contracted around his fingers.

"Going to fuck this ass, baby-boy. Want to..." His mouth moved over Ewyn's capturing the hushed response.

"Something fuckin' fierce, Dev."

Lips touching, mouths open, and tongues stroking, Ewyn shuddered when Devin captured his tongue, sucking on the tip. Devin's hot-ass torso pressed against his body. Closing his eyes, hands fisting, his fingers clutched the sheet as he shifted and spread his knees as he raised his lower body. Devin drew his tongue into all that tantalizing heat, while inserting another finger into his ass, stroking.

Then Devin released his mouth and licked a trail across his jaw to his ear. Squirming, he pushed further back as the rhythm of Devin's fingers increased, tapping his gland on every other stroke.

"Oh... Hell yeah, Dev."

Devin withdrew his fingers. "Ready?"

"Bring it."

Ewyn shivered from the loss of heat as Devin's body lifted away seconds before the head of Devin's cock, hot and moist, nudged the chink of his ass. Big hands settled on his hips. Despite his nervous expectation, he relaxed every damn muscle in his body, liquefying. It had been a while, but...hell. No way could he tell Devin just how long and why. Fuck. He didn't want easy; he wanted to feel the burn. In case he only had this one shot at Devin, he wanted a memory.

Face buried in the pillows, Ewyn spread his knees even further. Devin was a lot bigger than Gareth.

Devin pressed his cock against the firm little hole and pushed forward. He heard Ewyn cry out, most of the sound muffled by the bedding.

Oh, shit!

Tight...hot... Devin continued to ease forward.

In as far as he could go, he held his position. His fingertips idly stroked Ewyn's sides hoping to ease the tension in the slim body, while he contemplated how long he could prolong *his* agony. Hell. Staring down at the sweet little ass, seeing himself embedded up to his balls, he so wanted to slam into the tight heat and ride that ass until both were satisfied.

Except Ewyn's moan wasn't all about pleasure.

Devin tried to make his thrusts slow and easy in an attempt to avoid causing more pain, but baby-boy took the decision away from him. Feeding muffled sounds into the pillows, Ewyn's muscles contracted around him, tight, pulling him deep with his every forward

stroke.

“Oh... Goddamn...Ewyn!”

Hands caressing the taut little ass, Devin watched Ewyn’s slim fingers flex on the sheets. Leaning forward, his hand slid up along the svelte lines of the sexy form, smoothed down across tight abs, then wrapped around Ewyn’s thick cock. His hand kept pace with the combined rhythm of their bodies.

Face snuggled alongside baby-boy’s neck, he lapped up salty perspiration as he licked a path to that special spot behind Ewyn’s ear. There, he leeches on and drew the sensitive flesh into his mouth, pulling hard, while simultaneously withdrawing all but the head of his cock before thrusting forward again. Ewyn went wild beneath him.

Shit.

He wanted slow, gentle... He wanted to savor these first sensations.

“Easy, baby.”

“Damn easy, Dev. Fuckin’ bring it!”

Devin slammed into the tight ass. Ewyn countered his moves, riding his cock, hips gyrating in that delightful mind-of-their-own way. He felt the rush, nerve endings humming.

“Oh... Fuck. Ewyn!”

“Dev...”

Mouths fused together; his gaze sought and held warm shimmering green. Ewyn’s ass tightened around his cock; heat oozed over his fingers. His seed jetted out, filling Ewyn’s narrow passage.

Mind-meld.

Sloppy kisses, tongues sliding, Devin’s breath escaped in short, erratic puffs. Strength depleted, his limbs gave way, and he slumped down on Ewyn’s back, hugging baby-boy close.

Devin held that position until his mind regained its lucidity and his breathing returned to normal. Shifting his weight, cock slipping out, he dropped down beside Ewyn and spooned the lithe body to his. Hands skimming over the cool, damp skin, they settled on Ewyn’s chest where a rapid heartbeat vibrated beneath his palm. His fingers toyed with

a little nipple as he nuzzled the slim column of Ewyn's neck, teeth grazing. His tongue lapped up the salty moisture.

"Mmm...sweet," Ewyn murmured.

"You want to tell me about it, now?" Devin nipped the sensitive skin, loving the feel of the little round ass squirming against his dick. "And please, don't leave out the part about why your last name sounds familiar to me."

Ewyn mentally cringed; he'd fucked up. He'd never given his real name to anyone before. *Shit*. Of all the people to reveal it to... "Must I?" He turned to face Devin.

Unable to resist, he threaded his fingers through Devin's hair before running them across that sweet fuckin' mouth. He so wanted to feel those hot lips wrapped around him. Hell. Gareth never did it; apprehension kept him from suggesting it to this man.

Devin shivered. The enticing stroke of Ewyn's fingers, so easy to go with the feeling; he remained focused. "Ewyn..."

"Maybe you heard it at work?"

"Oh yeah. I've heard the name around work. Not associated with an employee. Try again."

"*Shit...*" Ewyn pulled away and sat up. "All right!"

Teeth gripping the inside of his bottom lip, Devin controlled the laughter wanting out when baby-boy jumped all over pissy. If what he suspected wasn't so serious...hell. If Ewyn had connections to the Calderone family, a name recognizable to most federal agencies...not to mention law enforcement, in general...

"Okay, but no one knows, Dev. You can't..."

"Ewyn."

"Hell." Ewyn twirled and untwirled a strand of blond hair around his finger. "Yes, I'm related to the Calderone family." Damn. He knew it was too good to be true. He had his shot at Devin and fucked it up. He hated the lying. "I don't use the name, for obvious reasons." He might as well get dressed. "I'd better go." He started to get up; Devin grabbed his arm. His stomach knotted.

"Related how? With you working at the shop, how close a relation?"

"Dev..."

Devin's grip tightened, eyes narrowing. "How, Ewyn?"

Trembling, Ewyn's voice came out in a shaky whisper. "My brother is Gregorio Calderone."

"Fuck!" Devin came up off the bed towering over Ewyn. "Your brother?" He leaned forward, then stopped, turned, and started pacing. "Goddamn it! How the fuck..." He raked his fingers through his hair, returning to the bed. "So what...you're a fucking plant!" He reached down, gripped Ewyn's shoulders --

"*Devin!*" Ewyn's hands came up defensively. "It's not what you think." Ewyn cowered against the headboard, his eyes wide and shimmering with unshed tears "Dev...please."

Devin jerked back. "Oh...fuck." Realizing what he'd done, he climbed on the bed and yanked baby-boy into his arms. Ewyn resisted, trying to scramble away; Devin held on. "Ewyn... Stop! I'm sorry... Don't. I'd never hurt you. No matter what or who you're connected to, I swear, I'd never hurt you." Tremors shook Ewyn's tense body. "Damn it! Baby, I'm sorry...please. Don't ever be afraid of me."

Devin sat back and pulled Ewyn onto his lap. Lifting Ewyn's chin, he stared into wide, frightened eyes, the flickering candlelight turning them into pools of emerald green.

"Sorry." He peppered kisses over Ewyn's cheeks and eyes before he took possession of the trembling mouth. His hands drifted up and down taut back muscles until they eased. "Go ahead, baby, tell me."

Threat gone, Ewyn relaxed and snuggled up to Devin's heat, soothed by Devin's voice and hands. *Shit!* He hated the cowering. Why the fuck did he keep hooking up with the bears? Why wasn't he ever attracted to men his own size...someone he'd have a fair chance with in a throwdown? *Damn it...*

"No one knows who I am, Dev. I swear! College...at work, I've used my mother's maiden name...Kelley."

"How did you get by investigations using your mother's maiden name?"

"My father always wanted me disenfranchised from the family business, so, on official documents, Kelley is my last name. With family connections in strategic places, Dad had it set it up from birth. And since the family always called me by both names, Ewyn Kelley, I never thought anything of it, didn't realize the significance until...oh, I must have been about ten. Kids can be so cruel."

"Oh, yeah."

"A few kids at school called me a bastard. Said I was illegitimate because I used a different last name from my family. I insisted I was a Calderone and went home with a black eye, which in turn forced my parents to explain everything to me." Ewyn shook his head.

"They were prepping me to respond to Ewyn Kelley, but believe me, I was never allowed to forget I was a Calderone. There were standards to uphold, and as a child, the entire extended family made sure I remained true to the name."

"So, you were supposed to be a Kelley cousin being raised by the Calderones?" Devin asked. "And no one in your neighborhood was suspicious?"

"Dev, people didn't question the Calderones. The area was mostly Italian and Irish. Calderones controlled the majority. If they said it was so, who in the neighborhood would contradict them?"

"Besides, this wasn't about changing who I am, Dev, it was about avoiding hassles. The family did this to keep me from being held back or stereotyped because of the Calderone name. How do you think our fellow employees would react if I used the Calderone name?"

"Yeah, you're right."

"After college, I came to work for the company with family-arranged identification setting me up as an orphan. No background, no fingerprints on file, no criminal record, so no reason to delve past basic clearance."

"The family... *Fuck!* Baby, you're IS; you have access. What's your clearance?"

"Top...section manager."

"Not just another computer geek. Hell."

"No, Dev, you called it. I'm a computer geek...systems technology, readiness assessment," Ewyn babbled. "What are you going to do?"

"Before we, as in you and I, go any further, tell me... Is this a setup...you being inside... Meeting me --"

"No! I swear. I wouldn't do that. Gregorio wouldn't ask me to do that...please. Greg wouldn't intentionally put me in danger."

Devin stared into beseeching green eyes, probing...*shit!* Was he stupid or what? Damn if

he didn't believe Ewyn.

"Tell me about Gareth. What's his last name?"

"Varvarinski."

"Hmm... I've heard the name before."

"Met him at a family function. My sister-in-law introduced us, which surprised the hell out of me."

"Why?"

"The bitch hates me."

"How did she know Gareth?"

"I guess Greg introduced them."

Brow furrowed, Devin asked, "Why would a Russian heavy be at a Calderone gathering?"

"Gareth and my brother were meeting on the q.t. to discuss business."

"Shit! Sorry, go on."

"I think my brother may have had suspicions about me before, because I never brought women home. I have my mother to thank for him not questioning me about it." Ewyn shrugged.

"My mother said she always suspected, but never asked, because I'm her baby, and she wanted me to do whatever made me happy. Said she didn't understand it, but she'd love me no matter what. She never mentioned her suspicions to any of the family."

"Hmm... I like your mother already."

"Yeah...well, Greg saw me with Gareth, confirming his suspicions, since it's well known Gareth is gay."

"Okay. How does that lead to you living with Varvarinski? Your brother throw you out?"

"No! Greg would never...he didn't ask me to leave. I already had my own place. After college, I tried to live at home, but I couldn't do it, couldn't go back. I needed to be on my own, Dev, needed to get out from under their control. It was my attempt to break

the close ties with the family and to keep my sexual orientation out of my brother's face. I didn't want to be an embarrassment to Greg or his kids...a disgrace to the family name.

"I know it sounds archaic, but tradition, and no other males in the direct line... The family would object if they thought a queer...running things... Didn't want to cause trouble..." Ewyn's voice trailed off.

"Yeah, baby-boy, I know what you mean. The shop operates on similar principles. Ops who swing that way, we're like well-known secrets...the boys' club, a term that takes on a whole other meaning at the agency."

"Yeah, I'd heard about that. Probably considered a member, unofficially."

"My point exactly. And since we do our jobs as well as or better than the majority... Hell. I had to kick a few asses to prove myself when I first came onboard. You'll notice none of us are top dogs." Devin brushed damp, wispy tendrils of hair from Ewyn's forehead. "Does Gareth know your real name, or who you work for?"

"Oh...*hell* no. Cecilia introduced me as Ewyn Kelley, a friend of the family. If Gareth knew my real name, he'd try to use me against Greg. All Gareth knows or cares about my job is I work at a computer company. He is so arrogant. It has never occurred to him to wonder about me, to wonder why he found a computer nerd, unrelated to the family, at a Calderone-only meeting. He blindly accepts the story the family made up about me."

"Why were you there?"

"Bad timing. Stopped by earlier to see my mom; still there when the meeting started."

"Hmm... I know Gareth's abusing you. Why do you stay with him?"

Ewyn looked away.

"What?" Devin reached over and flipped a switch on the wall. Overhead lights bathing the bed in brightness preceded his sharp intake of breath. "*Motherfuck!* I'll kill the goddamn bastard."

Bristling with anger, Devin stared at greenish yellow blunt force discolorations across Ewyn's rib cage and abdomen. Blue-black bruising mottled his upper arms and thighs. Hand trembling, his fingertips skimmed across scabbed-over nail marks along Ewyn's collarbone before he leaned away and looked at Ewyn's back.

"Son of a fucking bitch!"

If he wasn't mistaken, some of the marks resembled shoe impressions. He so wanted to hunt down that Gareth bastard and give him a few lessons in pain management, before he killed him. He made a mental note. He *would* have a one-on-one with the son of a bitch.

"Are you hurting, baby-boy?"

"Not now. It's been a few weeks, well, except for tonight."

"Fuck, this pisses me off," Devin growled. Ewyn stiffened against him. "Hey..." His hands rubbed up and down Ewyn's back in an attempt to calm them both. "I'm not angry with you, but *goddamn it*, Ewyn... Why?"

"Right now, I have no place to go, Dev," Ewyn whispered, eyes shimmering. "I never had to pay my own way before...spent my money as I earned it. I wasn't expecting...wasn't used to not having a ready supply of cash from the family. I fucked up..." His voice trailed off as he swiped the back of his hand across his eyes.

Devin's arms tightened around Ewyn as all sorts of shit -- pain, compassion, but mostly red-hot-fucking-pissed-off rage -- clogged his throat. How could this be? *Hell*. What a dumb-shit question, considering the things he saw in his everyday work world. He didn't understand the concept, or why it was tolerated, but he knew domestic violence wasn't just about women, the poor, or the uneducated.

Still, Ewyn...with hundreds of family connections?

Devin's continued silence had Ewyn's stomach knotting. "Dev?"

"Sorry. Go on."

"I can't go home. Mom lives with Greg and that wife of his, whom I've detested since the day she married my brother. And believe me, the feeling is mutual."

"Yet, you said she introduced you to Gareth."

"I can assure you, it wasn't benevolence. Cecilia always hated how close Greg and I were. Evidently, it wasn't enough for her that I moved out of the house. She started suspecting I'm gay just before I went off to college...making sniping remarks, calling me names -- never within Greg's or my mother's hearing. She introduced me to Gareth to put it in Greg's face.

"Hell. My dumb ass was so enamored by Gareth when I met him; at the time, it never occurred to me to question Cecilia's motives. I stupidly gave up the lease on my place

and moved in with the bastard.”

“Can’t you get money from the family?”

“Explain to Greg or my mother why I need money?” Ewyn snorted. “I hardly think so. And I can’t have a roommate...the family connections, everything would come out, if I shared with someone. My brother made sure I had my own room at the dorm in college.” Ewyn leaned back and looked up at Devin. “Do you know what it costs to get a decent place?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Well, I didn’t, until now. The family paid the lease on my place. Could I be any more naive?” Ewyn shook his head. “As for the rest of the family... For now, it’s like the job...everyone probably knows or suspects, but they won’t ask outright. If I went to any of them, there would be speculation and rumors; I don’t want to embarrass my brother. They’ll accept whatever Greg wants them to know about me, not knowing for sure how Greg feels about it. No one in the family wants Greg as an enemy.”

Ewyn’s breath huffed out in a rush, body sagging, he leaned heavily against Devin. “I’m saving my money to get away, Dev...honest.”

Devin kissed the soft inviting mouth. “Hey... As of this moment, you have some place to go and a place to stay. We’ll get your things tomorrow. Only your clothes. Anything else, leave it...no memories, clean break. Okay?”

Ewyn turned, straddled his lap, and threw those slim arms around his neck. Eyes all wide and bright, baby-boy dove in for a quick kiss.

“Are you sure, Dev? I don’t want to get you in trouble. I can tough it out another month; I almost have enough money. Gareth’s Russian mob,” Ewyn babbled. “He could...might come after you.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Devin laughed, baby-boy all over him like a warm, wriggly puppy. “But he can’t bring me half the trouble I intend taking to him. Soon as I get you away from him and get back to work...”

“He said he’d kill me if I left him.”

“Hmm.” Devin absently toyed with stray curls at Ewyn’s neck, his cock riding the crease of Ewyn’s constantly-in-motion ass. “You don’t seem very concerned about him killing you.”

“Well... It’s not as if I’m all over brave or anything, but self-preservation will make a

person do strange things.” Ewyn grinned up at him.

Devin chuckled. Wouldn’t that be a sight to see? Ewyn in full-out self-preservation mode.

“Honestly, Dev, I don’t know what happened. I don’t know why I let the abuse go on for so long, or why I let the bastard beat on me at all. It was fuckin’ crazy. Considering my background...a family of long-time badasses. As a kid, I held my own with Greg, some of the cousins. They have always been bigger than me.” He shrugged.

“I do know...tonight, in that bathroom, something snapped. Gareth had never been abusive in public before. I didn’t deserve that; I didn’t deserve any of it.”

“Hey. Don’t worry about Varvarinski. He’s my problem now.” Devin leaned forward and snagged that tempting bottom lip, tugging it into his mouth, nibbling, sucking. “Mmm... And I don’t want you trying to ‘hold your own’ for another day, much less another month. Hell. You’re no match for Varvarinski, even if you were a little badass as a kid. As for killing you, once I have another talk with the man, he’ll probably hire someone to make sure you never get a hangnail, much less die.” Devin stared into the depth’s of those mesmerizing green eyes. “Your family doesn’t know Varvarinski is beating you, do they?”

Ewyn looked away. “I’ve been avoiding the family. No one knows but you. Why?”

“What would your brother do if he found out?”

“Kill him.”

Devin grinned. Hell. Ewyn’s brother didn’t have anything on him.

“What?”

“Nothing. Go on, baby.”

“Gregorio’s response to Gareth’s abuse is another reason why I can’t go to the family for money. Gareth thinks him and his crew are so fuckin’ tough, but they’re small time compared to Greg. Hell.” Eyes turning to deep pools of green, glittering with anger, Ewyn glared up at Devin. “Hurt a Calderone...not for long; that’s a given, Dev. So, shit yeah, if my brother knew, he would kill Gareth, and Greg would make it personal...do it himself.”

“Just curious.” Devin refrained from laughing, all over loving baby-boy with his serious on.

Ewyn released his breath on a sigh. "Greg has enough problems with law enforcement. I don't want to be the cause of additional trouble for him from that quarter." He grinned up at Devin. "Although, if Greg wanted to get rid of Gareth, I doubt the body would ever be found. Still, I can't take that chance."

"Okay, I can understand that." Devin's fingers traced along Ewyn's collarbone, and his tone turned deadly. "But, for all of this, your brother will have to get there before me." Their gazes locked; he felt Ewyn shiver.

"If Gregorio finds out you're with me...what?" Devin grabbed Ewyn's hand to stop him tracing circles around his nipple.

Ewyn looked up through those dark lashes, eyes dancing. "He'd want you for himself?"

Devin stared, then hooted and took a quick taste of that inviting mouth. "Seriously."

"Oh... Oh-kay. Since Greg isn't gay by any stretch of the imagination and is very much married...although the bitch he's married to could scare a straight man gay" -- Ewyn grinned -- "Greg might expect our connection to give him some type of immunity?"

"Baby... If we want to be together and make a go of it... Do you understand what will happen if I have to go up against your brother?"

"Yeah." Arms snaking around Devin's waist, Ewyn cuddled closer.

"Can you deal with that...won't try to run interference? You don't owe me any loyalty. Hell. You really don't know me, and I hear it in your voice, how much you care about your brother."

"No, Dev. I want you...want to be with you. Loyalty comes with that." Ewyn yawned. "Never been part of the business. Before Dad died, he made Gregorio promise. Mom insists the family abide by Dad's wishes. I abide by Dad's decision, which is why I work for the same people you do." He yawned again. "As much as I love my brother, the family knows the consequences of what they do."

"Just want to make sure you understand." Devin reached over, flipped off the light, and then he settled down with Ewyn nestled on top of him. "There will be no conflict of interest on my part, Ewyn, regardless of where, or how far, our relationship goes. If I have to, I *will* kill your brother without blinking an eye." His hands wandered over Ewyn's back before settling on the little butt.

"Mmm-hmm... I know. You...use me...no..." Ewyn's voice faded into a soft snore.

Devin remained awake for some time thinking about their fucked-up situation. Damn.

He didn't need this shit. Yet he wanted Ewyn, in Ewyn's own words...*something fucking fierce*.

Moreover, baby-boy had it going on. Ewyn definitely had the Calderone instincts. Sharp enough to question Devin's motives, question whether he'd try to use him to gain knowledge against his brother. Cold-blooded enough to resign himself to the possibility of his brother's death.

A smile teased the corners of Devin's mouth as sleep claimed him.

Chapter Four

The smell of food woke him.

Right on cue, Ewyn's stomach made growly feed-me noises. He snuggled into the bedding; Devin's scent filled his nostrils as he pressed a pillow to his face.

Shit! What time is it?

He did *not* want to deal with this day. Yet he might as well get up and get it done, since he knew Devin would be chomping at the bit with more questions -- hazards of Devin's trade. Without a doubt, he needed to get the Gareth thing finalized.

Hell. Whoever looked out for dumb shits like him worked a miracle last night. To come across Devin at a time when he'd reached desperate overload, then have Devin *want* him, intending to *keep* him. Yeah...one lucky son of a bitch. Shit. If he'd only known, been able to get Devin's attention a year ago, he never would have hooked up with Gareth.

Although...

Thinking back to that time, if he remembered correctly, when some of the women at work were drooling over Devin, rumor-control had Devin locked into a committed relationship. Hmm... Wonder what happened? Dare he ask?

Hell.

Ewyn pulled the pillow away; warm amber eyes stared down at him, moving from his face to where his cock tented the sheet. Showered and dressed, Devin wore jeans and a sky blue T-shirt conforming nicely to well-defined pecs. An all over clean and fresh smell mingled with the scent of pure Devin.

Lowering his eyes to the tray in Devin's hands, he grinned. "Mmm...breakfast in bed.

What time is it?"

"More like brunch, it's almost noon." Devin winked. "Don't get used to this type of service. I'm not usually at home, as you well know."

Ewyn laughed. "Bathroom?"

"Through the door next to the dresser. Extra toothbrush, razor in the cabinet, and don't take all day," Devin grumbled, setting down a tray containing coffee, bottled water, and bowls with fruit. "The food is almost ready. I want to eat while it's hot. Then we go get your things."

Ewyn threw back the covers and rolled out of bed, not bothering to put on anything. Still chuckling, he took his time moseying across the floor, positive Devin's eyes were on his ass. Fuck. If his bladder didn't feel ready to burst, said ass would be all over Devin.

"You *do* want to eat, don't you?"

Ewyn paused in the doorway looking back over his shoulder, eyes wide. "What?"

"Don't fuck with me, Ewyn. I'll take your bad butt right where you stand. Food versus your sexy ass -- we can get something hot from Micky D's on the way to your place."

Chuckling, Ewyn entered the bathroom and pulled up short.

Holy shit!

The room was huge, everything in white, black, glass, and chrome. *Ooo...a bidet. Now that* had possibilities. A little research might come in handy.

He moved to the toilet while looking around in wonder.

Hell. At one end of the room, a glass-enclosed shower stretched across the entire wall. It had a seat, plus body-spray nodules running up the wall along both sides of the knobs and the handheld showerhead.

At the opposite end of the room, a spa bath...huge...a two-seater nestled in front of a floor-to-ceiling window. The bath looked like black marble. He flushed the toilet, then moved down the room for a better look. He knelt on the bottom step and peered over the side. There were seats with armrests at each end of the tub. He grinned. They were on the top floor...total privacy and no need for modesty. The uses they would get out of this bad boy.

Ewyn knelt there staring out the window, the beauty of the whole setup stirring his

imagination. In his mind's eye, he clearly visualized the awesome, panoramic scene the San Bernardino Mountains would present decked out in their winter apparel of snowcaps with green-foliage mufflers. Oh... He could so get used to this.

Losing the smile, he moved to the two-sink vanity; he didn't want to get too happy. He didn't want to jinx his good luck. The sobering thought of dealing with Gareth's shit loomed large, and could well blow up in his face.

He retrieved razor and toothbrush, both wrapped in cellophane. Fingers gliding over cheeks, chin, jaw...he didn't need to shave. He picked up the toothbrush and stared at his reflection while he brushed his teeth.

Hell. These mood swings -- giddy with happiness, then way too morose -- weren't like him. Forever the optimist, before his sojourn with Gareth, he never let things stress him for longer than it took the thought to clear his mind. But damn. If this turned into long-term...with Devin, so far beyond his wildest dreams; he couldn't help but hope.

Shit!

Fuckin' mind babble.

Ewyn snatched a washcloth from the rack and stepped into the shower. He washed and conditioned his hair, scrubbed his body, then rinsed from head to toe. He hesitated to turn off the water, tempted to linger and let the little jet-spray nodules work their magic... Devin had told him not to take all day.

He twisted the knobs, cutting off the pulsating spray and stepped out of the shower. He did a quick towel-dry of hair and body. Then, swiping another towel from the rack, he draped it around his hips. He hurried to rejoin Devin, because sure as shit, he believed Devin would start eating without him. Maybe eat his food too.

Damn if he wasn't hungry.

Ewyn returned to the bedroom and found Devin propped against the headboard drinking bottled water and reading the *San Bernardino Sun* sports page.

"I'm starving. What smells so good?"

Devin looked up. Distracted by Ewyn's body, eyes focused on hips moving toward him as if they had motor skills of their own, he rambled. "Mushroom omelet, maple-flavored bacon, uh...toast with orange-pineapple marmalade...coffee." Brain transmitting signals directly to his cock forced him to adjust his position.

In the light of day, watching Ewyn in motion, the short-shit had an almost too-perfect,

toned body. Defined pecs, arms and shoulders, cut six-pack, nice legs, small feet... *Sexy fucker.*

"There's fresh fruit with whipped cream too."

"Ooo...a gourmet cook." Ewyn leaned over and took a quick kiss before settling on the bed next to him. "I do love me some fruit."

"Yeah...I remember. Eat up. For as long as you're with me, I never want you to go another day without eating."

"Yes, sir." Ewyn filled his mug from the carafe on the tray, added cream and sugar, then took a sip. "Mmm...just the way I like it." He looked at Devin. "I don't intentionally miss eating, Dev."

Devin couldn't contain his smile when smoldering green eyes looked up at him through ink black lashes, sexy-ass smirk in place; already he was "Dev." Hell. He once considered his all-consuming occupation with Allister to be love, but that faded to trivial with Ewyn there.

Ewyn, a virtual stranger, yet... Something about Ewyn made him feel all over warm and fuzzy -- and protective. Considering what Ewyn had been through, the depth of bruising clearly visible in the light of day, baby-boy exuded happy. Ewyn seemed to have a love of life, which he refused to let anything diminish. He needed Ewyn's zest for living to ease the darkness in his soul and give him a purpose.

Devin finished off the last of his omelet and left everything else for Ewyn. He leaned back, paper discarded, content to watch. Baby-boy cleaned his plate, poured more coffee into his mug, and leaned back with a satisfied sigh.

"Hungry?"

"Always." Ewyn smiled and winked. "Oh...you meant for food?"

Devin reached over and took the mug from Ewyn's hands, put it on the tray, and took the tray off the bed, setting it on the floor. He turned back to find Ewyn watching him.

"Come here."

Ewyn crawled all over him as soon as the words left his mouth. Straddling his lap, Ewyn's mouth nuzzled right up to his neck, ass squirming, towel separating...baby-boy's rapidly swelling cock nudged Devin's abs.

"Mmm..." Devin's palm brushed across the moist head of Ewyn's dick. "How old are

you?"

Ewyn leaned away and looked up at him, eyebrow arched. "Why? Think I'm too young for you?"

"How old, Ewyn?" His fingertip pressed into the slit of Ewyn's cock, eliciting a moan, Ewyn's hips rocking.

"How old" -- Ewyn licked and nibbled on Devin's lips, ran his fingers over Devin's soft mustache, then followed the trail as it tapered into the thin line of a goatee -- "do you think I am?" His chin rubbed along the neatly trimmed five o'clock shadow; he inhaled Devin's scent.

"Your skin is too smooth." Devin's fingertips brushed Ewyn's jaw. "Maybe twenty-eight...hell, if that old. Are you even old enough to shave?"

"Wrong. But thank you, and yes, I shave." Ewyn laughed and kissed his mouth. "I'm what you might call a late bloomer, so maybe that's why you think I'm so young."

"What do you mean 'late bloomer'? Are you telling me the dirtbag you were with last night was what...like your first?"

"Well...not first. I had a hard time making up my mind..."

Devin's eyebrows shot up.

"Hey, mister-man...don't go there. I've never been with a woman, never had the urge." Ewyn glared. "I have hands."

"Sorry." Devin refrained from laughing.

"When I say I couldn't make up my mind... For the longest, I wasn't anything but alone and miserable, wanting to be what I thought big brother expected of me, not a happy camper. Found myself sneaking around, checking shit out, not committing. Fuck if I wasn't all over needing, trying to keep up the family image, believing Greg would despise me, if he knew.

"My last few years at Pepperdine University, a classmate and I had an on-again, off-again type thing. We graduated, he moved back home, back east, and I stayed solo until I met Gareth."

"How many, Ewyn?"

"Counting you...three."

"Are you shitting me? The way you sucked me off, you're telling me you've practically no experience!" He watched the stain of embarrassment pepper Ewyn's cheeks and started laughing. Ewyn tried to pull away.

"Hey. I'm not laughing at you. Actually, I'm laughing at myself for not being able to tell." Devin shook his head. "*Shit!* I've been out of circulation way too long."

"Oh...okay."

Devin lifted Ewyn's chin; jungle green met amber. "Come on, baby-boy, don't pout." Little by little, the sexy-ass smirk erased the sulky look.

"Baby-boy, huh?" Ewyn's eyebrow lifted. "I'm not much younger than you."

"Get the fuck out of here! How old are you?"

"You're not going to kick me to the curb when you find out my real age, are you?"

"Ewyn..."

"Okay! Shit. I'm thirty-two."

"Get the fuck out of here! No way."

"Way." Ewyn glared up at him.

Devin started laughing, arms tightening around Ewyn. "You're too much, and I don't intend kicking you to the curb --" His voice skidded to a halt. He'd almost said "ever," binding himself to a relationship with too many outside variables and ominous consequences looming on the horizon.

Fuck. He needed to back up and slow this ride down.

"Get dressed." Ewyn scrambled off his lap and the bed. "I want to get you settled before I check in at the shop."

"Dev... It's Sunday."

"Yeah. I have a few things to look into." Eyes trained on the sweet little ass before it slipped behind silk briefs, Devin asked, "Where does Varvarinski live?"

"He has an estate outside Rancho Cucamonga." Ewyn turned to look at him. "Maybe I should go by myself. His house is well guarded, men all over the place."

"Give me the address." Ewyn rattled off the numbers and street. "Not letting you go back there alone." Devin picked up the tray and headed out the door.

Bottom lip hooked between his teeth, Ewyn stared after Devin. This shit could get ugly. Maybe he should reconsider and call Gregorio, let him handle it. Hell. Now wouldn't that lead to an all-out war, with Devin and his posse coming down on his brother?

Damn.

Chapter Five

Devin took Kendall to Glen Helen Parkway to Interstate 15, headed for the 210 freeway, periodically glancing at Ewyn as he drove. Watching baby-boy run his thumb and forefinger along the crease of his trousers for about the tenth time, he reached over and grabbed Ewyn's hand, fingers interlocking.

"What has you so nervous?"

Ewyn's head swiveled. Mouth open, baby-boy stared at him as if he had lost his mind.

"What?"

"Dev... You're walking straight into hell. Gareth is possessive, he's vicious, and he's not going to let me go without a fight."

"You think?" He grinned. "I'm counting on it."

Since it was midday Sunday, once Devin hit the 210 freeway, he made good time. A step ahead of the gridlock coming out of Las Vegas, it only took twenty minutes to reach the outskirts of Rancho. He exited the freeway on Milliken, headed north to Banyan, then Crestridge, a cul-de-sac, Varvarinski's estate situated at its center.

Ewyn's fingers tightened on his as they drove onto Gareth's circular drive. Just as Ewyn predicted, there were quite a few men roaming about the estate, probably armed.

"Dev... I don't want to do this. Fuck the clothes. I can get more. It's not worth it."

Devin didn't respond. He released Ewyn's hand and put the gear in park, but he didn't move to get out of the Escalade. He sat there grinning, watching Varvarinski's approach, the stupid son of a bitch smiling as if he'd just won the lottery. Ewyn's hand slipped back into his, nails digging in.

Gareth stepped up to the driver's side of the truck. Devin pressed a button, and the glass disappeared between them.

"Yeah..." Devin grinned. "You have a problem?"

"Dev..." Ewyn started; Devin turned on him. Ewyn remained quiet.

"I expected you'd bring my property back," Gareth scoffed. "Once Ewyn told you who you were fuckin' with...once you knew my name."

"Then you're destined for disappointment. Ewyn doesn't belong to you or anyone else." Devin glanced up in the rearview mirror. "However, for the time being, Ewyn is with me." He smiled. "And yeah, your name got my attention. Probably not the way you anticipated." He reached for the door.

"Dev...no!"

Baby-boy wouldn't let go of his hand.

"Ewyn. Now or never. Trust me...believe in me..." Hand immediately released, he leaned over and gave Ewyn a quick kiss.

Gareth's sharp expletive in Russian had Devin glancing over his shoulder to respond, in Russian, "That would imply I know your mother." He laughed at Gareth's stunned expression before turning back to Ewyn and ignoring Gareth's next remarks.

"Thank you, baby." Devin ran his fingertips down the side of Ewyn's face. "Everything is going to work out. Let's go get your clothes." He kept his eyes on a visibly shaken Ewyn.

Despite his obvious apprehension, baby-boy opened the door and climbed out of the SUV. Devin smiled and pushed his door open, knocking Gareth off balance. He stepped down from the vehicle.

"Hey! Who the fuck do you think you are?" Gareth shouted.

"I think I'm the guy you should remember from our last encounter. How's that wrist?"

Noticing Gareth's men closing in, Devin reached in under his seat and retrieved his Beretta before closing the truck door. He turned to Gareth while fastening the belt with his weapon attached, and his identification shield clearly visible. Gareth's men halted in their tracks.

Ignoring Varvarinski's men, eyes narrowed, Devin's quick, scathing glance assessed Gareth's appearance. He wasn't impressed.

Not quite Devin's height, Gareth had swarthy skin, nut brown hair with a slight curl, and his body appeared toned. However, the signs were all there...the slight puffiness under the eyes, probably from too much drink, and the beginning of a double chin. He could easily visualize Gareth going to fat within a few years.

The man wasn't bad-looking, but Devin couldn't imagine what Ewyn ever saw in him. Well... Okay. The man had nice eyes, like robin's-egg blue.

Gareth nodded at his men, started toward Devin, and just as quickly stopped. Eyes wide, Gareth stepped back, his gaze locked on a point beyond Devin's shoulder.

Stomach beginning to knot, Ewyn had noted the stealthy movement of Gareth and his men edging in on Devin, despite the prominently displayed weapon and badge. Fearing for Devin, he headed toward him, not knowing what the hell he could do against so many, but determined to do something.

Fuck it.

He reached in his pocket and retrieved his cell. Who the hell did these people think they were messing with? Regardless of his stupidity in allowing Gareth's abuse, he was a goddamn Calderone...to the bone. Time to step up to the plate and go out like one. Let the shit fall where it may.

Ewyn flipped open his cell and pressed #3 for Gregorio. He glanced over at Gareth, intending to let him know all hell was about to break loose. The sudden look of panic altering Gareth's features had him whipping around to see what the fuck could cause such a reaction. He burst out laughing.

He snapped his phone closed, and ignoring Gareth, he walked up to Devin. "Damn you! Why didn't you tell me?"

Devin leaned down and whispered in Ewyn's ear, then watched two hotspots flare along baby-boy's cheekbones. He so wanted to kiss that soft mouth, but the swarm of black SUVs with dark-tinted windows and blue lights flashing deterred him. He brushed his fingers across the back of Ewyn's hand and smiled.

"Baby-boy, go get your things. My friends and I will wait here for you."

Grinning, Ewyn winked at him and sauntered off toward the house. His eyes followed the seductive wiggle of that cute little ass until it disappeared from sight. Looking around, Devin noticed he wasn't the only one eyeing said ass. He smiled, leaned back against his truck, ankles crossed, and started whistling.

Oddly, he whistled the tune from the movie *Jaws*. The first *Jaws*. The song Richard Dreyfuss, Robert Shaw, and Roy Scheider sang on the boat. Why the hell he picked a tune he couldn't even remember the name of, he couldn't imagine. From time to time, that same damn song would come to mind, and he'd end up humming or whistling it all day.

Gareth turned as if to follow Ewyn; Devin's relaxed pose vanished. "Take one step toward that house, and I'll shoot you where you stand." Gareth whipped around to face him just as Mick strolled over.

Dirt blond hair cut military style, Mick's six-two buff frame sported a black T-shirt and faded jeans accentuating toned legs and thighs. A far cry from the familiar pristine white shirt, black bowtie, paisley silver and black vest, and black slacks Mick wore at the bar; the T-shirt and jeans made him look much more intimidating.

Mick's friends, dressed similarly in dark tees and jeans, sported vests clearly exhibiting large yellow FBI lettering. All wore tactical boots.

Devin chuckled. Clearly, Mick and his friends came prepared to kick ass.

Steel blue eyes dancing, "Yo, Devin. You have friends in some of the damndest places. Me and the fellas were cruising around, recognized your Escalade. Looked like a party about to get rowdy." He winked. "Thought we'd stop, get the scoop." Mick glanced over at Gareth. "Nice neighborhood."

Right eyebrow arched, Devin stared pointedly behind Mick. "A few friends coming along for the ride?" They clasped hands. "I owe you one, Mick."

"Yeah...well... Any more unattached like you at home? I'll take one of those as payback."

Devin stared, then burst out laughing. "Yeah, right. And have Tag hunt me down and kick my ass." He nodded at the man emerging from Mick's truck.

Mick grinned.

Kyrk Taggart, otherwise known as Tag, was Mick's longtime significant other. Several years younger than Mick, Taggart just topped six feet. Caramel-colored skin covering a slamming physique, Taggart kept his head shaved clean, sported a Fu Manchu, and Devin thought the man had a *nice* ass. Jet-black lashes framed and highlighted dazzling eyes described as hazel, which were more gray-green with gold flecks than yellow-green. Taggart had it going on. No way Mick would readily trade Taggart in.

Devin and Mick stood there shooting the breeze until Ewyn reappeared with two

suitcases.

"Did you get everything?" Devin asked.

"No. There's a lot more. I'll have to make several trips."

"Is it all together?"

"Yeah..."

Devin looked over at Gareth. "Maybe your boys would like to help him."

Gareth glanced from Devin to Mick, muttered several expletives, then barked orders to three of his men. Before Gareth moved away, he gave Ewyn a narrow-eyed glare. Devin laughed when baby-boy met the stare head-on, not giving an inch.

"Get in the truck." Devin helped Ewyn put his suitcases in the SUV. "You're not going back in, until they come out."

"But, Dev..." Ewyn glanced at Mick, noticed his avid interest in their conversation, and climbed into the vehicle, mumbling obscenities.

Mick started laughing. "You're going to have a hard time with the baby. He's a real cutie, but I bet he's spoiled."

"Not by that son of a bitch he's been living with. But yeah..." Devin grinned. "I can do spoiled. I think spoiled will look good on him, and give me a purpose."

Mick laughed even harder. "Ring through the nose already? Damn."

"Oh...but baby-boy is *so* worth it. Within limits, he can lead me wherever."

"*Shit!* Lucky son of a bitch. I should have made a move on him before you came on the scene."

"Naw... Then I would have had to kill you instead of Varvarinski there, because I would have taken him from you too."

"Ho-boy..." Mick shook his head, still chuckling. "You've got it bad."

"Fucking A. I can live with that. What's more, unless you're into threesomes, I know you're not giving up Tag, even for someone as fine as Ewyn."

Mick grinned. "You've got that shit right."

Once Gareth's men loaded all of Ewyn's things into the back of the truck, Devin suggested Ewyn go inside to make sure he had everything. Turning to Mick, Devin said, "Be right back. I need a word with our friend Varvarinski."

"Uh...Devin. You can't kill him with all these witnesses."

Devin laughed. "Not my intention to kill. But, if he so much as twitches... I hope he twitches. Then I'd have to give him a short lesson in pain management."

Laughing, Mick replied, "I think I'd better hang around...observe your technique."

Still laughing, Devin strolled away and motioned Varvarinski to follow him. He had a short conversation with the man, then headed back toward his truck.

Mick snorted. "Fuck me! What the hell did you say to the man?"

"Just suggested he stay away from Ewyn."

"Yeah, right. I saw the look on the man's face. You're not going to tell me, are you?" Mick chuckled.

"Can't divulge tricks of the trade." Devin winked. "But hey, thanks."

"No problem. Me and the fellas didn't have a damn thing to do with our Sunday. My time is yours, if there aren't any games on." Mick chuckled. "Besides, being in on scaring the shit out of this dirtbag has point value. The Los Angeles ADIC has a hard-on for your friend Varvarinski. Anything to make this SOB's life miserable, MacGregor's up for it. Hell. I can record the damn games." Mick clasped Devin's hand. "So, like I said, any time." Mick turned and signaled his buddies as he walked toward his truck.

Ewyn smiled at Mick as they passed, then scrambled into the Escalade. He remained quiet as Devin climbed in and started the engine. They had pulled out of Gareth's driveway before he punched Devin on the arm.

"Ow..."

"Nervous looks good on me," Ewyn growled. "Makes my eyes sparkle...makes me look soooo fucking sexy!"

"Well, Mick thinks the spoiled look will suit you better." Devin laughed watching Ewyn sit back, brow knitted, and bottom lip puffed out. Damn he wanted to pull over and suck on that lip.

"You discussed me with Mick?"

"Why the fuck not? I'm not ashamed of who I am, or who you are. Nor am I ashamed of being seen with you. What's more, I carry a gun. Let somebody object...to my face."

Ewyn tried to maintain his angry front; it wasn't happening. He laughed. "So, what did you say to Gareth to make all the color drain from his face?"

"What... Are you and Mick a tag-team interrogation squad? Hell...like I told Mick, can't divulge tricks of the trade."

"Oh. So...you and Mick..."

Devin glanced at him, still grinning. "Mick and I...what?"

"Were the two of you involved?" Ewyn snapped. "Is he the one you were with for five years?"

"Uh-oh. Do I detect a note of jealous --"

"No! Just curious. I mean... Mick's a fine-looking man, for his age...the two of you seem to be on *very* friendly terms, like more than just old friends..." His voice trailed off. Damn. Babbling.

But jealous...

Oh...*hell* yeah. Ewyn couldn't even kid himself. He would be just as jealous of any good-looking man who had such an easy rapport with Devin. *Damn!* Didn't he sound like a world-class asshole, considering he just met the man?

"Hey...baby-boy..." Devin reached over and tilted Ewyn's face toward him. "Don't get your briefs in a bunch. Mick's a friend...period. All it was, all it is, and all it will ever be. We are both extremely alpha. Tops, baby. How could that possibly work? Besides... Did you get a look at the tall, golden-honey eye candy who climbed out of Mick's truck?"

"Ooo...yeah. The Shemar Moore look-alike."

"Hmm... Maybe I'm the one who should be jealous, if you noticed all of that." Devin compressed his lips to keep from laughing at the glare Ewyn turned on him.

"Hey! That's not the same. I only looked...haven't even met him or talked to him, like you..."

"Baby-boy, chill. I'm only teasing. Furthermore, what I want is sitting right here with

me.” He glanced over at Ewyn and smiled. “And Mick is in a solid relationship with your Shemar look-alike, has been for quite some time.”

“Oh...” Ewyn grinned, cheeks warming. “Sorry. My bad. Just a little wound up.”

“Have I relieved your mind?”

“Yes. Because what I need is right here next to me. Everything before is a moot point, right?”

“No memories.”

Ewyn reached over and walked his fingers up Devin’s arm. “I want you.”

“Damn it! Don’t fuck with me, Ewyn. I’m trying to drive here. After watching your ass traipsing around out there, my cock is so goddamn hard, it could reach up and steer.”

“Ooo...steer it this way.”

“Last warning, baby-boy, unless you’re an exhibitionist. Because I’m a half second from pulling this truck over on the freeway.”

“Devin...” Ewyn snatched his hand away. “I’ll be good...promise.”

“Oh, yeah.” Devin winked. “*That* I’m counting on.”

Ewyn’s eyes widened, mouth opened...guppy-in-fish-tank imitation...mouth closed. Baby-boy burst out laughing.

Chapter Six

Shit.

It took them six trips to get all his stuff up to the condo.

Devin wouldn’t let him rest until they put everything away, which wasn’t a problem since the master suite had two huge walk-in closets. Devin had had his second bedroom converted, so Ewyn had his own closet and dressing room behind the bathroom he’d used earlier. Hell. He could get used to this.

Tired and gritty with perspiration, Ewyn headed into the kitchen and grabbed an energy drink from the refrigerator. He popped the top and drank half the can in two gulps as he moved into the living room. He flopped down on the sofa and smiled, thinking about

Devin dragging his butt off the couch every time he tried to rest.

He needed to have a serious talk with Devin about his authority-figure attitude. He'd just left one tyrant...*fuck*. He was grown, worked out, and kept in shape, but lugging all those damn clothes up there took a little out of him. Devin could have cut him some slack.

Devin never broke a sweat during the entire operation. He'd showered and changed when they finished, gave him a quick kiss, and left, going to check in at the office. On Sunday. Well...hell. Definitely an area of Devin's life where questions weren't acceptable, and it worked both ways. His own area of expertise being off-limits as a topic of conversation too.

After he finished his drink, he'd take a shower, change, and then explore his new home.

Damn if he wasn't hungry again.

* * * * *

"He's safe. Settled in with that Devin Nilsson." He dropped down on the sofa.

"You have his address. What do we know about this man?"

"Not a lot, but it's all good." He opened his Day Planner, pulled out a page, and handed it over. "He works for Ryan. Ewyn will be safe with Nilsson."

"Good. And thanks. I'll have this Nilsson checked out, just to make sure."

"Hey...You know why I do it; I don't need any thanks. Besides, you know nothing is going to come up on Nilsson. You checked the company, and what did you get? Bupkus, nada, nothing."

"True. Still..."

"Have you eaten yet?"

"No. You know I've been too upset to eat. Guess I can relax now."

"Yeah. Let's go get something to eat." They stood and headed out of the room. "You need to take better care of yourself. Where's the boss?"

* * * * *

He picked up on the fourth ring. "Yo." He flipped on the light and grabbed his smokes

from the table.

"I have the information. Do you know Varvarinski?"

"The fuckin' Russian. Wasn't he at the meeting? The guy Ewyn hooked up with."

"Yeah, that's the one. Ewyn's not with him anymore."

"Oh..." He lit a cigarette, took a long drag, then exhaled. "Hell. Whatever you want with him, I can take care of it myself."

"No. If you're involved, it will come back to me. That's why I'm going with the Russians, but I don't want Varvarinski. He won't play by my rules. Hire some of his men. Make sure you get people who won't talk to the cops or Varvarinski."

"That won't be hard, no loyalty there. Fuck. You should see them under interrogation. They're better at it than our people. For the right price, none of them will talk." He reached for the ashtray and stubbed out his cigarette. He stood up, scratching his gut as he headed for the bathroom. "You have a schedule for this?"

"How long to get it set up?"

"A day or two."

"Good deal. Here's what I want you to do."

* * * * *

He must have fallen asleep.

Ewyn opened his eyes to find Devin standing over him. "Hey."

"Hey, yourself." Devin dropped down on the sofa. "Tired your bad ass out, hauling all your shit up here, huh?" He pulled Ewyn on top of him.

"Shit..."

"Shh...just kiss me." Devin staked claim to Ewyn's enticing mouth. "Have you eaten?" he asked when they surfaced for air.

"No." Ewyn moved back in for another kiss.

"Mmm...love your taste," Devin murmured. "Want to shower with me?" He nipped Ewyn's nose and sat up. Ewyn nodded and wrapped around his body. Devin clasped the

tight little butt and stood, heading for the bedroom. "Shower, then I feed you."

"Food...shower... You're going to make me fat, but I'll be one clean, fat fucker."

"Hey... I enjoy taking showers, especially with the right company. And I have the perfect exercise for burning calories and keeping you in shape, which can be done in the shower." He winked; Ewyn laughed and nipped his bottom lip.

"Dev... Right now, I'm the happiest I've been in...damn. Months, years, maybe my entire adult life. However, between Greg, Gareth, and the job, being with me could bring you more trouble than I'm worth." Tongue delving into Devin's mouth, Ewyn threaded his fingers through the soft blond hair worn loose today. Groaning, he pulled away.

"Are you sure about this, Dev...about me living here?"

Devin stopped moving, brow furrowed, he stared into wide green eyes. "More trouble than you're... *Fuck!* Ewyn..."

"Hey! I just want you to be aware..."

Devin smothered his mouth, cutting him off, the kiss brutal. Devin dragged his mouth away, dumped baby-boy on the bed, and flopped down beside him.

"Ewyn, I know what I want, and I know what I'm doing. *Goddamn it!* Don't *ever* let me hear you put yourself down again!"

"What? I'm not putting myself down, and I'm not trying to make you angry. Please... I just want you to be aware --"

"No! And stop looking at me like that. I told you last night...no matter how angry I get, I will never hit you, or intentionally hurt you." He turned away from Ewyn, raking his fingers through his hair. "The survival of this relationship shouldn't have anything to do with outside influences. Agreed?"

"I hear you, but..."

"There are no buts." Devin stood and stripped out of his clothes as he moved across the room. "I'm going to take a shower. Coming?" He walked into the bathroom.

Ewyn took his time undressing, worried about pissing Devin off, which wasn't his intent. Hell. The moment his eyes met Devin's in that mirror at the Fox, he'd sensed something, as if he'd found his other half, that part he'd been seeking all those years of indecision. Then Devin kissed him, made love to him...didn't just have sex with him for Devin's own self-gratification. It felt so right; he felt complete. And it scared the shit out of him, not

knowing if he could trust his instincts, not after Gareth.

In a matter of hours, Devin had provided him with a home where he could feel safe. A home equipped with a man who wanted to take care of him, spoil him...love on him. A man who gave him hope and made him think loving could be reciprocal. Damn if he wanted any of those outside issues to fuck it up. He just wanted Devin to recognize the possibilities.

Shit.

By the time Ewyn reached the bathroom, steam rising above the enclosure filled the room. He opened the shower door, paused, and stared, mesmerized by Devin's slick, buff frame. Head thrown back, legs braced apart, and ass glistening, Devin's water-drenched hair hung loosely down his back, stray tendrils clinging to his shoulders.

Stepping inside the shower, he moved to the seat and sat down. He could sit and watch the kinetics of Devin's naked, powerful body all day. He reached out and traced a circle around Devin's innie with the pad of his middle finger. Devin groaned, abs jumping beneath his touch. He leaned forward and drew the surrounding skin into his mouth, sucking hard enough to mark, while his tongue darted in and out of the tiny crevice. Devin's cock nudged his chest.

Ewyn looked up. "Dev..."

Devin reached down and hauled him up against the hard slick body. Large hands cupped his ass -- perfect fit. Amber eyes glittering with anger held him entranced.

"I know it's going to take a while...*fuck!* Ewyn, do you know *why* I'm pissed right now?"

Ewyn shook his head, unable to utter a sound, hypnotized by the varying hues of those tiger eyes.

"First... Don't ever put yourself down again. Understand?"

"Dev...I wasn't...I..."

"Understand?"

"Fine! Fuck it." Jungle green eyes glittering with temper, Ewyn glared.

Devin compressed his lips to keep from smiling. *Goddamn*, he loved it when Ewyn got pissy, because he really hated seeing the opposite...the trepidation in baby-boy's eyes whenever he raised his voice.

"However," Devin went on, "that's not what pissed me off. I'm pissed because you're afraid of me."

"No...I..."

"Baby-boy... I see it in your eyes every time our discussions get a little rowdy."

Ewyn's right eyebrow arched. "Rowdy?"

"You know what I mean." He grinned. "I know it's going to be a hard adjustment, letting go of the fear of getting your ass kicked because you don't agree with somebody. But I swear, I will never intentionally hurt you. Hell. Look at my size compared to yours. Only a coward strikes out at someone so much smaller than himself. Do you think that's who I am?"

"Dev...no! I'm sorry, I'll work on it." Ewyn toyed with Devin's hair, nervously twirling wet strands around his fingers. "Promise."

"Baby, it's not something you work on. It comes with trust." Devin stepped back and sat on the seat with Ewyn straddling his lap, cocks sliding together nicely as Ewyn's hips set into motion. "And stop apologizing. You're entitled to your anger. Throw a shit-fit, pout...hit me. I swear, I will *not* hit back. Okay?"

Ewyn chuckled and leaned in for a kiss. "Okay."

Devin leaned back and stared deep into a sparkling green glow highlighted by droplets of water shimmering on the tips of coal black lashes. Ewyn's flashes of temper made him wonder how far he could push Ewyn, made him wonder if Ewyn could be pushed too far; it made him curious to see what Ewyn would do at that point. Hell. He needed to do something to let Ewyn know the reality of being able to push back without consequences. He wanted to do something to ease Ewyn's constant apprehension.

"I'm going to try my damndest not to get pissed every time you cringe away from me. Once you feel comfortable..." He laughed.

"What?"

"You do know how to get pissy, baby-boy. I suspect it won't be long before you relax enough to trust me." He brushed damp, curling hair from Ewyn's forehead and kissed the tip of his nose.

Damn.

Devin couldn't believe how hard he'd fallen for Ewyn, in just a matter of hours. Then,

how could he not when baby-boy was so accepting, so loving...how could anyone want to hurt someone like Ewyn? Hell. If Ewyn had stayed with Varvarinski much longer, the bastard probably would have broken Ewyn's spirit completely, or killed him. Fuck if he didn't want to kill the son of a bitch for the debasing anguish Ewyn had endured.

Devin smoothed his hands up over Ewyn's back, then down to cup the firm, rounded contours of Ewyn's ass. He recaptured Ewyn's mouth, sucking on the soft tongue, drawing off the intoxicating flavor. His fingers teased Ewyn's tight little hole. "Mmm..." If he kept that up, all too soon it would become a done deal.

He relinquished his hold and shifted Ewyn to his feet. "Come on...wash up. I'll meet you in the bedroom." He kissed the tip of Ewyn's nose again, swatted the cute little butt, and stepped out of the enclosure.

Ewyn stood staring at Devin's silhouette through the misted glass.

Damn.

The man was a hard-core killer, no doubt. Their company operatives were so scary, other DOJ departments didn't want to know about them, most didn't acknowledge they existed. Factor in the deadly force indicative of that type of work, Devin's size, and his demeanor when angry, for Devin to possess a sweet, compassionate nature...

Oh... Goddamn! I'm in love.

Ewyn washed and rinsed his hair, then stepped out of the shower. He snatched a towel from the rack, blotted his hair, and patted his body down; he tossed the towel in the hamper. While he flossed, brushed, and gargled, he peered closely at himself in the mirror. Cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling, dumb-ass grin on his face...*shit*. He liked the feelings accompanying that look about him, and he wanted to maintain both.

He sure as hell hoped Devin had it right about the cowering eventually becoming a moot point, because, for now, he didn't know how to stop it. He couldn't let his guard down to trust.

He grabbed the blow dryer and dried his hair while he looked around wondering who cleaned the condo. With Devin gone more times than not, the place was spotless.

Ewyn tidied the room, turned out the light, and stepped into the bedroom. Brought up short by the sight before his eyes, mouth open, he just stared.

Flickering candlelight everywhere, the mellow sound of jazz emanated from the stereo. A bottle of wine, two glasses, cheese, crackers, and grapes were on a tray in the center of the bed. Devin sat propped against the headboard, wearing nothing but a smile and a

hard-on.

Laughing, Ewyn hurried across the room, rapidly filling cock leading the way.

“Dev...”

He couldn't take it all in, the things Devin had done for him so far, in a matter of hours. Disregarding the shit their connection might cause, Devin's patience in coaxing his skittish ass along, and the spoiling... A hell of a fuckin' commitment on such short acquaintance.

Ewyn stepped up to the bed, and Devin hauled him onto his lap. Mouths merged, tongues sliding. His cock leaked on Devin's stomach; Devin's cock prodded the chink of his ass. Devin's fingers moved through his hair, fisting, tugging.

“Do you know what I want?” Devin asked.

He shook his head, shuddering as Devin's palm skimmed across the head of his cock.

“I want a taste of this.” Devin smiled, thumb pressing on the moist slit. “Then,” he whispered against Ewyn's mouth, “I want to watch you ride my cock...” Ewyn's tongue teased his lips. “Watch you come.”

“Oh...fuck yeah, Dev. Want it too.”

“But first... Wine, cheese, fruit...you need to eat. After we satisfy our carnal appetites, we'll have dinner.”

Ewyn snorted. “Dinner? I wasn't in the bathroom that long. You did not have time to prepare dinner.”

“Having it delivered. Come on, eat.”

“I'm not helpless, you know.” Ewyn slid off Devin's lap, flipped the wall switch, then reached for the wine. He filled the two glasses and handed one to Devin. “You can stop babying me. I did live by myself for a while, without servants.”

Devin smiled. “And what did you eat when you lived by yourself? Pizza, burgers, other takeout...when you remembered to eat.”

“Well...yeah.”

“And you complain about me making you fat.” Devin sliced the cheese. “If you didn't get fat from eating that shit, fat is not in your destiny.” Ewyn opened his mouth to

Devin fed him a slice of cheese on a cracker. Eyes sparkling, Ewyn sucked on Devin's fingers before letting him withdraw his hand. He leaned back against the bed; Ewyn fed him grapes.

Devin stroked Ewyn's cheek. Damn. Acting like a love-starved asshole, and he couldn't stop himself. He wanted this so badly; he wanted Ewyn so badly. He never knew he could feel this deeply about another human being. Hell. He wasn't even sure what to call what he felt; not even twenty-four hours had passed since he'd met Ewyn.

"Dev..."

"Hmm?"

"Who does the housecleaning?"

"A service comes three times a week."

"Should I..."

"No. I don't want you doing anything."

"I'm not fuckin' helpless, Devin. Don't treat me like I am."

Eyes narrowing, Devin stared.

"And while we're on this topic..." Ewyn glared, voice tight. "I'm not stupid, either. I'm organized, I have a degree, and I'm quite capable of logical thinking."

Eyebrow raised, Devin's mouth opened.

"Hey! Don't goddamn go there. Gareth...well, most of the time I think logically." Ewyn frowned. "The point is...you do *not* need to dictate my every action, or put me on some goddamn schedule. Been there, done that."

"Really." Devin tried not to laugh. Watching the storm build in those pretty green eyes, he knew he should back off, but he couldn't pass up this opportunity. He laughed.

"Fuck you! And stop calling me baby-boy. I'm not that much younger than you!"

"Baby-boy... What *are* you getting all bent out of shape about?"

Ewyn stared, chest heaving and teeth clenched. "Stop...making...fun...of me... Devin."

"Or what?" Devin sipped his wine, watching Ewyn over the rim of his glass. Ewyn

started to move away; Devin grabbed his hand. "Calm down. I'm just teasing."

Ewyn snatched his hand away and slid to the edge of the bed.

"Come on, baby-boy, don't pout," he goaded.

"Pout...baby-boy..." Ewyn whipped around and hurled the glass in his hand.

The glass missed Devin's head by mere inches, splintering; shards tapped his cheek, and wine splashed his shoulder; he didn't even blink. He kept his eyes on Ewyn, who jumped to his feet, eyes wide...*shit!* There it was...the fucking fear. Ewyn appeared paralyzed with fright, rooted to the spot.

Devin cursed under his breath. *Hell!* What did he expect? He'd pressed the issue too soon.

"Ewyn..." He stood and warily made his way around the bed. He reached out; Ewyn's hands came up defensively.

"Dev, *please*... I didn't mean..."

Devin saw the fight-or-flight look enter Ewyn's eyes, and he edged closer; he caught Ewyn around the waist just as baby-boy tried to escape. Arms flailing, Ewyn fought to get loose.

"Ewyn... Stop."

Baby-boy continued to struggle.

Keeping his voice low and calm, Devin tightened his arms around the thrashing body. "Baby..." His lips nudged Ewyn's ear. "Listen to me. You didn't do anything wrong. My fault. I deliberately provoked you. Now, I'm going to let you go before you hurt yourself. Don't run from me."

He released his hold; Ewyn took off.

Devin caught him before Ewyn reached the door. He grabbed Ewyn's arm and swung him around; Ewyn's fist connected with his cheek. He started laughing, which gained Ewyn's attention. Baby-boy stopped struggling and stood staring like the proverbial doe-in-the-headlights.

He took advantage of Ewyn's astonishment, grabbed Ewyn's bad butt, and carried him back to bed. He tossed Ewyn across the bottom and came down over him, pushing between Ewyn's legs. Tempestuous green eyes gazed up at him.

"Are you okay, now?" Devin could feel tremors rattling the slim frame; he kissed the trembling mouth. "Did you get it all out of your system?" He laughed. "You have a mean right hook."

Voice a shaky, breathless whisper, Ewyn asked, "What are you going to do to me?"

"Baby-boy..." Devin grinned down at Ewyn and wiggled his eyebrows. "First, I'm going to feed you, and then I'm going to fuck you senseless. Any objections?"

A tentative smile. "Stop..."

Devin put his fingers to Ewyn's lips. "I'm not going to stop calling you baby-boy. That's who you are to me." He nibbled on the pouty bottom lip. *Hot damn*. He could feel the tension easing from Ewyn's body. Maybe it wouldn't take long for Ewyn to understand, after all. His fingers brushed damp tendrils of hair from Ewyn's forehead.

"But, Dev, I broke your glass...there's wine everywhere..." Ewyn's voice notched up an octave. "I hit you! I'm..."

"Stop." Devin pressed his hand over Ewyn's mouth. "*If* you say you're sorry, I *will* beat your ass." He grinned to take the sting out of his words. "So you have a temper, *well* hidden behind your victim façade. You used it on me, nothing happened. So maybe we can move past all that, huh?"

Unable to resist the temptation any longer, cock drilling a hole in the mattress, Devin shifted, moving up Ewyn's body, he took total possession of that enticingly kissable mouth. Slim arms snaked around his neck and hugged him tight, Ewyn whimpering. Hell. He could lie there for the rest of the night just feeding on Ewyn's mouth, drugged into complacency by the taste.

The doorbell chimed; Devin pulled away. "Fuck!" Seeing Ewyn's startled look, he brushed his fingertips along the side of Ewyn's face. "Hey...dinner's here."

Devin stood, moved across the room, and grabbed his robe from the back of the door. Headed out of the room, he looked back over his shoulder. "I'm going to clean up the mess, then food. Put something on and come eat."

Ewyn remained on the bed staring at the empty doorway.

What the hell just happened here?

Devin wasn't angry. Devin wasn't going to beat him down for fighting back. Devin actually laughed when he punched him. Could he trust this man not to hurt him?

Damn if he didn't hate the fuckin' whine he heard in his voice, the flash of panic, the fear knotting his gut... *Shit*.

He could get used to this kind of loving.

Ewyn grinned, then laughed aloud as he came up off the bed and headed for the closet to retrieve his robe. He'd start hanging his robe on the back of the door with Devin's, since they probably wouldn't need anything on in the bedroom, wouldn't need robes unless they left the room...maybe not even then...if they were alone most of the time...*damn*.

Mind babble.

Being this goddamn happy made him lightheaded.

"Ewyn..."

Startled, he swung around and hit Devin before he could stop himself. "Oh...shit. I'm..."

Devin's eyebrow arched.

"Fuck it, then."

Devin laughed and hauled Ewyn into his arms. "Baby-boy, you *are* a quick study."

Ewyn grinned, feeling heat infuse his cheeks.

"Pretty soon you'll be kicking my ass."

Sobering, Ewyn pulled away.

"What?"

"I don't want to hit you. Did I hurt you...your jaw... I don't want hitting, Dev."

"Aww, shit. Fuck dinner. Come here." Devin dragged Ewyn over to the bed, sat down, and pulled Ewyn down beside him. "Didn't you ever roughhouse with your brother?"

"Yeah...and then some."

"So you know the difference. You know what abuse feels like; you know the boundaries. You're already learning I won't hit back, no matter what." He lifted Ewyn's chin. "Look at...*damn*." Devin found himself staring into dull, sad eyes.

"Ewyn." He took Ewyn's hand in his, palm to palm, "Look at us. My big paws...your small, almost delicate bone structure doesn't compare. Hell. Hit you...I'd probably kill you with one blow. Baby, I'd leave before I'd hit you in anger.

"This..." Devin touched the skin beneath his eye. "You didn't hurt me. I'll probably bruise...no biggie. Trust me?"

"Dev! Trust you? I've put my life in your hands...without question. I think I'm already in love with you. That shouldn't... I mean it's only twenty-four... That's not supposed to happen."

Devin laughed, happier than he could ever remember feeling. He fell back on the bed dragging Ewyn on top of him. "Oh, baby-boy, I feel you." He moved in for a long deep kiss, then surfaced for air. "Come on, food's getting cold. I have roasted chicken, asparagus, and twice-baked potatoes waiting."

Ewyn's eyes widened. "Delivered?"

"Oh, yeah. For the right price, you can get just about anything delivered." Devin sat up; Ewyn slipped from his lap. "Let's eat, talk, and get to know each other. Fresh fruit for dessert." He winked. "With whipped cream."

Ewyn's sexy laugh warmed his heart.

Chapter Seven

Six months.

Ewyn couldn't believe it. He had been living with Devin for six fuckin' months, and Devin kept his promise...no hitting. However, they argued...a lot.

Devin refused to stop calling him baby-boy and insisted on treating him as if he were helpless. Said he wasn't treating him that way; Devin called it spoiling him.

Hell-lo...argument.

Of course, Devin said they weren't arguing, just voicing a difference of opinion, friendly debating.

Hell. Sometimes their play turned damn combative. He'd get pissed, hit out; Devin never hit back. Devin teased and aggravated him on purpose, allowing him to have his own opinion, and vent without getting the crap beat out of him. Devin's attitude

annoyed the shit out of him because Devin enjoyed it so much.

Then again... Afterward...

The loving, whether playful or combative, outweighed the aggravation on levels he never knew were possible, and had only teased his imagination in the past.

Devin had been in and out on short-term assignments quite a bit since they had been together, but this time he had been gone for two consecutive weeks. They hadn't seen or spoken to each other in all that time and, contrary as it might seem, he missed the spoiling and the arguing. He missed Devin, and he worried about him, about his safety.

Nonetheless, he couldn't let his fear rule, or he'd turn into a nagging, neurotic bitch. Devin's life revolved around his job, so he needed to be supportive and resigned to the situation.

Likewise, he had travel time. By no stretch of the imagination as hazardous as Devin's, but Devin would be in his position if he went out; he would expect quid pro quo.

Damn.

He shouldn't be wasting his time off stressing about things he couldn't control. Not on a Saturday, at one o'clock in the afternoon, when he'd just woken up and had plans to do nothing except kick back. He wasn't *even* going to dress, since he didn't have anywhere to go.

Hell. He'd worked his ass off the last two weeks. Fuckin' rookies. Screwing with the programming, thinking they knew everything, they'd tried to fix a runtime error without knowing what the hell they were doing. He'd worked last weekend, and stayed late two nights in a row this past week fixing their fuck-up, which put all the support departments behind. The little assholes were at the top of Data Entry's shitlist.

If that wasn't enough aggravation, add the raised eyebrows, quizzical looks, and the subtle questions he received the first day he drove Devin's SUV to work. Quite a few people were still giving him the inquiring expression when they saw him getting in and out of the truck. Hell. He gave an off-the-wall explanation about car sitting the first day, then gaffed it off, refusing to explain further. It wasn't anybody's fuckin' business.

Damn.

Starting to sound like Devin, and that couldn't be a bad thing.

Grinning, Ewyn hopped out of bed and headed for the shower. He washed his hair, towel-dried most of the moisture, slipped on clean briefs and cutoffs, and went into the

kitchen. Maybe he'd work out after he ate.

Surprised the hell out of him when he first explored the condo and found the family room converted into an office and workout room. Complete with the necessary equipment...three-station workout bench, treadmill, recumbent bike, it even had a freestanding punching/kick bag, and a speed bag. Devin bought another desk so he could have his own office space.

Ewyn took a melon out of the refrigerator, flipped the switch on the coffeepot, and started laughing. Wasn't he the little domestic, remembering to put coffee in the coffeemaker at night? He even had the timer set for the workweek.

Of course, Devin had weaned him off caffeinated coffee. He had been there about two weeks when he mentioned they were almost out of coffee. Devin told him he didn't need the caffeine. Hell. No argument from him. It wasn't as if caffeine gave him a boost; he only drank it out of habit. He liked a hot drink in the morning, and tea didn't do it for him.

Devin did let him finish the caffeinated, probably left over from Devin's ex, since Devin, the freak, didn't drink coffee. Drank what Devin called energy drinks, which Devin made every morning from a combination of fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables. Devin tried to get him to drink them too. He tried them, and they were all right, but he refused to give up his hot drink in the morning.

Devin caved, called him spoiled, but he retained his hot drink, albeit decaf. Besides, Devin bought him the flavored kind, so he didn't complain.

Shit. Devin had him eating all the right foods, eliminating practically all junk food from his culinary repertoire. If Devin wasn't away, Devin made their lunches...nutritious shit. Devin taught him how, and what to combine to make a proper brown-bag lunch. Hell. Devin had him so programmed to eat right, even with Devin gone, if he ate out, he went to a restaurant, sat down, and ate a proper three-course meal.

Damn. Devin would be weaning him off the decaf next.

Devin continued to take the fuckin' spoiling to a whole other level by refusing to let him pay for anything. Devin put him on his credit card accounts for all household expenditures, said Ewyn's cards were for personal use only. He objected; Devin suggested they use his money and cards for special occasions or vacationing.

Vacations.

He hadn't done vacations since he moved away from home. Moreover, after leaving home, he didn't have anyone he wanted to share vacations with, and he didn't want to

go alone.

Living with Devin, the money he saved could add up to some serious savings, and a nice investment portfolio. Combined with his trust fund, which he would gain control of when he turned thirty-five, he would be pretty fuckin' wealthy. So, shit yeah. They could do some serious vacationing.

Thinking of wealthy, he had the impression Devin had a personal source of income, like maybe from old money or an inheritance. A person didn't live like Devin on a government salary, unless you were a top dog or double-dealing, which didn't *even* fit Devin's personality. Hell. Devin never talked about family, and he hadn't worked up the courage to ask.

Ewyn had taken the eggs, cheese, and milk from the refrigerator when the peal of the doorbell had him moving toward the front door. Brow furrowed, teeth tugging on his bottom lip, he peered through the peephole, jerked back, and stared at the door. The bell chimed again.

Fuck!

Hand shaking, he released the security latch and reached for the knob. He took a deep breath, then opened the door.

"Mom. What are you doing here...does Greg know?"

His mother reached up and lightly slapped his face. "Ask me in, before you start the interrogation. Didn't I teach you any manners?"

"Mom..." She pushed by him and strolled into the room.

"Oh, I like this. Where's this Devin?"

"How do you know who I'm living with?"

"Yes, I'd like some coffee. Have you eaten yet?" Mairianna Calderone asked, moving toward the kitchen.

Ewyn stared after her -- all five feet nothing of his slim, feisty, red-haired Irish mother.

Dressed to perfection, she wore a white linen pantsuit and a silk blouse matching the color of her blue-green eyes. Two-inch pumps the exact shade of her blouse encased her tiny feet. Small, white-gold hoop earrings dangled from her ears, and a white-gold choker lay at the base of her neck. Her wedding rings, which she now wore on her right hand, and a white-gold bangle watch were her only other concessions to jewelry.

"Mom!" She stopped and looked back at him. "Why are you here...how did you find me?"

"Coffee. Then talk."

Ewyn sighed and followed. "It's decaf. Cinnamon."

"Ooo...sounds good. Never had that before. Any French vanilla creamer? Bet that would go nice with cinnamon coffee." Looking around, she settled down at the table. "Where are the cups and saucers?"

Ewyn rolled his eyes as he removed two cups and two saucers from the cabinet, knowing his mother wouldn't expect him to drink from a mug, either. "I was going to make a cheese and mushroom omelet. Do you want one?"

"No, thanks. It's way past noon, Ewyn. I've had breakfast. It's lunch time."

"Did you come here just to chastise me?"

Ewyn moved about the kitchen, filled cups, took the creamer from the refrigerator, and then he placed everything on the table. He sat across from his mother and waited.

"So... Looking good, son. You working out, eating right? I'm glad. This Devin obviously treats you better than that rabid dog you were with before. I want to meet Devin."

"He's working."

"On the weekend?"

"He travels." Ewyn released his breath in a quick rush. "How did you find me?"

"Your brother isn't the only one with his ear to the street."

"Ground, Mom."

"What...? Oh." She waved her hand in dismissal. "Whatever. You think because I'm a woman I don't know what's what. Your father taught me everything he knew. Just because I choose to stay out of it..." She shrugged.

Cup halfway to his mouth, Ewyn gaped.

"Oh yeah. If this Devin hadn't gotten you away from that bastard beating on you, I would have had him castrated, then killed."

"Mom! How..."

"I know everything, Ewyn." Her eyes narrowed. "Don't ever doubt it." Nodding, she went on. "All the lies, the reasons you kept avoiding the family, putting off our lunches... Busy, traveling... Covering up for that bastard..."

"No, Mom, I did --"

"Bullshit! And I couldn't openly inquire about you without your connection to the family coming under scrutiny. The moment I found out for sure about the beatings, I wanted to do something about that Russian, but couldn't find a way to get it done without Greg finding out and getting involved. Then what? More trouble with the law.

"I hoped you'd come to your senses." Mairianna looked over at him, tears forming in her eyes. "Why, baby? Why would you tolerate it? You're better than that. You always kicked ass with your cousins; they're twice your size. You never let Greg get the best of you. What happened?"

"Mom, I was a kid then, things were different. The fighting... I don't know. With Gareth...I thought I was in love, thought it was part of the loving." Ewyn shrugged. No point prevaricating with his mother; she'd eventually get it out of him.

"The first time Gareth hit me... I fought back; I always fought back. I didn't just stand there and let him beat me. After the fight, he apologized, said he didn't mean it. He seemed sincere, and for weeks afterward, he acted as if he really loved me; he treated me as if I were special. I let Gareth dupe me, Mom. I thought I loved him, so I wanted to believe he loved me.

"So, yeah, I was making excuses. But not for him...for me. It became a vicious cycle of stupidity on my part."

"Honey, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry it wasn't what you were looking for. Love isn't about that kind of pain. He needs to die."

"What?"

"That Gareth. He doesn't deserve to breathe air."

"Oh. Don't worry about him. It's over. Gareth's out of my life. As tough as he thinks he is, being with Dev will keep him away from me, at least until I get my act together.

"Mom, I had reached the breaking point when Dev got to me. I'd had enough. I thought I'd have to tell Greg or kill Gareth myself. That scared me."

"I know, baby. Scared me too, thinking it might come down to that. It's in your blood." Mairianna handed Ewyn her cup and saucer. He went to the counter, refilled her cup, and then he returned to the table. They sat in silence for several minutes, just sipping their coffee.

"It's been six months, Ewyn... Don't give me that look. Yes, I've been keeping tabs, giving you time to settle in. Are you happy here, baby?"

"More than I can put into words." He grinned. "Dev spoils me; I think he loves me, and now I know he'll never physically hurt me."

"Do you love him?"

Heat infused his cheeks; he nodded.

"Good. Put the food away and get dressed. You're taking me to lunch."

Laughing, Ewyn stood up, gathered their dishes, and rinsed them off before putting them in the dishwasher. He returned the food to the refrigerator and headed out of the kitchen. "I'll be just a few minutes."

He returned dressed in jeans, knit shirt, and Top-Siders, smile still hovering. "Where do you want to eat...Black Angus?"

His mother smiled up at him and looped her arm over his as they walked toward the door. "How did you know?"

Ewyn grinned down at her as he bent and kissed her cheek. Dining out, during the day, his mother always went to Black Angus.

They rode the elevator in silence to the underground parking garage where he led his mother to the Escalade, helped her in, and waited until she settled. He moved around the truck and started smiling when he suddenly remembered that first night Devin brought him home. He didn't know the place had underground parking, and when he found out and asked about it, he didn't know if he should feel insulted.

Devin told him it wouldn't have been worth his time going to his assigned space if things between them turned out to be just a slam-bam-thank-you thing. Fuck if that wasn't a sobering thought.

No sooner had Ewyn opened the driver's door...

"Nice. Devin's?" Mairianna looked around the interior.

"Yeah, Mom." His mother knew he didn't own a vehicle. "And don't start. I don't need a car, and yes, I know Greg will give me anything I want." He rolled his eyes, breath escaping in a forced rush. "What I want is to be on my own."

Mairianna snorted. "Living with this Devin isn't on your own."

"You know what I mean." He climbed into the SUV.

"What's that?"

"What?"

"What's a dirty knife doing on the floor behind your seat?"

Ewyn grinned. "Mom. If you knew what...never mind. I have no idea."

Hell. He couldn't tell his mother about the knife, not after her comments about Gareth. Actually, it surprised him to see it still there. He'd been driving the truck for two weeks and never noticed it. Devin must have forgotten he threw it there.

"I'll take it out when we get back. Can't throw it away, might be something Dev needs."

"A dirty old knife?"

"Mom... Does Greg know where I live?"

"Ewyn, please. If I know...what do you think?"

"Shit!"

"Watch your mouth."

"Sorry."

"Your brother wants you to be happy. It'll take time for him to adjust; he never wanted you to move out. He's been cursing himself every day since you left, but he thinks you're happy, so he doesn't interfere. If this Devin makes you happy..."

Ewyn snorted.

"You ought to thank me for keeping what I knew about that bastard beating you under wraps. I let Greg believe you were happy there, all the while praying *you* wouldn't kill the bastard. Then what? Have the law on your ass too? Have your connection to the

family come out? It was making me ill.

"As long as you were seen every day and appeared to be in good health, no visible bruising... I tried to find a solution, Ewyn. If I could have moved someone in close to the son of a bitch..." Mairianna glanced at him.

"Your Devin works at your company...that's nice, you'll have things in common. He's in computers too?"

"No, Mom. He's in sales. That's why he travels a lot."

"Sales, huh." She chuckled. "You have that answer down pat, don't you? If you weren't driving, I'd slap you."

"Why? What did I do?"

"What...you think because your aunt Gemma, my sainted sister-in-law, and I despise each other and don't talk, I wouldn't find out the truth?" Mairianna asked. "Don't look so surprised. I only acknowledge she exists because she loves you as if you were her own."

"Hell. The minute you hooked up with your Russian, I had him investigated. While my sources checked him out, I had them look into your so-called computer company too. Every time I asked your brother about your company, he'd tell me to leave it alone...told me to stop babying you. He told me to let you handle your own business."

Ewyn snorted. "So, what do you think you know?"

"I know your company is part of her husband's organization. I know Gemma's husband is the reason you were able to get the job and pass their security process."

"Mom...how..."

"Your father's old acquaintances keep me in touch with things. And your company... So deep in the network of governmentocracy, my sources said their contacts at the FBI, DEA, and US Marshals couldn't tell them anything, or wouldn't. Most of the agencies my people spoke to were unwilling to talk about your people, something about spooks. What's that about?"

"Mom!"

"You're right, don't tell me. But know this...I have my ways, Ewyn."

"Obviously. Damn." He automatically dodged the slap aimed at his head, so used to his

mother's ways. Grinning over at her, he asked, "Does Greg know?"

His mother gave him the look. The "boy...please" look.

"Let's just say, what I know goes no further. I'll keep Gregorio in line." She laughed. "I'm sure Greg would like to get on the good side of your Devin."

"You've got that right. Especially since he knows Tim's stand on the matter." Ewyn pulled up outside Black Angus and put the gear in park. Smiling, he said, "I love you, Mom."

"I know. Right back at you, baby." Mairianna leaned over for his kiss on her cheek. "I'm proud of you, Ewyn. Your dad would be proud of you too. If only he could have lived to see you graduate. Greg running the business, you going to college, getting a real job...always your father's plan. Hell. You were supposed to be a girl."

"Mom!"

"What? Back when you were born, I didn't trust all those new-fangled things in medicine. I put more belief in the old women who sat around predicting the sex of the child if a woman carried a certain way. According to several of them, you were supposed to be a girl." Mairianna smiled over at him. "Why do you think you're so pretty?"

"Mother, stop. I'm a man; I am not pretty." He grinned. "Relatively good-looking...not pretty."

"Yeah...you think. I bet that's why your Devin is so captivated by you."

"You haven't seen Dev. He wouldn't be considered pretty, but he's got it going on."

"I know. I've seen his picture, and whoa... Take a few years off this old lady..." His mother laughed, blue-green eyes sparkling.

"Mom!" Ewyn snorted. "I'm not *even* going to ask how or where you saw Dev's picture. You're too much."

"Seriously, baby. You were so pretty when you were born...all lily white, ink black hair, gorgeous green eyes...cute little chubby cheeks with dimples. And I'm not talking about your face."

Ewyn gaped. "Mom, stop. You're ruining my appetite."

Ignoring him, eyes dancing, Mairianna went on. "Your father fell madly in love with you the moment he saw you. Surprisingly, despite the age difference, Gregorio did too. Your

brother worshiped you. Hell. He still does. He'll come around."

"I believe Greg loves me, Mom. He's not the problem, per se. How's that bitch he married? She's the one stoking the flames of discord."

"Cecilia's still as bitchy as ever. I know her game, so she usually stays as far away from me as she can."

"I'll never understand why she doesn't like me. We barely know each other, yet she's always trying to instigate something between me and Greg."

"She's a greedy bitch, baby, she wants it all. She thought the house belonged to Greg when she married him. Finding out it's mine until I die doesn't sit well with her. She tried to get Gregorio to buy them their own place. Hell. She makes herself miserable, and she tries to make everyone else just as miserable. Forget her." Mairianna laughed.

"Now, feed me, I'm starved."

Chapter Eight

They entered the restaurant and waited to be seated.

Once settled, Mairianna ordered a white wine; Ewyn ordered a Grand Marnier. When their drinks arrived, they placed their orders for lunch. Mairianna ordered baked potato soup, the rib eye with sautéed sweet onions and mushrooms, and a fresh vegetable medley. Ewyn chose the crispy jumbo shrimp, garden salad, and steakhouse fries.

"We'll have the soup and salad with our meal," Ewyn told the waitress as she collected the menus, and then he turned to his mother.

"I still don't get it with Cecilia. Her getting the house or any damn thing else...what does it have to do with me?"

"Baby, she's jealous of your relationship with your brother. She resents the amount of money Greg spends on you, not realizing the money is yours...the interest from your trust fund. Your father set it up that way. And she feels threatened because she and Greg didn't produce a son; you're the heir. If she had a son, he would usurp your position; she would be set for life."

"Stupid bitch." Ewyn shook his head. "When you die, the house belongs to Greg. If Gregorio dies, she can have the house. I won't want it. What the hell would I do with a house that size?"

"Ewyn... If she had any smarts, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"But can't she see what she's putting Greg through? Why would she do that to him? He gives her everything she wants."

"Everything but love." Mairianna smiled sadly. "Baby, there has never been any love between Greg and Cecilia. Your brother only married her out of duty to your father. Her father and your father were like brothers growing up in Italy; they made a pact. They promised their eldest male and female children would marry."

"Damn. How come I never knew about the planned marriage?"

"You were young...it wasn't important." Mairianna patted his hand. "Forget her, baby. She is not worth your time. Trust me. Greg let her do what she wanted so he wouldn't have to deal with her bullshit, and because she's the mother of his children. But now that Greg knows what Cecilia has been doing to undermine his relationship with you, she is nothing to him."

"It seems like such a waste, Mom. She could be happy if she put her mind to it and stopped trying to do a job on everybody else."

"Baby, she won't be saying anything about you to Greg again." Mairianna laughed. "That's for damn sure. So, tell me... What happens if this Devin doesn't work out?"

"That's not going to happen. I feel this in my soul...me and Dev."

"Perhaps. But I'm worried about that Gareth bastard." She looked at him. "He'll come after you."

Ewyn shrugged. "Maybe. *If* I'm not with Dev...he might."

"Baby, he's Russian...vengeful."

He snorted. "Like Italians and Irish, which Gregorio and I are a combination of, aren't vengeful...your fiery temperament and Dad's implacable fortitude. I'm telling you, Mom, I had reached my breaking point with Gareth. And for sure, I'm pissed at Gareth for hurting me without provocation. But I'm angrier with myself, and embarrassed, for staying and letting him beat on me, for whatever reason...for accepting. I refuse to let anyone demean me again."

Ewyn reached across the table and took his mother's hands. "In the short time I've been with Dev, I've learned how loving is supposed to work; I have my head screwed on right. So yeah, if Devin and I split, I hope the man isn't stupid enough to come after me. If he does, Greg can deal with him. I don't want to go there."

"I know, and I don't want to see you go there. Do not try to handle him on your own."

"Trust me, I won't. Unless Gareth gives me no choice."

"Okay, baby. Enough said about that son of a bitch and the heifer your brother married. Don't want to ruin our lunch." Mairianna laughed, waited while the waitress served their food, and then started eating.

Ewyn smiled at the waitress, ordered another wine for his mother and a Perrier for himself.

"So tell me all about your Devin. I like him already. There's such a change in you; I have to attribute that to Devin." His mother gave him a look. "Does Devin know your real name?"

"Yes. No secrets between us."

"Hmm. He can accept that...your name, considering what he does for a living. What happens if Devin and Greg butt heads, Ewyn? And we both know that's a possibility." She glanced over at him. "What happens to your relationship if Devin is the one who pulls the trigger and Greg is on the receiving end?"

"Dev asked me the same thing our first night." He looked up from his meal. "I am not prepared to give up Dev, no matter what, and Dev won't compromise. Besides, for now, Gregorio comes under FBI jurisdiction, not Devin's turf. If Greg does stray into Devin's area of expertise, Greg should worry more about Tim than Devin."

"True."

"So, what about you, Mom? Would you be able to accept it, not hate Dev for it?"

"Baby, Devin would be doing his job. Can't fault him for that."

"That's not what I asked you."

Mairianna laughed. "Whoa... Maybe this thing with you and Devin is the real deal. You getting all huffy with your momma on his behalf."

"Mom..."

"Baby, you work for the same people. What if you had to pull the trigger? Do you think I would hate you or disown you for doing your job?" Mairianna shook her head then sighed. "Your uncle, my brother, God rest his soul, was a cop, and he would have

arrested or killed your grandfather, your great-uncles, and your father in a heartbeat, if necessary. Thank God, it never came to that, but I still would have loved my brother. It's about a right and wrong thing. Of course, that's the Catholic talking."

"I'm going to make this work, Mom." Ewyn handed the waitress his credit card. "I don't want to be alienated from you if it should come to a throw-down between Dev and Greg."

"I would never blame Devin if that happened. Baby, it would kill me if I lost both of my sons at the same time." Mairianna patted his hand. "It won't come to that. Promise."

"I hope not. Because you have to understand -- Dev comes first." He signed the credit card receipt, then helped his mother to her feet. He guided her out to the Escalade.

"What about your uncle, Ewyn? You haven't told Devin about him, have you? You don't think that secret can blow up in your face?"

"It's not the same thing. There's no conflict of interest; it shouldn't be an issue."

"It's about keeping secrets from someone you profess to love, baby."

Ewyn sighed. "You're right, and I've been thinking about it. I'm just not sure how to tell Dev."

"Well, the relationship is new; you'll find a way. I hope you're right about it not being an issue. But tell Devin soon. Don't let him find out on his own."

"Yeah, I will." He headed back toward the condo. "Where'd you park?"

Mairianna reached in her purse and retrieved her cell phone.

"Oh... Didn't drive, huh?" He chuckled. "How is Pat? Still as feisty as ever."

Patrick McCormick, the family driver/bodyguard had been around for as long as Ewyn could remember. All six-five, two-hundred-plus pounds of ex-boxer, Patrick used to be his bodyguard. He'd spent many happy hours with Patrick during his youth. After all those years, Patrick remained with the family and continued to be as devoted to Ewyn's mother as he'd been to Ewyn and his father.

"He'll meet us in front of your place. Come say hello. It's been a while."

Sure as shit, when Ewyn drove onto the parking lot, his mother's metallic silver Mercedes was parked out front. Patrick's large frame, dressed in light gray slacks, black Doc Marten's, a black button-down shirt, and a light gray vest, leaned against the back

passenger door. Still intimidating, still a fine example of the male species, the man didn't seem to age.

Ewyn pulled up behind the Mercedes, helped his mother out of the Escalade, and handed her over into Patrick's capable hands.

"Hey...Pat. Looking good for an old man."

Ewyn clasped the big hand held out to him. *Shit*. He remembered Patrick being big, but he'd forgotten the reality of it. Slightly taller than Devin, bulked up about the same, Patrick kept his head shaved, sported a neatly trimmed, reddish brown Fu Manchu, and his deep blue eyes always held a twinkle.

"Pipsqueak." Patrick winked. "I need to take you to the gym, teach you new defensive skills?"

Ewyn looked down at his mother already seated in the back of her car. "Mom..."

"Don't *Mom* me. Who do you think my source is? Hell. I had more trouble keeping Pat off that son of a bitch's ass than worrying about Greg finding out."

Heat strafed his cheeks, but Ewyn met Patrick's gaze head-on. "Yeah...well, it won't happen again."

"Oh, I know." Patrick grinned. "For now, your Devin will see to that."

Ewyn shook his head. Hell. Why bother? He would never truly escape the family.

"Come on, Pat, I have some shopping to do." Mairianna looked up at Ewyn. "Lunch next month, baby?"

Ewyn smiled, bent and kissed his mother's cheek. "Yes, Mom. That would be nice."

* * * * *

Ewyn sighed as he unlocked the front door.

His mother would never change. Hell. He needed a drink, something strong; he'd settle for an energy drink and a hot shower.

He moved toward the kitchen, then stopped. Head tilted, he listened. The faint sound of music came from the bedroom; he did a one-eighty and headed in that direction. Smiling, he pulled off his shirt as he went, body vibrating with anticipation. Devin was home.

Ewyn reached the bedroom and found it empty, an open garment bag on the bed. Then he heard the water and chuckled, moving toward the sound. He did love him some slick, passionate shower sex. Stripping out of the rest of his clothes, he strolled into the bathroom.

Overwhelmed by a hot, muggy mist clouding the mirrors and the frosted glass of the shower door, he could barely discern the outline of a male form. He grinned and crept over to the enclosure; hoping to surprise Devin, he snatched open the door...

"Who the fuck are you?"

"More to the point...who are you?" came the amused response. "How the hell did you get...oh... The cleaning crew?" Dancing hazel eyes ranged over Ewyn's body. "Hmm... They let you clean in the altogether." The stranger laughed. "Be out in a minute."

"Cleaning..." Heat warmed Ewyn's cheeks as he gaped at the naked, toned physique of the stranger. Eyes narrowing, he growled, "Bastard. I live here. Who the hell *are* you?"

"That's odd." The man grinned. "I'm Allister, and I've lived here for the last five years. Never ran into you before."

Ewyn stared. Allister Teague, Devin's ex. Devin had told him about Allister, and on the q.t., he'd asked his friend, Darrell Smalls, section chief of IS Investigations to let him have a peek at Allister's file. A lot of grinning, winking, and nodding passed between them, and he'd let Darrell assume he had a personal interest in Allister.

The picture didn't do Allister justice.

In the photo, Allister had long blue-black hair -- now cropped short -- but the same laughing, luminous hazel eyes stared down at him, mocking him. With a physique almost as daunting as Devin's, Allister wasn't quite as tall as Devin, but Allister topped his short ass in bulk and height. He wasn't impressed, and he couldn't imagine what Devin ever saw in the man.

"Hmm... The bastard who left Dev without explanation," Ewyn mocked. "Well, you selfish son of a bitch, you can get dressed and get the hell out. You don't live here anymore."

"Is that what Devin told you? Yet I still have a key." Allister chuckled. "Listen. I don't know who you are, or why you're here, and frankly, I don't give a shit. Playtime over. I'm not the one going anywhere. I'm back to stay."

"So, to avoid further awkwardness, I suggest you leave before Devin returns and shows

you what he prefers. Uh..." The bastard's eyes roamed over Ewyn's body, a smirk altering the contours of Allister's mouth as if he found Ewyn lacking. "You don't appear the type who can take that kind of blow to your ego."

Brow furrowed, Allister continued to stare at Ewyn. "You know, you seem familiar. Do I know... *Shit!* You work at the shop." He hooted. "Just a substitute. Devin knew I'd come back. He's been using you, kid."

Red-hot anger burned deep, and without thinking, Ewyn hurled himself at Allister. They went down, Ewyn knocked breathless.

"Son of a bitch!" Allister quickly recovered and flipped Ewyn, his arm hooking around Ewyn's neck. "You're not needed anymore, you little bastard. Your usefulness is over. Leave before you force me to hurt you. Believe me, you're no match."

Ewyn knew he wasn't a match for the son of a bitch, but he didn't care. Temper out of control, he tried to free himself. Devin had taught him a few maneuvers, assuring him size wouldn't matter if he used the right tactics and motivation. Well, fuck yeah...he just leaped all over goddamn motivation.

The way the bastard looked at him, as if he were dog shit on the man's shoe... Oh...*hell* no. His ass wasn't fuckin' accepting defeat or humiliation, not this time. His mother said it earlier...he was better than that. He squirmed trying to get free.

"Hold still," Allister hissed next to his ear, applying more pressure, "or I'll snap your fucking neck."

Ewyn ignored the command and continued to struggle, feeling the constriction building in his lungs. He tried to draw a deep breath...gasping, coughing...he clawed at the arm pressing against his throat; he couldn't breathe. Body thrashing, legs kicking, and feet scrambling, trying to find leverage, he put his all into his attempt to break free. It wasn't happening...he didn't want to go out like this...lose Devin...*shh-yit!* Vision blurring, he felt faint...

Allister's arm and the pressure suddenly disappeared.

Restrictions gone, Ewyn drew a deep, shuddering breath before attempting to rise. Feeling lightheaded, with his hands braced against the wall, he crawled upward until he gained his feet. Fuck it. Win or lose...he swung around...

His heart skipped, eyes widening, he backed into the corner, the old fear returning, rapidly eroding his newfound resolutions.

Devin stood there with Allister in a chokehold, blazing amber eyes on Ewyn.

"Are you okay?"

Ewyn nodded and relaxed, seeing concern and...something...some unrecognizable emotion registered in the fiery amber gaze.

Devin released Allister, spun him around, and decked him. Poised over Allister's recumbent form, he roared, "Have you lost your goddamn mind, going after him that way?!"

"Fuck!" Rubbing his jaw, Allister rose to his feet. "The little shit attacked me. I defended myself."

Devin looked at Ewyn, eyebrow arching, and a slow smile eased the tension in Devin's jaw. He pushed by Allister and stepped over to Ewyn. Reaching around baby-boy, he turned off the water. "Come here." He pulled Ewyn close, fingertips brushing damp tendrils of hair from Ewyn's forehead. "I missed you."

Hands moving to clasp the almost-too-pretty face, head lowering, Devin stared into shimmering green eyes. Their gazes locked, saying more than any amount of words. He took full possession of Ewyn's sweet mouth, ignoring Allister's sharp expletive.

After he had his fill of Ewyn's intoxicating taste, Devin turned to face Allister, pulling Ewyn around in front of him. With Ewyn's back and ass pressed firmly against his body, his arms snaked around the slim, sexy form. Hands splayed across warm, damp abs, he held Ewyn close, nuzzling his neck.

"Oh, baby-boy, I so needed that."

From behind damp denim, Ewyn could feel Devin's cock pressing against his ass as it filled. Face infused with heat, Ewyn snuggled in. For Devin to do this in front of somebody...proving beyond a doubt how much he meant to Devin... Feelings Ewyn never knew he possessed warmed his heart and buoyed his spirit. If this was love, then his feelings...what he considered love, until that moment, paled in comparison. In his wildest dreams, he couldn't imagine love like this actually existed. Tears stung the backs of his eyes.

Devin kissed Ewyn's neck, then looked over at Allister. "What are you doing here, Al?"

"What the fuck do you mean? I live here."

"Since when? You made your decision several months ago. Took *all* your stuff. What could you possibly want now?"

Ewyn remained quiet, watching and listening to the exchange, happy as fuck; his turn to smirk. Hell. If Devin released his hold on him, he'd float.

"Devin..." Brow knitted, Allister's glance settled on Ewyn. "Can we talk in private?"

"No. Get dressed. Go back to whoever's been keeping you the last several months. It's not happening here for you anymore. Understand? And leave the *fucking* key!" He felt Ewyn tense beneath his hands. *Damn it.* All his work with Ewyn fucked up in a couple of minutes.

"Baby..." Devin nipped Ewyn's earlobe, feeling Ewyn relax, he smiled. "Why don't you dry off and go get in bed." He smacked the fine ass moving away from him. "I'll join you in a few."

Ewyn looked back at him grinning, green eyes sparkling. Baby-boy grabbed a towel and glanced from him to Allister before leaving the bathroom. The minute the door closed behind Ewyn, Devin turned on Allister.

"The *only*...god...damn...reason you're still breathing just left this room."

"Fuck you! I don't need this shit."

"Yeah. You made that perfectly clear some months ago. See you around."

Allister moved to the door, opened it, and started to leave, then paused. He turned back. "'Baby' is right. He won't last...he's not me. He'll never be man enough for you. You'll want me back."

Ignoring Allister, Devin removed his backup weapon and laid it on the vanity. He restarted the shower, stripped out of his damp clothes, and moved toward the hamper.

He closed the door in Allister's face as he passed.

* * * * *

Ewyn sat propped against the headboard, towel wrapped loosely around his waist, he watched Allister dress, then repack his garment bag. Motions brusque and jerky, anger radiated from the man.

Ewyn's relaxed front wasn't all it appeared, since he didn't know what to expect from the bastard. He could only hope with Devin close by, if anything, it would remain a battle of words. Whatever. Devin had made it clear who he wanted, so Ewyn wasn't backing down.

Allister zipped his bag with a snap. Ewyn tensed when angry hazel eyes homed in on him.

“You think he’s yours, don’t you, you little son of a bitch! Well, you won’t last. You’re not man enough to hold onto Devin.” Allister snatched his bag off the bed, turned and started toward the door; Ewyn’s laughter brought him up short. Allister turned back, eyes narrowing.

Ewyn glanced at the bathroom door, then back at Allister.

“You know... I’d *really* like to thank you for what you did for me today. You can’t *even* imagine. However,” he remarked, his smile vanishing, “whether I last or not, one thing should be absolutely clear, even to an egotistical bastard like you. Devin *won’t* be taking you back.”

For several seconds, eyes smoldering with fury, Allister glared at Ewyn, hand clenching and unclenching, before Allister turned and stormed out of the room.

Ewyn relaxed against the headboard, grinning, his hand gliding down over his body to his cock.

Oh...hell yeah. Devin is mine.

Chapter Nine

Devin stepped under the hot, steamy water and fell back heavily against the wall.

Damn.

He ran a shaky hand over his features, fingers raking through his hair. Knees barely keeping him upright, he moved to the seat.

Hell!

Allister just didn’t know how close he had come to dying.

Son of a fucking bitch.

Devin came home eager to see Ewyn, heard the running water, and rushed to the bathroom intending to surprise baby-boy. Instead, he stepped into the room...into surreal...time moving forward in slow motion... *Fuck!* He didn’t think anything could scare him shitless; he thought his heart stopped.

Comprehending the reality, Allister with Ewyn in a chokehold, and Ewyn lying lifeless, seriously hurt or worse, Devin went berserk, going for the kill. Then he heard the sweet sound of Ewyn's sharp intake of breath.

Shit.

Even now, the thought of baby-boy going up against a cold-blooded killer... He didn't *even* want to think about what would have happened if he hadn't arrived when he had, or... Oh...*goddamn!* If he had followed his usual procedure and checked in at the shop, instead of coming straight home...hell. He never had reason to rush home before.

Devin weaved his fingers through the tangle of wet hair and leaned back, relaxing against the tile. A slow smile tilted the corners of his mouth as his mind replayed the picture of Ewyn rising up off the floor, standing naked and defiant, body glistening under the downpour of water, his fists clenched. Those sweet green eyes...shimmering with tears, blazing with fury...*fuck*. He had to give Ewyn props. Baby-boy had balls and continued to be a source of surprise and amusement. Pride and admiration for Ewyn touched his heart, sealed his fate.

A bark of laughter escaped him. Ewyn...not man enough for him? Allister's insinuation was so far off base. Hell. He had to wonder if he qualified as man enough for Ewyn's bad ass.

Damn.

Devin bolted up from the seat realizing he needed to get to Ewyn before baby-boy went into stress mode, worrying about whether he did something wrong, or if Devin was mad at him. Ewyn's display of bravado aside, baby-boy still had nagging insecurities hovering quite close to the surface.

Devin made short work of washing up. He briskly towel-dried his hair, tidied the room, and grabbed his gun as he flipped out the light. He stepped into the bedroom; his feet stuttered.

Candles lit up the room; classic R & B played in the background. Ewyn, relaxed and smiling, waited for him on the bed, his cock peeking out from beneath the towel...inviting.

"Baby-boy, are you okay?"

Devin placed his gun on the dresser and hurried across the room. He climbed on the bed, leaned against the headboard, and tugged Ewyn over to him. Slim arms wrapped around his neck as Ewyn's mouth covered his; baby-boy climbed all over him, straddling his lap, then finally settling.

Surfacing for air, Devin tilted Ewyn's chin up to feast on those sexy eyes that haunted his thoughts during his absence. "Did he hurt you?" Gleaming in the candlelight, petulant green eyes glared up at him.

"*Hell* no. It's a good goddamn thing you arrived when you did. I was about to kill his bitch ass."

"Whoa..." Devin hooted, arms tightening. "Had a can of kick-ass today?"

"Goddamn right." Ewyn laughed and dove in for another kiss before pulling back. "No more beatings, Dev...no more humiliation. He said you would kick me to the curb for him, then he called me kid..." Tone deadly serious, Ewyn frowned. "If I have to go down, then I'm going down like a fuckin' Calderone."

Eyebrow arched, Devin compressed his lips to keep from smiling or laughing. Baby-boy had his serious on and looked so fucking cute, getting all pissy.

"Dev... Don't be angry with me, but I am a Calderone, no matter what name I use. And I'm taking my identity...that personality back."

Devin grinned. "Oh, baby-boy, I love you...missed you." He hugged Ewyn tighter. "Goddamn, I missed you." He reached for the lube. "I need you even more. It's been a long two weeks, and you can be any-fucking-body you want to be, as long as *you* know, and everyone else knows, you're mine."

"Dev... No shit? You love me. Really?" Ewyn squeaked.

Devin stared into prismatic green eyes mirroring all of the love he felt for Ewyn. "More than I ever imagined I could love someone so soon, baby." Devin kissed the smiling mouth. "These last few weeks, you were constantly on my mind. Thinking about holding you, sleeping next to you...fucking this sweet ass." He smiled. "Probably have carpal tunnel...hand working overtime because I couldn't stop thinking about you."

Hearing Ewyn's breathy seductive laugh, and feeling that fine ass wriggling on his cock, warmed Devin's heart, soothed his soul. He eased down, head propped on the pillows, he slicked up his hard-as-fuck dick before slipping two fingers into Ewyn's tight little hole.

"Mmm... I want to watch you, baby-boy. I love watching you. You put your all into loving. I like seeing it, feeling it...being a part of it."

Feeling heat strafe his cheeks, and knowing he had his goofy-ass expression on, Ewyn was overwhelmed with emotion clogging his throat. He shifted, pushing back on Devin's

fingers, he babbled. "Me too...love you... Hell yeah, I'm yours...oh... Oh, fuck..."

Gazes locked, Ewyn readjusted his position and eased down on Devin's cock. Leaning forward, he snagged Devin's bottom lip, nibbling and sucking before his tongue insisted on entrance to the inviting warmth. He parted Devin's lips, delving deep, then withdrawing. Humming, moaning... Ewyn rambled disjointedly.

"Full... Missed you, missed this. So fuckin' hot...love you... Oh, shit, Dev!"

"Oh yeah. Feeling you, baby." Ewyn's agile hips kicked into motion, riding his cock, setting the pace. "Missed this ass, this beautiful fucking cock."

Devin's hand grazed across the head of Ewyn's dick; moisture coated his palm. His hand glided down along the hot, silky-smooth shaft before closing around it, keeping pace with the motion of those mobile hips.

"Baby-boy, I'm hurting something fierce. Come on, give me what you've got."

"Oh...shit, Dev. Need this...you."

Devin sat up, arms and hands bracing Ewyn's body as baby-boy raised his knees, pulling them back, cradling Devin's sides. Their mouths fused together, tongues dancing...his happy sounds mingled with Ewyn's nonsense. Ewyn shifted to his knees, and their rhythm became erratic. He tried guiding Ewyn's pace -- not happening. Baby-boy had control.

"Oh...fuck! Ewyn..."

Ewyn held on tight as Devin tensed, murmuring Ewyn's name. Feeling the burn, limbs trembling, his fingers fisted the tangle of damp blond hair. Hot spunk shot into his ass just as he felt the rush starting to build. Heat singed his toes, surging... His sperm jetted out, spattering their bodies. Whimpering, he rode the waves, his ass milking Devin's prick, drawing out the remaining seed in short, pulsing spurts.

Hearts tripping an identical cadence, souls speaking a similar language, their mouths fed on the love. They remained locked in each other's arms for some time.

Reluctant to give up the moment, Devin dropped back on the bed, cock slipping out; he drew Ewyn down on top of him. Having Ewyn's warm, supple body stretched out along his, snuggling in, and the slim fingers threading through his hair, he breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"You know, I should be wiped after being on the road for several hours. I came home with the intention of showering, fucking you senseless, and then crashing." He kissed

the top of Ewyn's head. "Now I feel energized, wide awake. It's as if I don't want to lose a moment of the time I have to spend with you."

"I feel you." Ewyn kissed the side of his neck. "Love you."

"Back at you, baby. Hungry?"

"Mmm-hmm..." Ewyn lifted his head, eyes dancing. "We are talking about food, right?"

Devin laughed. "Yes..."

"Then I'm starved. I don't know what it is about living with you, but I seem to be hungry all the time."

"That's a good thing, especially since you're eating right." Hands smoothing and kneading Ewyn's ass, he asked, "What do you want? I can order something, cook something...what?"

"Hey! I can cook. I can wait on you for a change."

"Hmm. I like the sound of that. Deal. Shower first?"

"Oh, yeah."

Baby-boy swooped in for a quick kiss before sliding off him and the bed, heading for the bathroom. Ewyn sauntered across the floor at a snail's pace, giving him a nice long look at that little round ass, the pearlescent glow of their sperm speckling ass and thighs. Cock taking note, Devin jumped off the bed and eagerly followed.

"How did it go while I was gone?" Devin asked, stepping into the shower. "Besides Allister... Any problems?" He dropped down on the seat, content to sit and watch that sexy body in motion; the majority of the bruising had faded. Ewyn came over and straddled his lap, baby-boy's dick filling and pressing against him.

"Well, there were a few raised eyebrows when I drove the Escalade to work."

"Fuck them."

"Yeah...my sentiments exactly." Ewyn kissed Devin's mouth, sucking and nibbling on his bottom lip for a few seconds. "Mmm... My mother showed up today."

"Excuse me?" Devin tilted Ewyn's chin up. "How did she find out where you live?"

"According to her, she has skills."

Devin snorted. "I have got to meet your mother."

"Good thing. She wants to meet you too...real bad." Ewyn grinned. "We had lunch together, and she asked about you. I don't know why, when she seems to know you're not in sales and that our company isn't all it's set up to look like. Said her sources have contacts at a few government agencies who referred to your posse as spooks and were reluctant to talk about your group."

"Wait a minute...she... Oh...shit!" Devin growled. "Getting cold." He reached over and adjusted the water. "Let's wash up, get something to eat, and then talk."

Despite the chilling water, Devin kept teasing, kissing, and loving. He loved the sound of Ewyn's sexy laughter, the feel of Ewyn's touches, the taste of Ewyn's kisses; he couldn't get enough. He loved the feel of Ewyn's soap-slicked body rubbing against him...reluctant to let go after his earlier scare.

It took them quite a while to finish their shower.

* * * * *

Barefoot and wearing only pajama bottoms, Devin strolled into the kitchen and stopped. Leaning back against the counter, his eyes ranged freely over the svelte lines of Ewyn's body.

Exposed to view, a narrow expanse of toned back and chest, which slimmed down into a trim waist that melded nicely into the slight flare of hips and a sexy ass hidden beneath nothing but a black bath towel. Music played softly in the background, and the tantalizing sight of baby-boy moving about the kitchen preparing dinner, body gyrating to the rhythmic beat, held his attention, had his heart tripping.

Ewyn turned, saw him and grinned. Baby-boy danced his way over, slim arms circling his neck as their bodies meshed and brushed together in a synchronized movement with the music.

"Mmm..." Cock filling, Devin bent and seized Ewyn's mouth. His tongue delved as his hands slid down the sexy form and settled on the little round ass. They danced for several minutes before Devin pulled back. "Baby-boy, if we keep this up, we'll never eat."

Ewyn glanced up, green-eyed gaze glowing with passion. "Would that be a bad thing?"

Devin grinned and swooped in for one final kiss before putting Ewyn away from him.

"I'm hungry." He moved to the table, sat down, leaned back, and relaxed. His eyes followed Ewyn's every move, admiring the view.

Ewyn had come to him with a nice, toned physique, but since then, baby-boy had bulked up. Nothing too obvious...hell, it made Ewyn look sexier. Arrogantly pleased with himself...yeah, he'd take some of the credit for the change in Ewyn, but not all. Despite all he'd experienced, Ewyn continued to exemplify happy, and for now, baby-boy lived without the intrusive anxiety. From his attack on Allister, obviously, Ewyn had reclaimed all kinds of self-confidence.

Comfortable in his surroundings, Ewyn ate right and regularly. He even worked out, which had a lot to do with the new Ewyn. So, yeah... He'd give himself props for some of that.

Shit. Allister.

How the fuck did he get a handle on any further stupidity from Allister? That whole scene still pissed him off. Allister wasn't totally stupid. The self-centered bastard could see Ewyn wasn't his equal, yet Allister deliberately goaded baby-boy into violence.

Did he have to worry about Allister going after Ewyn at work... *Oh, fuck!* Ewyn's name. If Allister found out, would he try to get back at him by using Ewyn's family connections? Damn it.

"Dev..."

"Sorry, baby. What do you need?"

"I asked if you wanted to eat out on the balcony."

"Sure. Let me help set it up." He gathered the dinnerware and headed outside.

"Mmm... Something smells good."

"Rainbow trout in lemon pepper marinade, steamed veggies, and rice." Ewyn smiled up at him. "With the microconvection and rice cooker, won't take much longer."

"Mmm... You're getting good at this."

"Thanks." Ewyn beamed as he spread the cloth on the table. "It's such a nice night, no Santa Ana winds; I thought it would be nice to eat out here."

"Candles?"

"Ooo... That would be perfect."

"I'll get the candles and the wine. We can sit and relax until the food's ready." He left Ewyn on the balcony and went inside.

Hell. He needed to talk to his department chief, Timothy Ryan, get the scoop on Allister, and find out why Allister came back to the States so soon. He had a good rapport with Timothy and some of the other top dogs; maybe he could get Allister's ass sent to Alaska or Timbaktu...shit, anywhere away from Ewyn.

Moreover, meeting with Timothy would give him an opportunity to get the lowdown on Ewyn. Find out what Timothy knew about a Calderone working at the shop, without breaking Ewyn's cover.

Devin retrieved wine, glasses, and candles, and then he rejoined Ewyn on the balcony.

"Sit, Dev, I want to do this." Ewyn headed for the balcony doors. "Be right back. Going to slip on my sweatpants."

"Hey. Not on my account. I like you the way you are."

Sexy-ass smirk in place, baby-boy stepped into the doorway, paused, and looked back at him over his shoulder. Ewyn winked, snatched the towel from his hips, and gave him an enticing view of that sweet little ass.

"Whoo-hoo... Hot damn!" Devin whistled, laughed, clapping. "Hey! No fair. Come back." With a wiggle of said ass, Ewyn blew him a kiss and moved out of sight. He whistled again. "Show me what you've got, baby-boy."

Moments later, Ewyn returned, still chuckling. He lit the candles, filled two glasses with wine and settled down next to Devin. "You know you spoil me beyond reason, Dev. Time I spoiled you for a change."

"Okay. I can get used to that." Devin winked. "So, tell me about your mom with the skills."

"You know, you already know more than enough about me and mine, yet I know nothing about you, family-wise." Ewyn sipped his wine, eyes on Devin.

"What..." Devin grinned over at Ewyn. "You weren't tempted to look into my file, like you did Allister's?" He laughed when wine sprayed his face, Ewyn spewing, laughing, and coughing at the same time.

"Damn you. How..."

Devin wiped his face, then dabbed at the wine dribbling down Ewyn's chin.

"Hey. I'm good at my job. Knowing you... Hell yeah, as soon as I told you about Allister, Mister I'm-only-a-geek-readiness-assessment clearance, I knew that curious as fuck mind of yours..." He held up his hand. "Don't go there."

Baby-boy stared...mouth open.

"Ewyn... You did not get where you are with your job by being complacent. To do what you do, you have to be all over inquisitive. I would have done the same, and I'm a mere grunt, so to speak."

"Mere grunt... Yeah, right."

"What's more, my knowledge of your family is only from the business end of things. On the personal side, I haven't a clue." Devin took a sip of wine. "So... Tell me about your mother. She sounds fascinating."

"Yeah. That's as good a word as any to describe my mom." Ewyn stood, moved into the kitchen, put the food in serving dishes, and brought them out on the balcony. "I guess I should tell you more about the bitch my brother married; I have nieces too." He served up the meal and returned to his seat. "I want to hear about your family when I'm done."

"No problem, it's short and sweet...actually, I'll go first. I'm an orphan, end story." Devin grinned before forking food into his mouth. "Mmm...food is delicious." He took a sip of wine. "So now I'm intrigued. I want the lowdown on your mother, sister-in-law, and nieces."

"Devin..."

"Hmm... Eat up. This is good."

"You're not going to tell me, are you?"

Devin put his fork down, wiped his mouth, and looked over at Ewyn. "Baby-boy, I've told you the truth. I'm not putting you off."

"Oh... Dev, I'm sorry. Did you ever try to find...hell. What am I saying? In your line of work, of course, you've checked."

Devin laughed. "Baby, there wasn't anything to check, since being there when my parents and siblings died in a car crash only left me with one question. Why didn't I die with them? To this day, I still don't understand."

"According to reports, the mangled mess they pulled from the wreck shouldn't have been alive. Outward scars were the least of my problems; it took quite a bit of surgery to put my ass back together."

"Oh, Dev, the scars. I thought they were job related."

"No...most are from the accident. At such a young age, thank God, they kept me sedated; I remember very little. But the moment I regained consciousness, I knew before the doctors said anything...no one survived except me. So, at seven years of age, I'm alive but alone, no family...literally. My parents were only children; their parents died way before my siblings and I were born."

"Who raised you? Not the system."

"No. An elderly, distant relative in Sweden I had no idea existed. I lived there with her until I turned eighteen, which is the reason I speak five languages. I came back to the States to attend college and stayed. Aunt Margret, well, she wasn't actually an aunt, more like a very old cousin. By mutual agreement, I called her Aunt Mags. She died my first year at college."

Ewyn stood and moved to Devin's lap. Wriggling and squirming, he made himself comfortable, hands moving on Devin's face, petting and soothing. "Damn, Dev. That must have been fuckin' hard. At least you weren't totally alone." Tears welled up in his eyes; Devin's arms snaked around his waist.

"Baby...it's okay. It happened a long time ago, I'm over it. Well, mostly. Sometimes I have nightmares about the accident." A tear dropped on his arm; he lifted Ewyn's chin. "Oh, baby-boy, you're much too sensitive. It's okay. Aunt Mags loved me. She had no one, either. I had a good life with her considering her age...close to seventy when I went to live with her. There were nannies, tutors, and servants; we weren't alone."

"Hey... I'm done here, and I see you're finished. So come on, I'll help clean up, and we'll make it an early night." Devin leaned forward. "You're much too gentle." The tip of his tongue swiped a lone salty teardrop from Ewyn's cheek. "And so sweet."

Ewyn grinned. "I thought the same about you...the sweet part, when you first took me on."

"Sweet, am I?" Devin growled. Ewyn slipped from his lap and started clearing the dishes. Devin goosed the little round ass; baby-boy peeped. "Let's get this done, and I'll show you sweet."

"Ooo..." Ewyn winked as he moved inside. "Dessert."

Chapter Ten

Baby-boy had had one hell of a day. First, his mother, then Allister...

Devin sat at his desk, staring into space, aware of the goofy, lopsided grin on his face. Feeling rather smug, his mind's eye retained in vivid detail the look of Ewyn when he left him in the bedroom only moments before.

Baby-boy lay sprawled across the bed, hair a riot of dark curls against the pristine backdrop of white satin, with an all over freshly fucked look about him. Fine naked ass exposed to view, Ewyn slept soundly, snoring lightly, and that damn sexy-ass smirk ever present.

He couldn't stop smiling, knowing he put that look on Ewyn's face; he wore Ewyn's bad ass out. Hell. He'd been missing baby-boy something fierce, so he'd had a lot of loving stored up. Ewyn might be a little sore in the morning.

Devin opened his briefcase, retrieved his cell, and pressed #1.

"Ryan."

"Tim... Devin."

"Problem?" Timothy Ryan asked. "Stateside, right?"

"Yeah. Personal. Tomorrow?"

"My office...until eleven."

"Nine."

"Got it."

Devin disconnected and tossed his cell back in his briefcase as he stood. Grinning, he headed back to the bedroom, thinking about what awaited him there. Hell. He still had a lot of loving needing out of his system.

* * * * *

"Tim in?" Devin asked the admin as he passed, not even waiting for an answer.

"He's expecting you, Nilsson."

Devin opened the office door and stepped inside. Not a big office, it had a wide bay window on the right wall, with light blue vertical blinds, opened, and the morning sun casting jail-bar shadows along the opposite wall. A cobalt blue leather sofa, centered in front of the window, faced two leather chairs, the fabric a lighter shade of blue.

Deep, rich mahogany-paneled walls were adorned with white-oak picture frames of various sizes, containing pictures, diplomas, and awards strategically hung around the room. An alcove at the far end of the room housed a wet bar complete with mirrored backdrop, glass shelving -- fully stocked -- and a minifridge.

Timothy's desk, considering the dimensions of the room, was adequately sized and made of white oak, with a minimum of desktop accessories neatly arranged on its surface. Unlike Devin's space with serviceable Berber carpeting, plush beige carpeting covered Timothy's floor.

Timothy's tall, distinguished figure stood with his back to the door, and he wasn't alone. He held a slim, petite woman in his arms.

Devin cleared his throat to get their attention.

The woman peeped around Timothy. She had an impish smile, with dimples peeking out, and jet black hair cut short, a mass of curls all over her head. She looked at Devin and winked.

Eyes narrowed, Devin hesitantly returned her smile. "Am I interrupting? I can come back."

Timothy turned, laughing, his hazel eyes warm and welcoming; he moved forward to greet Devin. For his age, probably late forties, Timothy just about matched Devin in height, and Timothy had a physique just as tight. His dark brown hair, cropped short, military style, had touches of gray peppered throughout the spiky tufts.

"Not interrupting. Come in, Devin, have a seat." Timothy escorted the woman to the sofa in front of the windows.

Brow knitted, Devin moved to one of the chairs facing the couch and waited for Timothy to be seated before he sat. He looked quizzically at the woman, then at his boss.

"Is something up?"

"No, but I want you to meet someone." Timothy watched him closely. "Devin Nilsson, my wife, Gemma Calderone Ryan."

"A pleasure, Mrs. Ryan."

Nodding, Devin stared at the woman. Dressed in emerald green slacks, a blouse of seafoam green with light green pearl buttons and self-tie neckline, she wore pale green sandals on her feet. The entire outfit complemented her dancing green eyes.

"Seriously, Tim, I can come back -- *fuck!*" Devin leapt to his feet. "Son of a bitch!"

Neither Timothy nor his wife reacted to Devin's sudden outburst. Both calmly watched him pace the room, watched him ponder the situation and arrive at a conclusion; they waited for him to return to his seat.

"Damn." Devin glared at Timothy. "Just damn." He spoke to both of them. "You know one of the reasons why I'm here?"

"No, I'm not certain," Timothy replied. "But I can assure you, everything discussed in this room stays between us."

Gaze locked with Timothy's, Devin nodded. "Damn. Why didn't Ewyn tell me?"

"Don't be too hard on the boy," Gemma interjected, a slight accent tinting her voice. "The secrecy is so ingrained within Ewyn. But I have a reliable source who said Ewyn promised his mother he'd tell you." Gemma smiled. "Admit it, Dev -- I may call you Dev, right?"

Devin chuckled. "Sure." If he needed more proof than the resemblance, only one person called him Dev.

Gemma went on, "Ewyn is feeling overwhelmed by all of this...the relationship. It's so new to him, at least the loving part."

"Yeah..." Devin grinned, eyes roving over the woman's features. "When I first walked in, I thought you reminded me of someone. Meeting you answers the question about a Calderone being at the agency."

"Okay...good deal," Timothy remarked. "So what's your other reason for being here?"

"Allister. Is he back on permanent?"

"Yeah. He didn't work out at his last assignment. He and his *partner* had a difference of opinion, on a personal level. Nichols had to bring him back in. Why?"

"He almost killed Ewyn yesterday."

"Oh, shit!" Gemma leaned forward on her seat. "Dev... Is Ewyn all right?"

"Oh yeah. Ewyn is more than okay. According to him, if I hadn't come in when I did, he would have killed Allister." He chuckled. "Of course, Ewyn lay on the floor barely breathing when I arrived."

"Thank you, Devin." Gemma relaxed back against the cushions.

"No thanks needed. I'd do anything for Ewyn," he told Gemma, immediately turning to Timothy. "Which brings me to my point. I can't trust Allister, especially if he finds out Ewyn's real name. He may try to use it against me."

"Against you..." Timothy shook his head. "He chose to leave. Besides, anything he does to you regarding Ewyn and this agency comes back at me. I hope Allister is smarter than that."

"Yeah... I don't know...maybe, considering he came back thinking to pick up where we left off. Your badass nephew attacked him."

"Are you shitting me?" Timothy looked stunned. "But... Allister's a trained..."

"I know."

"Almost twice..."

"Tell me about it." Devin couldn't quit smiling.

"He could have killed..."

"Didn't stop Ewyn."

"Son of a bitch." Timothy grinned. "Then let me add to Gemma's thanks."

"For what?"

"Giving Ewyn his self-confidence back. The boy isn't a wuss, by any means. In fact, he used to be the badass Calderone...family used to worry he'd end up in jail or dead." Timothy laughed at Devin's skeptical look.

"As a kid... A lot of Ewyn's behavior had to do with who he was...the family reputation. Ewyn seemed to have no fear and a *serious* temper. You've seen his brother. Gregorio is almost your size and fifteen years older than Ewyn. Never stopped Ewyn." Timothy paused, staring out the window, smiling as if what he just said conjured up some memorable event in Ewyn's childhood.

"Hell. Ewyn never won a battle with his brother, but he never backed down; he usually struck first. Then, too, Greg would never hurt him. Now or then."

"So, what happened?"

"Haven't a clue." Timothy shrugged. "I noticed subtle changes in Ewyn about the time he started college. It was his decision to live on campus; he insisted. He became introspective, went off by himself a lot, and he wouldn't attend family functions like he used to, unless his mother insisted. That wasn't like him. Ewyn had always been way too outgoing...optimistic."

"Then he finally came out. I don't know... To find out he let that bastard beat on him --"

"Yeah," Gemma interrupted. "Tim wanted to take that son of a bitch apart personally."

"I know the feeling," Devin mumbled.

"I tried to talk to him, but he shut me out...said nothing was wrong." Timothy shook his head. "He told me to stop trying to baby him."

"*Damn it,*" Devin growled. "Ewyn should have called the cops and filed charges against the son of bitch for domestic violence...got out of Dodge...got a restraining order. Somebody should have called the cops, anonymously."

"No." Gemma was adamant. "You're forgetting... Even though Ewyn uses the surname Kelley, he would have come under close scrutiny by the locals, *because* he was with Gareth, a known Russian heavy. Ewyn would have been exposed." She looked from Devin to Timothy. "Besides, as long as Ewyn was in denial...wasn't much any of us could do without family connections coming into play. We had to keep Gregorio from getting involved."

"Yeah...you're right. Denial is one of the reasons most domestic violence goes unreported." Devin's hands clenched. "If Ewyn had stayed, the man would have ended up killing him."

"Not true..." Gemma shook her head. "Eventually, Ewyn's temper would have overruled his submissive behavior, trust me. Then we would have had that war we've been trying to avoid, because Ewyn would have struck first, unexpectedly. Allister is a good example of that." Gemma smiled. "We're getting our baby back, thanks to you, Dev."

"Yeah." Devin grinned. "I'm working on it." He turned to Timothy. "So... What to do about Allister?"

"I'll take care of it."

"Good. Because believe me, I went for the kill when I saw Ewyn lifeless on that floor." Devin stood and moved toward the door. "If he comes at Ewyn again..."

"Consider it done." Timothy moved to clasp Devin's hand. "Let me make something clear, Devin. Ewyn and his mother are the only two Calderones I'll step up to bat for, within boundaries. That's why Ewyn is here with me, to keep him out of it. Gregorio is on his own; he knows it. This agency operates strictly by the laws governing it, so don't feel constrained if you have to go after the Calderones."

"No doubt. I explained that to Ewyn."

"Oh... Another thing. Next time you need backup, call me." Timothy winked. "I know MacGregor has a hard-on for Varvarinski, however, mine is now personal. The FBI can have what's left."

"Sorry. Because of the personal aspect...well, hell. If I'd known about your connection to Ewyn...shit yeah, I would have called you first."

"Good. In the future, anything personal... I have a few buddies on the team who like to hang out with me from time to time."

"Will do."

Devin had reached the door when Gemma's voice stopped him.

"Dev..."

He turned back.

"Take care of our baby. Tim and I don't have children; Ewyn is like our own. The entire family tries to watch out for him."

"Yes, ma'am. Ewyn told me." Devin grinned. "I hear I'm in for a treat when I meet his mother." He looked at Timothy. "You know she's been investigating us, right?"

"Yeah, I heard. Nothing to worry about. And believe me, there won't be any problems from that quarter," Timothy said. "For helping her baby get his self-esteem back, Mairianna already loves you."

"Oh, yeah," Devin mumbled as he left the office, "that's what I'm afraid of."

The sound of harmonious laughter seeped through the closed door behind him.

* * * * *

Devin moved quietly about the kitchen. He whipped up his morning drink of frozen cinnamon-baked apples, fresh banana, and frozen carrot slices, along with vanilla yogurt and low-fat milk. He polished off his smoothie while he sat at the table working his way through the Sunday paper. Just as he flipped to the sports page, slim arms snaked around his neck.

"Boo," Ewyn whispered before kissing his ear.

"Mmm..." Inhaling Ewyn's freshly showered scent, he turned his head and leaned into the kiss. "Hey, sleepyhead." His words nudged into baby-boy's receptive mouth. Hand slipping inside Ewyn's robe, it glided up warm thighs to the cute little ass cheeks; he loved the feel of the warm skin. Ewyn pushed back into his hand.

"Mmm... You've been up and out already?"

"Yeah. Had a meeting. Want to talk to you about that."

"Okay. Breakfast first." Ewyn moved away, flipping the switch on the coffeemaker, "I'm going to have an omelet and fruit...want some?"

"No. I've eaten." He held up his glass and winked.

Ewyn laughed, then moved about the kitchen fixing his breakfast. He retrieved his coffee and settled down next to Devin.

"So... What's up?"

Devin set the paper aside. "When do I get to meet your mother?"

Food halfway to his mouth, Ewyn blinked. "You had a meeting about meeting my mother? With who?"

"Baby, get real." Devin grinned. "Why would I have a meeting about meeting your mother, when it turned out to be much more entertaining meeting your aunt? Who happens to be married to my boss."

Ewyn's fork clattered on the plate, eyes wide. "Dev..." He started to rise; Devin grabbed his arm and held him in place.

"Baby-boy...don't do that. There is no reason for you to fear me, and you know it." Devin spoke calmly. "What else do I have to do to prove myself to you?" Ewyn relaxed

under his touch.

"You're right. Just for a moment there...old habits... Honestly, Dev, I planned to tell you about Gemma."

"She told me." Devin tugged on Ewyn's arm. "Come here." Ewyn moved to his lap, straddled his thighs, wriggling. Ewyn's robe fell open. "I told you the first night, no matter who you're connected to, I'll never intentionally hurt you."

"I know...really. I'm getting better."

"Yeah, you are." Devin laughed. "I'm thinking that self-preservation mode you mentioned once before is looking damn good on you." His hand absently glided up and down the pudgy cock pushing against him as it filled. "The way you went after Al, and even back when Gareth's men came at me... I'm so goddamn impressed and proud of all the changes in you."

Devin couldn't resist the enticement of that mouth a moment longer. He leaned in for a kiss; Ewyn's sweet tongue eased right into his mouth. His lips closed around it, sucking...oh... *Goddamn*. He didn't know whether he should consider Ewyn's taste a narcotic or an aphrodisiac.

Before he lost all concentration, Devin pulled away, lifting that almost-too-pretty face, he rested his forehead against Ewyn's. Their gazes locked.

"You know I want you to stand up for yourself, right?" Slender arms slid around Devin's neck.

"Yeah..." Ewyn whispered hesitantly.

"Baby, please... *Never* again, scare me the way you did yesterday. Hell. Allister is almost as skilled as I am." Ewyn grinned; Devin rubbed his thumb across the pouty bottom lip. "Seriously, baby-boy, do not go up against any of these people on your own. If Gareth, his people, or any-damn-body else comes at you while I'm away, call Tim...hell, call your brother."

"Promise, Dev."

Devin kissed the smiling mouth. "No more secrets, right?"

"Promise." Ewyn leaned in for another kiss. "So what about your Allister?"

"Not mine...mmm..." Devin nibbled on the supple bottom lip before slipping his tongue inside the receptive warmth. Palm caressing the moist head of Ewyn's cock, he

mumbled, "Taken care of."

Ewyn squirmed, hips rocking, he whispered, "Dev..."

"I know...feeling you, baby." He shifted Ewyn from his lap, hands resting on Ewyn's shoulders, he steered him toward the bedroom.

Ewyn slipped out of his robe. "Dev..."

"Hmm... You're not too sore, are you?" He glanced down at Ewyn while he removed his clothes.

"Sore..." Ewyn grinned. "Oh...not noticeably. But that's not what I wanted to say." He moved close to Devin, hands sliding over taut muscles as they came into view; his fingers absently tweaked dusky pink nipples. "Can I..."

"Mmm..." Devin put his hand on Ewyn's to stop the teasing fingers. "Can you what, baby?"

"Do you --" Ewyn blurted out, then rushed on. "You never let me... Not complaining... I mean I'd rather we continue as we are, but just once... Don't want you to think I'm selfish..."

Laughing, loving the baby-boy babble, Devin dove in for a quick kiss, then put his hand over Ewyn's mouth. "That's not me, baby." Ewyn tried to remove his hand. "Wait...let me finish. For you...yeah."

Ewyn threw himself at Devin, wrapping around him, knocking them to the bed. "Are you sure? I mean if it's something you think you won't like. We don't..."

"Ewyn. I've done it before, just not my thing. I'm all over alpha." He winked. "But for you..."

"Shit yeah. I'm all over loving you that way, definitely my preference. But I thought about it a lot while you were gone." Ewyn straddled Devin's thighs, squirming and wriggling, loose-hipped motion kicking right in. "I'll stop if I'm doing it wrong...not making it right for you."

"Baby-boy..." Devin's hands went to those mobile hips to slow the process. "You've never done this before?"

"No. Guess I gravitate toward tops. Honestly, I never considered doing it with the two before you." Ewyn shrugged. "You must think I'm a total twink. As old as I am...to be such a novice at all of this... You have to tell me to stop, if I'm not...I don't want to hurt

you, Dev. You can tell me..."

"Hey. I don't think anything you do to me won't feel right." Devin's hands sidled up the smooth form, pausing to pinch the tiny nipples and eliciting a sharp indrawn breath from Ewyn in response. Smiling, he slid his hands higher and clasped Ewyn's head, pulling it down to his; he took possession of that appealing mouth. Cocks nestled together, sliding... "Mmm..."

Ewyn pulled away.

"First, I want to refamiliarize myself with your flavor...take the edge off. Love your taste...can't get enough." He paused for a breath. "You were gone a long time, Dev."

"Hell yeah. No argument from me." Devin made himself more comfortable on the bed, cock already hard as steel in response to Ewyn's closeness. "Head to toe, baby."

Sexy green eyes lit up.

"Oh..."

Ewyn thought he would lose it just thinking about what Devin's words meant, Devin being the only man he'd been with who liked to suck his cock. Hell. He loved giving head, and his previous partners, the selfish bastards, preferred it that way. Not Devin.

Devin laughingly told him he had such a cute dick, all pudgy and nicely shaped, little slit winking at him; Devin said he couldn't resist it. Shit. Heat still surged into his cheeks thinking of Devin's words. Could he be any more naive?

Furthermore, Devin gave a bitchin' blowjob.

Ewyn leaned forward, teeth grazing Devin's bottom lip, his tongue pushed into Devin's mouth; Devin latched on. After several satisfying minutes, he withdrew and kissed his way down the wide expanse of chest. Nibbling and toying with Devin's nipples, feeling them pebble, he extracted several guttural groans before moving on.

"Mmm...baby-boy. You keep that up, and I'll go off before we get to the good stuff."

Ewyn reached his target, scooted around, his cock leaking and painting Devin's abs and chest. He positioned himself for maximum comfort and pleasure.

"Mmm...eager little bugger," he whispered just before his tongue swiped across the head of Devin's cock, lapping up the bittersweet liquid seeping from the slit.

Devin bucked beneath the touch. "Little..."

"Figure of speech." Ewyn looked back, grinning. "*Nothing* little about you."

"And you like me that way."

Devin's palm caressed the head of Ewyn's cock before his tongue swiped across the tip, teasing the opening. His fingers toyed with Ewyn's balls, stroked along the fine texture of smooth skin as they moved toward Ewyn's ass, fingertips ghosting the tight little hole. His hips pushed up into Ewyn's touch.

"Oh... Baby-boy...*goddamn*."

"Fuckin' A."

Ewyn's lips closed over Devin at the same time heated moisture encircled his cock. *Fuck*. Still unused to the feel of Devin's mouth on him, he lost his rhythm. Nerves vibrating, he lapped clumsily around the cock in his mouth until his hips finally picked up Devin's tempo.

Devin eased Ewyn's dick all the way in, the head pressing against the back of his tongue, nose nudging Ewyn's balls; he inhaled baby-boy's unique scent. He gripped the round, supple ass; his mouth mimicked Ewyn's every action. Already primed from Ewyn's teasing, combined with their mutual enjoyment, made it all too quickly a done deal for both.

Ewyn collapsed on him, but Ewyn's tongue continued its teasing licks, teeth gently grazing; Ewyn's mouth softly suckled, bringing them both down. His fingers kneaded the cute little ass cheeks cuddling his nose, his tongue lapping around Ewyn's asshole.

"Mmm... Dev..."

"Yeah, baby."

"Nice."

Ewyn relaxed into Devin's touch a moment, before easing away. He repositioned himself, mouth all over Devin's, tongue shoving into the waiting warmth, flavors exchanged.

"Mmm," Devin fed the sound into his mouth. "Very nice. How do you want me?"

"Oh." Ewyn lifted his head, sexy smirk hovering. "I want to watch you...want you to watch me...like you do me, Dev."

Devin smothered Ewyn's mouth for a hot minute, and then he pulled back, grinning. "Yeah? You're not exactly built for that." Devin chuckled. "Not with someone my size." Ewyn's sexy laugh washed over him like a balmy breeze. "But hey, we'll improvise...give it a shot."

Ewyn grabbed the lube and slicked up his fingers as Devin lifted his knees and spread his legs. Eyes locked with Devin's smoldering amber gaze, he inserted one finger, easing it in, then out. Inserting two fingers stretched the taut ring of muscle, eliciting a moan combined with the upward shifting of Devin's hips, a sure indicator of Devin's pleasure. He inserted a third finger, working the tight hole; he leaned forward and captured Devin's mouth, tongue insisting on entrance.

Before long, he reluctantly relinquished Devin's mouth, pulling back, his tongue skidded along the taut column of Devin's neck. His mouth sucked up salty perspiration, then continued its downward spiral. Tongue gliding over the broad chest, he paused to tease the hard nipples, nibbling and suckling before cruising across cut abs; the trail ended at the tip of Devin's cock.

Ewyn took one final taste of the brackish flavor oozing from the slit before he raised his head, his eyes trained on the steady amber gaze. "Ready?"

"Shit yeah," Devin's voice escaped in a thready whisper. "Baby, bring it." After forcing himself to lie dormant under Ewyn's sensual assault, heart tripping, nerves pulsating, and muscles tight, Devin hooked his hands behind his knees, pulled his legs up and back, then spread them wide. Baby-boy eased his cock into position and edged forward.

"Oh... Dev... It's so..."

"Yeah, baby...*damn*. Feels good."

"Mmm-hmm..."

Buried deep, Ewyn remained unmoving, savoring the moment, until Devin's ass flexed around him.

"Oh! Dev...nice." His voice huffed out in a soft undertone. He set their rhythm, hips pumping, hands gripping Devin's thighs.

"Oh, yeah. *Fu-u-ck*... Come on, baby-boy, show me what you've got."

Ewyn picked up the pace, working Devin's ass, reveling in the sensations. "Oh, shit!"

"Hell yeah...again, baby," Devin growled, breathing disjointed. "Don't stop...*goddamn!*"

Ewyn reached over, fisting Devin's cock; his hand kept pace with the rhythm of their hips. "Fuck... Dev..."

Ewyn's eyes captured and held the steady gaze of blazing amber, hips pumping a few more times before he felt the heat building. The blood rush from brain to cock tingled along his spine in its rapid descent. Head thrown back, bottom lip gripped between his teeth, his body tensed. Words escaped him in a broken whisper.

"Oh, fuck... Dev... Damn... Just damn."

"I know... Shh-yit... Goddamn, baby-boy...bring it!"

Ewyn's world became a kaleidoscope of bright lights before fading behind closed lids. His spunk jetted into Devin just as liquid heat flowed over his fingers. The intermittent snap of his hips pumped the last of his sperm into Devin's ass. Hand still working Devin's cock, he felt the periodic pulsing as droplets of come dribbled from the tip.

The tenseness in his body uncoiled as he came down off his high; he collapsed on Devin, breathing forced and erratic. They remained in that position for what seemed like hours.

At some point, Ewyn's brain neurons ignited. Mobility restored, his cock slipped out of Devin as he crawled up the solid body, mouth headed home, settling into the familiar heat where it belonged. Big, gentle hands caressed him, pulling him close. His heavy, staccato breathing retreated to pulsing, shallow breaths; he relaxed into Devin's touch.

"Damn, Dev."

"You've got that shit right."

Devin recaptured Ewyn's mouth. Nerves settling, his muscles started to ease as he fed on Ewyn's provocative taste. Mind blown, he couldn't assimilate his body's acceptance of yet another dangerous aspect of loving Ewyn...*hell!*

He wouldn't mind being fucked, on occasion.

* * * * *

He grabbed the cell phone off the dashboard. He hated using prepaid phones, but he followed directions...told to trash them after each use. Hell. He wasn't footing the bill. He pressed the numbers, which were permanently embedded in his memory from overuse, and waited for an answer.

"What?"

"He just left. Is it a go this time?"

"Hell...why not? I might get lucky, if you don't fuck it up like your friend did the last time." Silence. "You have his phone --"

"Look... I know what I'm doing." He disconnected, threw the phone on the dash, and picked up the other cell.

Chapter Eleven

Ewyn felt edgy.

Devin received a call, promptly showered and dressed, then left. No postcoital cuddling, no snoozing, then going for another round, just the sound of that stupid-ass ringtone Devin programmed to signal his job calling. A Prince oldie... "Sign of the Times"; he used to like that song.

Shit. They had barely finished when Devin's cell rang.

Ewyn rolled onto Devin's side of the bed for about the hundredth time and snuggled into Devin's pillows, inhaling his scent. He couldn't get to sleep.

Hell. Thinking about fuckin' Devin...the power and all those sensations brought a smile to his face, turned him the fuck on. Conversely, he wouldn't bring up the issue again, since Devin didn't seem comfortable with it. Oh...no doubt, Devin got off on it, but he sensed Devin only let him do it because he'd asked. Devin rarely refused him anything.

Shit. For him, being fucked came second only to breathing. He thought Devin would want it too. Evidently not. He only mentioned it because he didn't want to appear self-centered, having it all his way. Well...*oh*-kay. He'd wanted to know what it felt like.

Ewyn sat up and hopped off the bed. He smiled as he moved across the floor, thinking about the ringtone programmed into Devin's cell to signal calls from him. "Adore," another Prince oldie, and Devin called him sweet? Clearly, Devin qualified as the sentimental one. Then again, he did have "Some Kind of Wonderful," a really old oldie by the Drifters as his ringtone for Devin's calls.

He came to a halt in front of the armoire and turned on the stereo. The smooth vocals of Dee Dee Bridgewater and the instrumental sounds of Braun, Whalum, and Brown filled the room with their rendition of "Let's Do It Again." He groaned, started to turn it off, then picked up the remote instead and headed back to bed. He did like this particular jazz CD, and that specific song.

Ewyn threw himself across the bed and tried to relax. He glanced at the clock. Shit. Eleven-thirty on Sunday night...he needed some sleep so he could function at work tomorrow.

He rolled off the bed and headed for the bathroom. He took a quick shower, donned his sweatpants, cranked up the music, and wandered into the kitchen. He flipped the light switch; a note and a business card stuck under a magnet on the refrigerator caught his attention. He hurried across the room to examine them; he read the note first.

Carry card with you at all times...program number. Love you, D.

Brow furrowed, he looked at the information on the card, then smiled. Mick's card. He laid it on the counter next to the coffeemaker so he would remember to take it in the morning.

Damn, he loved Devin. The man had become manic about taking care of his every need.

Ewyn grabbed a mug from the cabinet, took milk from the refrigerator, and filled the mug. His mom used to give him warm milk when he couldn't sleep. *Hmm...* She added something to it. What... *Ooo...* vanilla and sugar. He found what he needed and added it to the milk, then popped it in the microwave. Couldn't hurt.

He grinned, remembering how Greg used to tease him about being a big baby, because even as a teen, he still drank his mother's potion, as his brother called it. Well, fuck...he *was* the baby.

Then there were his recent arguments with Devin over milk. Shit. The man changed everything else about his eating habits, but giving up his whole milk... Devin used that low-fat, nonfat shit...eww. He refused to go there. Devin caved.

The microwave dinged.

Ewyn grabbed his mug. Warm milk in hand and still grinning, he turned off the lights and headed back to bed. He had just settled down when his cell rang. *Hell!* Who would be calling this late? Devin didn't call when out on assignment. Oh, shit. He hoped it wasn't the job calling to tell him the little fuckups in his department were at it again. He really needed to reassess the employees on the night shift. Damn.

He snatched up his cell, glanced at the caller ID, and almost threw the phone across the room.

Gareth.

Hand trembling, he stared at the phone. Was the man fucking crazy? Didn't Gareth know Devin would kill...wait a minute...*fuck!* Gareth knew. The only reason Gareth would have the balls to call him... How did Gareth know Devin wasn't there? He held the phone in a death grip, watching the backlight fade. Was Gareth having him watched?

Eyes moving from the phone to the doorway, he peered into the darkness of the other room. Nerves jangling, he jumped off the bed and headed for the front door to check the security latch.

He heard it then. Someone trying to jimmy the lock.

Heart tripping double time, he crept up to the door and eased the latch into place, then backed away. He stood paralyzed, watching the twisting doorknob.

Call the police --

Hell!

The problem with that scenario...his damn family would find out. They had ears and eyes everywhere. For sure, the shit would hit the fan.

Damn it.

Devin had both of his weapons on him; he'd watched Devin dress. He needed his own weapon. Patrick had had him handling a gun as soon as he could take a piss by himself.

Snapping out of his stupor, Ewyn turned and rushed into the kitchen. He picked up Mick's card, grabbed a knife from the block on the counter, and hurried back to the bedroom. He flipped open his cell while reaching for the remote; he turned off the stereo and pressed Mick's number.

No more cowering. Damn if he would go down that road again. Oh yeah...his ass was afraid, which only reinforced his determination to fight back. Who the hell did these people think they were fuckin' with? Losing touch with his roots had been a short-term aberration. Never again. With backup, he would be good to go.

"Yo."

"Mick..."

"Yeah."

"It's Ewyn. Devin gave me your card."

"Hey, babe. What's up? Tired of Devin, want a real man?"

Ewyn tried for a laugh; it came out like a catch in his breathing.

"Ewyn... What's wrong?"

"I need help. Can't call the cops... Dev's gone, I'm unarmed..." Damn. Babbling. "Mick... Someone's trying to get into the condo."

"Shit! On my way. Hang tight."

Ewyn closed his cell with a snap and leaned back against the headboard. Shivering, he pulled his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. Knife in one hand, he clutched his cell in the other. The scratching at the door seemed louder.

Would they try to break in since he didn't answer the phone? Were they stupid enough to think he could sleep through that commotion? Hell. What a dumb-ass question. Of course, they were stupid...coming for him at Devin's house.

Damn. He didn't even know where Mick lived...how far he was from the condo. Maybe he should have called the cops, screw the consequences. In this upscale area, the cops probably would have been there before he hung up. Possibly quicker than Mick. *Fuck!* Letting family ties outweigh common sense just might get his ass killed.

Ewyn hopped off the bed and went to the dresser. He snatched one of Devin's T-shirts from the drawer and slipped it on; the bottom edge brushed midthighs. He returned to the bed, flipped open his cell, and pressed #2.

"Hello..."

"Uncle Tim?"

"Ewyn...what's wrong?"

"I'm alone. Called Mick...you know, Mick... No...maybe not." *Babbling.* "Devin's gone... Someone is trying to get into the condo."

"Damn it!" Timothy snapped. "Hang tight, kid. On my way."

The phone went dead at the same time the racket began outside the front door. Ewyn hopped off the bed and looked around for somewhere to conceal himself for better advantage; the knocking started.

"Ewyn! It's Mick...open up!"

He rushed to the door, unlatched it, flung it open, and threw himself at Mick.

"Hey, babe. Sorry it took so long. We came up the stairwell so we wouldn't alert them. It's okay." Mick held him at arm's length. "We caught the dirtbag. Come on...take a look. Do you recognize him?"

Ewyn pulled himself together and stepped around Mick. He looked at the man kneeling on the floor facing the wall, hands linked behind his head. "Yeah. One of Gareth's."

"Varvarinski?" Mick glanced at Ewyn; he nodded. "Cuff him. Get the fucker out of here, Tag. Call the locals and let them have his dumb ass."

The elevator dinged.

Mick shoved Ewyn back into the condo, Mick's body shielding him from view as Mick pulled his weapon. Ewyn caught a glimpse of Mick's partner throwing the cuffed man to the floor, foot on the back of the man's neck. The Tag person pulled his weapon and aimed it toward the elevator.

"Close the door, Ewyn. Don't open it until I tell you. If anyone else tries to come through this door..." Mick reached down, unhooked his backup, and handed it to Ewyn.

"Got it." Ewyn took the weapon and released the safety. About to close the door, he saw the elevator open; his uncle, flanked by six men, strolled out, weapons drawn.

"Hold it!" Mick yelled at the same time Timothy Ryan shouted, "Drop your weapons!"

"Stop! Mick! Tim!" Ewyn stepped into the hallway between Mick and his uncle and placed his hand on Mick's arm. "Family...it's okay."

Mick lowered his weapon, as did everyone else. "Get him out of here, Tag." Mick nodded toward the man on the floor.

"Wait! We'll take him." Timothy showed Mick his ID. "This one's personal. But thanks, man." He clasped Mick's hand. "I owe you." Glancing at the other man, whose badge was clipped to his waist, Timothy said, "I'll square it with MacGregor."

"That's not a problem. We're on our own time." Mick looked at Taggart. "Let them have him."

Timothy waited until his men hauled Gareth's man away before turning to Ewyn. "Let's move this party inside."

Ewyn walked back into the condo and started making introductions, his voice a shaky monotone. "Uncle Tim...Timothy Ryan, this is Mick...Michael Tavis." He looked down at the gun he held, realized his hands were trembling, and handed the weapon to Mick. The others must have noticed his unstable condition, because his uncle and Mick started toward him.

"I'm all right, please... Sit." He dropped down on the sofa. Dazed, he hugged one of the cushions against him. He vaguely heard the others introducing themselves before his uncle joined him on the sofa. Mick took the chair opposite.

"Dorsey." Timothy turned to one of his men. "Take the guys, walk a perimeter around this place. We'll be here the rest of the night, if that's what it takes for an all clear."

Mick nodded at Taggart. The five men filed out. The minute the door closed behind them, Mick looked at Timothy. "Can they be trusted?"

"With my life."

"Okay. So what's this about?" Mick asked.

* * * * *

He must have fallen asleep.

Ewyn came awake with the gray light of dawn shadowing the room. Stretched out on the sofa covered by a blanket... He shot to his feet and made it to the kitchen before he sensed someone in the room behind him. He swung around and peered into the darkness.

In the corner of the room, he saw the silhouette of a man sitting in the chair with his feet propped up on the hassock.

"Dev!"

He ran back into the room and launched himself into Devin's arms. Mouth covering Devin's, sloppy, awkwardly, before he calmed down and kissed Devin as if his life depended on it. Surfacing for air, he drew back and took a deep, shuddering breath.

"Hey, baby." Devin's fingers threaded through the ink black curls, caressing. "Thought you were trying to get away from me. I open my eyes, and all I see is this cute little ass rushing from the room."

Ewyn managed a shaky laugh. "Dev..."

"I know, baby-boy. I can't leave you alone for a minute without the goddamn drama coming at you. Must be this pretty face and sexy ass everybody is after."

"Hey..."

Devin kissed Ewyn, lips pulling on the hot little tongue while trembling hands moved over the slim body. If he lost this man... No. Not *even* a consideration. He drew back.

"What happened, Ewyn?"

"Gareth called. I recognized the number; I didn't answer. Then someone tried to get in. Gareth wouldn't call if he thought you were here. He's not that fuckin' stupid. How did they know you weren't here, Dev?"

"Good question, and I intend to get some answers. However, right now, I need you in the worst way. I need reaffirmation that you're here, you're okay, and you're mine."

"Oh, yeah...me too, Dev." Ewyn slid off his lap, looking around in a daze. "Shit... What time...do we have time? Work..."

"Fuck work."

Devin stood and pulled Ewyn into his arms, his mouth smothering Ewyn's as his hands clasped the little round ass; baby-boy wrapped himself all over him. He didn't relinquish Ewyn's mouth until he reached the bedroom.

"I don't want you leaving here until I check on a few things. Hell. You don't have to work at all, if you don't want to. It's your choice." Devin grinned. "However, knowing your hyper ass, you need something to do when I'm not here. It's up to you."

"But today... Baby, will you stay home for me? Someone will be around to keep the riffraff out."

"Riffraff?"

Ewyn's breathless, sexy as hell laugh had his cock throbbing to attention.

"Dev... How did you get back so soon?"

"Still at the office being briefed when Mick and Tim called. One call...maybe, but both of them calling...hell. Baby-boy, you are going to be the death of me. I promised my soul to Jimmy Blanchard, if he'd cover for me."

"Oh, Dev, I'm sorry." Ewyn's eyes filled with tears. Devin deposited him on the bed. "I

told you I would be more trouble than I'm worth."

"Hey... What did I tell *you*?" Settling down next to Ewyn, he brushed the tears away with his thumbs. "Evidently, I'm not the only one who has a serious interest in this ass. Only difference, my interest is of a very intimate nature, no harm intended." Ewyn gave him a shaky smile, then baby-boy pushed him over and crawled on top of him.

"Guess Gareth didn't take my warning seriously. He needs a personal demonstration."

"Dev..."

"No, baby, listen. Varvarinski and every-fucking-body else needs to know you are not an option. I won't allow them to use you as a pawn in anybody's game plan."

Ewyn yawned. "You think this is about you...your job?"

"Not sure." Hell. He wasn't going to upset Ewyn with what he only suspected.

"Was scared, Dev." Ewyn snuggled into Devin's warmth and sighed. "Going to fight back, though."

Ewyn's words "going to fight back"... Fear and anger rose up in Devin's throat like bile; he wanted to kill something. Arms tightening, he kissed the top of baby-boy's head.

Ewyn yawned again. "Didn't mean to... Love you... Sorry, Dev..." His voice faded into a soft snore.

"No, baby. You're not the one who's going to be sorry." Arms clutching the sleeping form, Devin closed his eyes.

Chapter Twelve

"Sit down, Devin. Couldn't sleep, either? Want coffee...sorry, water?" Timothy turned to his admin and told him to bring bottled water. "If we keep meeting like this, I'll have to stock up on water and energy drinks."

"Goddamn this pisses me off! Who knew, Tim? Who has access...where's Allister?"

"On his way to Hawaii. Sent on his way late yesterday after we talked."

"Shit!"

"Yeah, I know. But that would have been too easy. How did your meeting go with Pat?"

"It's all set. This won't happen again. Well, if it does, I'll know whose ass to kick." Devin smiled. "You know, he'd been keeping tabs on Ewyn since Ewyn left home. Stopped when Ewyn moved in with me. He thought Ewyn would be safe."

"Damn. I didn't know. Did he know about the beatings?" Timothy went to the wet bar and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Yeah. In fact, he had been prepared to take Varvarinski out the night I met Ewyn. He planned to gut him like a fish, slow and easy, and then kick him to the curb like trash. His words, not mine. He said he couldn't find a way to get close to the bastard before then."

"Hell. Wouldn't that have solved all our problems?" Timothy moved to his desk and rested one hip on the corner. "I can guarantee he has as much, if not more of a stake in keeping Ewyn safe."

"Yeah."

"Thank God you left Mick's number with Ewyn."

"Hell. I left it as insurance...wasn't expecting anything to happen."

Timothy's admin arrived with the water, handed it to Devin, and turned to leave. "Don't want to be disturbed, Roger," Timothy told the retreating figure, who paused, nodded, and then continued out the door.

"Ewyn should have called you first." Devin uncapped the bottle of water and took a swig.

"No. He did the right thing. I took too long to get there. Mick's closer, practically around the corner." Timothy walked behind his desk and sat down. "So, what's your best guess?"

"I have more questions than answers. And the most important one... What purpose did this serve? Is this about me? Is this about Ewyn...scaring him or killing him? Varvarinski didn't love Ewyn...hell, I doubt Gareth even cared about him. Ewyn was nothing more than a pretty possession to Gareth. So why come at Ewyn when Gareth knows he has to go through me, which in turn could bring the Feds down on his entire group? He can't be that stupid." Devin sighed. "No, Tim, there's more to this, and fuck if I don't think Allister might be involved."

"Okay. Let's suppose Allister has something to do with this. What makes you think Varvarinski and Allister would hook up? Trying to scare Ewyn, or worse, killing him over a broken relationship? If Varvarinski didn't care about Ewyn, it doesn't make any fucking

sense.”

“Shit. People have killed for less.”

“True. So why not go after you?”

“Going after Ewyn *is* going after me. I made the significance of my relationship with Ewyn clear to Allister. So, to get back at me, even though *he* chose to leave me... Ewyn is the easier target. And the same goes for Varvarinski. I pissed off that dirtbag when I took Ewyn away from him. The man came at me with a knife that first night. I should have ended it then.

“With Ewyn out of the picture, Allister probably thinks I’ll take him back.” Devin took several swallows of water. “And Allister could have easily convinced the Russian to help him get even with me.”

“How could Allister have known about Ewyn and the Russian to solicit his help? And, Allister collaborating with the Russians... I don’t know.”

“Hell. Allister is a goddamn intelligence agent; it’s his job to know things. Office grapevine... Who knows. All of this is just speculation.” Devin raked his finger through his hair. “Besides, if Allister and Varvarinski are in this together, it’s not collaboration. Allister is too smart to leave himself vulnerable to blackmail. He’s using Gareth and his people; they’re expendable.”

“Okay. That makes sense. But how would Allister know you were going out? You and I only talked that morning. I shuffled some schedules and had Allister’s ass gone that night. Your call didn’t go out...” Timothy paused looking stunned.

“Yeah. Allister stateside, he’s back in my section. Not a problem finding out what I’m working on. Probably in the office when Simmons called me. Hell. The standard response given to the public when we’re out...the away messages are plugged in as soon as assignments are set. A civilian wouldn’t know what it meant; an insider would.

“Allister left, phoned in, and received the typical response to his inquiry...he knew.”

“Damn. As much as I want this resolved, I really don’t want it to be one of our own.”

“I hear you. But think about it. Ewyn’s been with me for six months. After he has a run-in with Allister, someone comes at him? But hey, it’s all conjecture.”

“True.”

“However, there is one thing I am sure of.”

“What?”

“Neither Allister nor Varvarinski knows Ewyn is a Calderone. Hell. Gareth and his people can’t be that stupid...to take on the Calderones and the Feds at the same time. I might be able to use that against them, if I’m right.”

“How?”

“We get Calderone involved, let him do the research, while boosting our protection on Ewyn. Hell. This morning, after you and Mick left, I realized we’ve overlooked a crucial fact.”

“Such as?”

“Aside from all the personal shit, Ewyn is a goddamn federal employee. Every fucking agent in the place should be prepared to come to his defense.”

“Damn! You’re right. Guess I let the personal aspect cloud my judgment.”

“Both of us were taking it way too personal, and I believe it’s the same premise the perps are using. However, maybe with Calderone’s help, we can resolve this so we don’t have to take it upstairs, which will keep the personal shit from the brass, and keep it from becoming public domain.”

“Wait a minute. Allister knows Ewyn works here. So that would eliminate him.”

“Not necessarily. Allister is a vindictive son of a bitch, and a hothead. Right now, if he’s involved in this, he’s pissed and striking out at me, spur of the moment. Coming at this from a personal standpoint...he hasn’t thought beyond that.”

“Okay, I’ll buy that. So, what were their intentions? To kill Ewyn, scare him, beat him up?”

“Not sure how far they would have gone, but definitely, the intent was to scare. For what purpose...” Devin shrugged.

“Still...” Timothy shook his head. “I don’t know. Getting Gregorio involved...he’ll go for the kill, if he finds out about the beatings. Hell. I’ve been doing my damndest to keep that from Greg, and evidently, Pat and Mairianna are doing the same.

“Gemma told you the truth when she said I wanted to go after Varvarinski when I knew for sure. But I couldn’t without the shit hitting the fan around here. Now, if what you suspect is true about Varvarinski working with Allister to get at Ewyn, Greg might start

an all-out war.”

“No, he won’t. He’ll want the person behind it, because this is personal, not Calderone business. From what I know about your nephew, he’s fair. At a young age, he took over the family business, and he’s held the reins all this time without getting killed or arrested. He must have his shit together.”

“True. Greg is fair, and he’s changed the running of things a lot since his father’s death. But...I don’t know.”

“I’ll get his promise to let us handle it, once we have the right answers.”

“Devin... If Teague is involved, I don’t want you going after him. Let me handle it through the proper channels.” Timothy leaned forward, resting his chin on his hands, “Besides, what makes you think Greg will do this without some incentive on our part?”

“One... This is about Ewyn. From everything I’ve heard about Calderone, he truly loves his baby brother.”

“Fact.”

“So he’ll make this goddamn personal. It’ll be a family honor thing, but he’ll focus on Gareth, not the Russians as a whole. All said and done, Gregorio will let you handle it, since unofficially, family will be handling Varvarinski. While officially, you’ll take care of it because it’s a federal matter; Ewyn is federal domain.” Devin finished off the water before he went on.

“If Allister is involved, Calderone will understand the premise of Allister being one of our own, so we have to handle him through official channels.”

“Yeah...You’re right.”

“All that aside, do you know what really frosts my ass? *If* Allister is involved, his vindictiveness could screw up federal investigations into both organizations. Hell. He’s a trained goddamn Intel agent. He should have done his homework before setting this shit in motion.”

“Correct.”

“If Allister is behind this, I want him, Tim.”

“Sorry...no can do. We have to play by the rules with our own, or we’ll end up being like the badasses we go after.”

“Shit.”

“I know. Trust me. This is just as personal to me as it is to you. However, as you said, this is also business; Ewyn is a valuable employee. Personal shit aside, someone is coming after one of our own. If necessary, I’ll get the entire agency involved. So, *if* Teague is implicated, he’ll be sanctioned through official channels.” Timothy remained adamant. “You have my word on it.”

“I guess I’ll have to settle for that.” Devin sighed as he stood up. “Did you question Varvarinski’s man?”

“Yeah. Said he didn’t know anything about Ewyn living there, he’d been casing the place for several months. He only intended to break in and steal what he could, didn’t know who lived there.”

“Yeah...right. What story did Varvarinski give you about his man being at my home?”

“Said he didn’t know anything about it, his guy must have been acting on his own.” Timothy shook his head. “Had the goddamn nerve to laugh...said we know how vindictive Russians can be.”

“Did you believe him?”

“Yes and no. At first, he seemed surprised. I think we caught him off guard. But he’s probably so used to having the Feds on his ass, he quickly recovered, got all jovial on me, and started coming off with the wisecracks and the smartass answers.”

“And the phone call?” Devin asked, moving toward the door.

Timothy snorted. “Said he must have hit the button by mistake. He even let us check; let us see he erased Ewyn’s number, so there wouldn’t be any more mishaps.”

“Sure. For all we know, the cell he showed you could have been a different phone.”

“I know. I’m looking into that. Are you going to tell Ewyn your suspicions?”

“Not yet. For now, I’m just going to make him as safe as possible. Make him aware of the dangers.” He started to leave...

“What if neither Allister nor Varvarinski is behind this? Have you thought of the possibilities?”

Timothy’s question stopped Devin midstride, bringing him up short in the doorway. He turned back and closed the door.

Timothy went on. "I'd rather not bring the whole agency into this until we know for sure whether it's business or personal. But I don't want to become lax, thinking we have a grip on the situation, and then shit comes at us from another direction."

"I know." Devin raked his fingers through his hair. "And now that I think about it, suppose the statement Varvarinski's man made about casing the place for months had some truth to it, minus the burglary shit."

"So why tell us?"

"In case someone saw him, it would look just like what he said. If we buy into that, it leads us away from Al, but makes me wonder why Varvarinski would wait all this time. Hell. Since Ewyn has been living with me, I've been in and out; Gareth could have gotten to Ewyn any of those times."

"Yeah. And Al didn't know about Ewyn until two days ago. Shit. Too many variables."

"Right. So, the next question is...who put surveillance on Ewyn -- or me -- months ago, and why? Another reason for talking to Calderone. Let him know the danger his brother is in, and let him figure out if it's someone other than Allister. This shit could tie in with the crime families. Hell. Most of law enforcement might not realize Ewyn's connection to the Calderone organization, but you can bet Gregorio's connections do. And we know damn well none of Calderone's associates will talk to the Feds, so we need him."

"Okay, you've convinced me. Since the mob doesn't usually go after family members, only Greg can tell us if something is going down that would bring Ewyn into the spotlight?"

"Exactly." Devin turned toward the door. "Outside of work issues, I won't hold anything back from Gregorio. Until we know for sure, we need all bases covered." He looked back over his shoulder, "Meanwhile, can you keep tabs on Allister?" Timothy nodded. "If Calderone's discoveries are on the same page, we'll take it from there."

"Good deal. Let me know how meeting...uh...your in-laws turns out."

Devin stared, then burst out laughing. "In-laws...right. Thanks a lot, Tim."

* * * * *

Devin returned home around noon and found Ewyn still asleep. His quick stop to pick up a weapon for Ewyn took more time than he'd expected, but he refused to leave Ewyn defenseless again. In a matter of days, his baby-boy had endured quite a bit, and he had to give Ewyn props for keeping his shit together.

He took a quick shower, then slipped into bed. Drawn to him like a magnet, Ewyn closed the distance between them. He spooned baby-boy's body to his, smiled, and kissed Ewyn's neck. He closed his eyes; within moments, he drifted off to asleep.

* * * * *

Devin opened his eyes and found himself nose to nose, staring into a sleepy, green-eyed stare.

"Hey, baby-boy...you okay?"

"I love you, Dev." Tears sprang up in Ewyn's eyes.

"Good thing. Because..." Devin hauled Ewyn on top of him. "I don't let just anybody crawl all over me." Staking claim to Ewyn's mouth, he retained possession for several minutes, savoring the distinct flavor, before pulling away. "And, I don't let just anybody kiss me like that." Ewyn's seductive laugh fanned his lips. "What's wrong, baby?"

"I don't want to lose you, Dev."

"Hey..." He sat up and tugged Ewyn onto his lap. "What's this about?" Ewyn snuggled in, straddling his body, squirming; Ewyn's cock prodded his abs while that mobile ass stroked his dick. "Look at me." He put a finger under Ewyn's chin and lifted his face.

"Baby... Now that I've found you, I am not letting you go. You're mine for keeps, and nothing will separate us on a permanent basis, except death. I'm doing my damnedest to keep it from coming to that any time soon. Trust me?"

"With my life, Dev."

"Back at you, baby. However, I want you to be cautious and pay attention to your surroundings when you're not with me. I've made provisions for you when I'm out, but you'll have to do your part."

Ewyn smiled. "Promise."

Devin could drown in the look in those sparkling green eyes...and that smile... He would die happy. He felt like such a quixotic asshole. He shook his head.

"Which brings me to your own personal protection...can you shoot?"

"Sharpshooter."

"Figures. I lost my mind for a minute, considering your family background."

His hands glided up and down Ewyn's back. He felt the tension in baby-boy, although Ewyn tried to appear unaffected by everything happening to him. He latched onto that succulent bottom lip, nibbling, tongue teasing before slipping inside Ewyn's mouth...tasting. *Mmm...*

Devin leaned away and stared into the steady green gaze. Up to this point in his life, he couldn't imagine having such profound feelings for another human being on such a personal level. Clearly, Allister had only filled a physical void, since he'd never cared about Allister with the same degree of passion he felt for Ewyn. Baby-boy had become an essential part of him...his soulmate...his heart.

Shit. He needed to focus.

"Tomorrow, we're going out to the shooting range. I have a weapon for you, registered to me, so we won't have to deal with the nightmare of the names."

"You read my mind." Ewyn grinned up at him. "I intended to ask you about that. Last night, if your backup had been here" -- Ewyn grumbled, sobering, and his eyes flaring -- "I wouldn't have cared how much trouble came down on me...I would have used it, Dev, no questions!"

"Goddamn, I love you." Devin leaned in for a quick kiss. "One other thing, baby..."

"Uh-oh. I don't like the sound of that."

Devin laughed and nipped the tip of Ewyn's nose. "I want to meet your mother and your brother."

"My brother?" Ewyn squeaked.

"Oh, yeah. Time to take me home to meet the your family." He tried not to laugh at the comical expression on Ewyn's face. "What...you ashamed of me?"

"Devin..." His eyes narrowed. "Don't *even* go there. What's up?"

"I love you. Don't you think it's time I meet your family?"

Ewyn gaped, then laughed and threw himself against Devin, taking them down. "I want you, Dev...right now."

"I'm yours, baby...right now, and for keeps."

Chapter Thirteen

A total waste of space, Ewyn sat at his desk staring out the window at the smog hovering over the city skyline. The muted sound of activity buzzed around him, but with his mind occupied by everything happening to him lately, work wasn't even a consideration; his concentration was shot. Good thing he was only receiving data, not analyzing, and didn't have any systems down or programs running.

Then too, there was his appointment at the range today; he had to leave early.

After the incident at the condo the other night...for someone to come at him while he had Devin's protection -- someone had made it patently clear they were playing for the real deal. So, hell yeah, he needed his own weapon and testing at the range. Definitely time to ratchet up his skills a notch.

Instinct told him that Devin's attempt to shield him from the hardcore truth indicated it involved something other than just Gareth, the options innumerable. It could involve Devin's job, and shit, Devin's ex wasn't feeling warm and fuzzy toward him. Or maybe somebody found out about his connection to the Calderone name. Thought they could use him to get at Gregorio. Hell. However it went down, he was in for the long haul.

Damn if he didn't sound like his old self, and he had Devin to thank for rediscovering Ewyn Calderone. The Ewyn Calderone who didn't intend becoming a victim again.

Oh yeah... A refresher course on the range would not go amiss. So, let Gareth, his friends, and any-fuckin'-body else who wanted a piece of him, bring it.

* * * * *

"Damn! You handled yourself out there like a pro, baby. With a little more practice, you'll be as good as I am. I'll have to watch my back." Devin grinned over at Ewyn as they drove away from the range. He watched two spots of color infuse baby-boy's cheeks. "At the very least, I'll never piss you off."

"You think so? I mean, the part about being as good as you are? I watched you, Dev. Shit. I don't know."

"Well, I have a pass for you. You can come here by yourself, practice when you want."

"Oh... Thanks, Dev."

"Hey... It's as much for my benefit as it is for yours." His hand slid over Ewyn's thigh, and his fingertips soft-stroked Ewyn's cock. "I like this ass just the way it is. Alive and in

one piece.”

Ewyn’s sexy laughter had his dick pulsing. Remembering where they were, and knowing that they had a minimum thirty minutes before they reached home, Devin withdrew his hand.

“Dev...”

“Yeah, baby.”

“I’ve been thinking about you meeting the family.”

“Mmm-hmm... So what’s the decision?”

“I think we should have them over to our place for dinner. I want to cook. I’ve got the menu all planned out. I mean...unless you want to cook. It’s just...” Ewyn paused for breath. “Sorry, I’m babbling.”

Devin laughed. “I love you babbling. Go on.” Baby-boy glanced over at him, eyes sparkling and so full of love.

“Oh... Oh-kay.” Ewyn grinned. “Well, it’s because I’m the baby...I mean the Calderone baby... Fuck. You know what I mean.”

“Baby-boy... Why are you so nervous? If this is going to upset you, it can wait awhile.”

“No, it’s not nervousness. It’s more like excitement. As I said... Being the baby, well, that’s just the way everyone has always treated me. Like I’m a baby, as if I’m helpless and can’t do for myself...” Eyes going wide, he gasped, “Oh, wait... Dev... I didn’t mean...”

“Ewyn. If you don’t stop apologizing and tell me what you want, I’m going to pull this truck over and kiss you senseless...for everyone to see.” Devin glanced over at Ewyn and wiggled his eyebrows.

“Oh... Fuck it, then.”

“That’s *my* baby. Get pissy.”

Ewyn laughed. “I want to show off a little for the family. Let them know I’m capable of more than just computer skills.”

“Okay. No problem. Go for it. I’ll only help if you ask. Good deal?”

“Yes.”

"However, I insist on bringing in the cleaning service to clean up before and after, and I'll have them send over people to serve. You can do all the cooking, but this way, there will be help available if you need it."

"That will be great, Dev. So, can I go ahead with my plans?"

"Baby, it's your home too. You do not need my permission."

"Oh, yeah...thanks..." He looked over at Devin. "Sor --" Devin's eyebrow rose. "Fuck you!"

They burst out laughing.

"So... What's on the menu?"

"While surfing the web, I came across some recipes... Actually, I subscribed to a recipe newsletter. I've discovered I like cooking for you. I'm beginning to get the hang of this cooking and shopping thing, and... *Shit!* You have to stop me when I babble."

"No, I don't. You look so cute when you babble...hands fluttering, eyes all wide and sparkly, whether you're happy or pissed. So, yeah. I'm all over loving your babble, makes me hard."

"Dev!" Ewyn felt the heat strafe his cheeks. He ought to be used to Devin's outrageous comments by now.

Devin laughed when he saw the hotspots flare. Damn. He still couldn't get enough of Ewyn happy...the sexy laughter... Fuck. Focus needed here.

"Go on, baby, I'll stop teasing."

"No. I like your teasing. No one every teased me before...well, except my brother. His teasing sure as hell didn't have any sexual connotation to it and usually ended in a knock-down, drag-out. I am such a rookie at this loving stuff. Hell. I don't think I'll ever stop blushing when you say those things to me."

"Hey... If you do, I'll invent something new to keep the relationship interesting."

"Oh...hell yeah." Ewyn chuckled. "About the dinner...I want to do stuffed pork chops, asparagus...still debating on the hollandaise sauce. Haven't thought much beyond the main course, except dessert. I want to do cheesecake with pineapple. I love that stuff."

"Wow. Sounds good to me."

“Really?”

“Baby. If you wanted to have bacon, eggs, and grits, I’d eat it. The hell with everybody else.” Devin drove into the underground parking garage, pulled into one of his assigned spaces, and then he turned to look at Ewyn as he put the gear in park. “So, you found the recipes for your dinner menu on the Internet.”

“Yeah... There is so much stuff out there.” Ewyn practically bounced in his seat. “I’ll show you when we get upstairs.”

“Baby-boy, once we get upstairs, I seriously doubt we’ll be looking up recipes. Not for a while.” Devin unfastened his seatbelt and leaned over to seize the most appetizing mouth he’d ever had the privilege of tasting. He surfaced for air, staring into dazed green eyes. “I think we need to move this somewhere more private, before I lose all control and take you right here.”

Those words snapped Ewyn out of his passion-induced stupor, knowing Devin meant what he said. He quickly undid his seatbelt and scrambled from the vehicle.

Chuckling, Devin followed, watching the wiggle of the cute little ass just ahead of him. He caught up with Ewyn at the elevator. “You know, baby, I’m so fucking hurting right now, we’ll skip the shower.”

Ewyn stared, mesmerized by the burning passion in those tiger eyes, unable to fully grasp what he heard. Not taking a shower... “Dev...” He stumbled into the elevator, gaze on Devin.

“Yeah, I know. But watching your ass out there on the range, well...I need you something fierce.”

The moment they stepped out of the elevator, Devin proved his point by spinning Ewyn around and backing him up against the wall. He grabbed baby-boy’s wrists and extended Ewyn’s arms above his head. Bodies pressed together, baby-boy squirmed, cocks bumping, his nails scraped across Ewyn’s palms flattening his hands, backs to the wall. Palm to palm, fingers interlocked, he leaned down and captured Ewyn’s mouth and surprised sounds. His tongue delved deep, tasting, teasing; cocks rubbing, baby-boy whimpered, feeding into the kiss.

Shit.

Devin forced himself to retreat before he took this to the next level. He released Ewyn’s wrists, hands gliding downward, he clasped Ewyn’s ass, grunting when sharp little teeth nipped at his lips. Slim arms snaked around his neck, and baby-boy climbed all over him.

"Mmm... Point taken. But this," Ewyn whispered against Devin's mouth, "would be much more satisfying...naked...in bed."

Devin snorted. "You think?"

One hand supporting Ewyn's butt, he moved to their door and unlocked it, then stepped inside; he kicked the door closed behind them. He headed straight for the bedroom, his need for Ewyn riding him hard.

No preliminaries, no time-consuming undressing... Devin tossed Ewyn onto the bed. Baby-boy squeaked and giggled as he leaned over him. He popped the button on Ewyn's jeans and yanked them down along with silk briefs, sliding them off with baby-boy's shoes. He kicked off his Top-Siders and slipped out of his sweatpants, flipped baby-boy, and glued his mouth to the tight little hole.

"Dev!" Ewyn squirmed, ass contracting, he elevated his lower body, a breathy groan escaping as he pushed back into Devin's touch.

"Oh yeah, baby-boy. Need this...you..." His tongue circled and delved, teasing, before he climbed on the bed and replaced his tongue with his cock, seating himself in one forceful thrust.

"Oh! Hell yeah, Dev. *Shit!* Love you...this..." Ewyn bit down on his lip to stop the babbling. Never brutal or sadistic, just way forceful, he loved it when Devin got rough with him. "Goddamn... Dev!"

"Oh, yeah... Here? Harder, slower..." Leaning down over the writhing body, his teeth grazed along the slim column of Ewyn's neck. "Tell me what you want, baby." He sucked up the tender skin, latching on.

"Fuck...there! More..." Hips rocking back into each thrust. "Oh, shit, Dev, going to..."

"Hell yeah. Give me what you've got..."

Devin reached under the squirming form. Hand sliding across the moist head of Ewyn's prick, precum lubricated his palm, allowing his fist to glide easily. His hand picked up the rhythm of their combined efforts.

Momentum accelerating, breathing tortured, Devin whispered against Ewyn's lips, "Now, baby. Fucking bring it!"

Nerve endings vibrating, hands clutching the sheets, Ewyn pushed back into Devin's thrusts, their pace synchronized. "Fuck, Dev... *Shh-yit!*" His words huffed into Devin's

open mouth as the heat sparked...feet, legs...brain-drain. Body drawing up tight, a fireworks display of tiny white lights exploded behind closed lids, cum spraying.

Devin shut his eyes as Ewyn's liquid heat pulsed out over his fist. Muscles tensing, body tremors, he fed on the rush, intoxicated by Ewyn's addictive taste. His seed pumped into the tight little ass contracting around his cock and siphoning off all he had to give. Arms snaking around the lithe form, he collapsed.

Breathless, and crushed beneath Devin's weight, Ewyn reveled in the feel of Devin still embedded deep inside him. Clenching his sphincter, he felt the pulsing spasms of Devin's cock as he milked it of every drop of sperm. His contractions elicited a satisfied grunt, which mingled with his surprised gasp when Devin's cock remained semierect.

"Baby-boy, I need more. This time...I want slow and easy." Devin kissed Ewyn's neck, then eased away and rolled off the bed. "Come on." He swatted the little round ass, grinning when Ewyn peeped. "Jacuzzi."

"Yeah..." Ewyn sat up and blinked. "Bath..." Limbs like jelly, he tried to stand...not happening.

Laughing at Ewyn's glazed, thoroughly fucked look, Devin reached down, grasped the bottom of baby-boy's shirt, pulled it over his head, and tossed it with the rest of their discarded clothing. He bent, scooped Ewyn up, and headed for the bathroom.

Ewyn's warm cock pressed against him as it filled; his prick bobbed against the fine little ass. He nuzzled the slender neck, inhaling Ewyn's intoxicating scent comingled with the smell of sex. His tongue licked, his mouth tasted...

"Mmm... Baby, did I hurt you? Was I too rough?" Sexy green eyes sparkling, legs tight around his waist, Ewyn grinned up at him.

"Fuck no." Slim arms hugged his neck. "I love it when you get rough. You never go too far, never hurt me...gives me ideas."

"Oh..." Devin chuckled. "Maybe I'll have to get a little rougher. How about cuffs? I do have some, rarely have a use for them. You'd let me know if I'm going too far, right?"

"Ooo...cuffs." Ewyn winked. "I trust you implicitly, Dev. You won't hurt me."

"No, baby...no pain. Just hot, kinky sex."

Devin released his hold on Ewyn's ass, and the supple body slid down his; baby-boy plopped down on the side of the bath. Devin turned on the Jacuzzi, then moved about the room lighting candles.

“Hmm... We’re missing something. I’ll be right back.”

Head cocked to one side, Ewyn stared at Devin’s retreating back, smiling at the tempting view. Devin wore nothing but his polo shirt, toned thighs and that fine naked ass flexing as he moved. Ewyn still sat there smiling when Devin returned with a bottle of wine and two glasses.

“If you’re hungry, I can get some Gouda and crackers to stave off hunger pains until dinner.”

“Yeah... I think I’d better have something to eat, or the wine will knock my ass out.” Ewyn smoothed his hands over the contours of Devin’s ass.

“Keep that up and we won’t even get to the wine.”

“Mmm...” Ewyn grinned. “Promise?”

Devin left the bathroom chuckling.

Ewyn uncorked the wine, then set the bottle and the glasses on the side of the spa. He stood and stepped down into water. He sighed as he sank into the swirling cocoon of warmth and settled back, letting the pulsing jets massage his back muscles.

“Okay...” Devin set the tray down, then removed his shirt as he stepped into the spa, settled back, and relaxed. “Damn, this feels good.”

“Mmm-hmm...”

“We have two hours to play, relax, and anything else that comes to mind. I ordered dinner. Something special for your good showing out on the range today.”

“Ooo...what?”

“Chicken Parmesan with spaghetti, four-cheese garlic bread, Caesar salad, and I have a surprise for you.” He poured the wine, handed Ewyn a glass, slid the tray of sliced cheese and crackers Ewyn’s way, and lay back.

Feeling too relaxed, Ewyn arched a brow, the most movement he wanted to initiate. “A surprise...hmm.”

Devin winked.

Ewyn sipped his wine, watching Devin watch him. Tiger eyes gleaming in the

candlelight, if Ewyn read the look in those eyes right, they reflected his own feelings of love back at him. Happy as fuck, and forever thankful he and Devin had finally connected, moments like this made him realize how, prior to Devin coming into his life, he had missed out on a hell of a lot of loving over the years.

Devin set his glass down. "Come here."

Ewyn floated over to Devin. Cock trailing over Devin's legs, he drifted up along the buff body. His tongue blazed a trail over the broad expanse of chest to tease Devin's lips before insisting on entrance to Devin's warmth. The semisweet taste of wine always enhanced Devin's flavor.

"Mmm...nice." Devin couldn't get enough of Ewyn. Sucking on the hot little tongue, his hands moved over the contours of the lithe body before settling on the sweet little ass. His fingers delved between the cheeks, ghosting the little hole, teasing.

"I could stay like this for the rest of the night." Right on cue, baby-boy's stomach made growly feed-me noises. Devin snorted. "Maybe not."

"Hell yeah, I'm hungry." Ewyn wiggled around until he sat astride Devin's body, diving in for another kiss before he pulled away, laughing. "However, it's not all about food."

"Oh, baby-boy...I feel you. We have plenty of time before the food arrives." Devin readjusted Ewyn's position, easing him down on his cock.

Ewyn leaned in and recaptured Devin's mouth.

Chapter Fourteen

Ewyn stretched out across the bottom of the bed feeling satiated and all melty. Eyes following Devin about the room...damn. How the hell could Devin be so energized...dressing, humming and whistling to the music filling the room? Shit. For a man his size, Devin had that hip-humping, rocking-rhythm thing going on. The same rhythm Devin used to fuck him senseless.

"Dev..."

"Hmm, baby?"

Devin turned and smiled at the sight of Ewyn sprawled out on the bed, freshly fucked and sexy as hell. He moved to the bed, sat down, and leaned back against the headboard, fully sated himself.

"Do I have to get dressed, Dev?" Ewyn asked, eyeing Devin's attire...an old pair of black sweats and a ratty, light gray T-shirt. "Don't *even* want to expend that much energy." Ewyn chuckled as he crawled up over Devin and settled on his lap.

"Well... Only if you want to eat...the energy part that is. As for dressing...no. I like you just the way you are." His fingertips skimmed over the firm prick and up to Ewyn's innie.

"Smartass. I was referring to the going-into-the-other-room dressing thing."

"Oh-ho... Smartass, am I?" Using the pad of his finger, he circled the skin surrounding Ewyn's belly button, before bending baby-boy back and clamping his mouth down over the little crevice. Pulling on the skin, his tongue darted in and out.

Laughing and squirming, Ewyn tried to wiggle away. "Stop... Tickles... Dev!"

Devin took pity on Ewyn, and pulling him up against his chest, he planted a noisy, sloppy-wet kiss on Ewyn's mouth.

"I knew what you meant. We can eat in here." As if on cue, the doorbell chimed. He kissed Ewyn's nose as baby-boy scooted off his lap. "Be right back."

Ewyn slid off the bed and moved to the windowed alcove. He repositioned the lamp on the table to make room for their food, changed the music to jazz, and lit a few candles; the scent he associated with Devin filled the room. He turned out all the lights except the three-way on the table, turning it down to its lowest wattage. He slipped into his robe just as Devin returned with the food, wine, and dinnerware.

"Sit, Dev, let me." Ewyn moved about serving up the food, practically drooling on himself as the spicy aromas assaulted his senses.

Devin uncorked and poured the wine. Then he settled back in his chair and watched Ewyn, sexy green eyes sparkling and cheeks flushed. The transformation in Ewyn, from the fearful man he'd brought home several months ago, continued to amaze him. He figured what people said about love had some truth in it. It *did* conquer quite a bit.

Hell. Look at him. If anyone in his work world ever saw him like this with Ewyn, no one would believe he was the same cold-blooded son of a bitch who killed in a heartbeat, without blinking an eye. No one would ascribe a loving and compassionate nature to him.

Ewyn looked up and caught Devin staring. His heartbeat accelerated. "Dev..."

"Yeah, baby."

"Is something wrong?"

"No. Just enjoying the view." Ewyn grinned at him, dimples peeking out, and eyes lighting up. "I do love the view. Although it was much more pleasing sans the robe."

"Yeah...but chilly." Ewyn couldn't wait a moment longer; he sat down and started eating. "Mmm... This is delicious, Dev. You always make the best choices."

"You don't do so bad yourself." He took a sip of wine. "So, tell me about all your recipe explorations on the Internet."

"First... Where's my surprise?"

"After dinner."

Before Ewyn said another word, Devin's cell rang.

"Fuck!" They spoke in unison, then started laughing.

Devin reached for his phone. "Nilsson." He looked over at Ewyn while he listened to the voice at the other end. Noticing Ewyn's tense posture, he smiled, hoping to ease baby-boy's anxiety.

"Got it. I'm having dinner. Oh..." He winked at Ewyn. "Let's say one hour. I'll meet you there."

He closed his cell and started eating.

"Are you going to be away long?"

Devin took a sip of wine, wiped his mouth, then leaned over and kissed Ewyn. "No, baby, and I'm not leaving without giving you your surprise." He stood and left the room, returning moments later with a covered take-out dish, which he placed in front of Ewyn. "Open it."

"Dev..." Ewyn looked from Devin to the dish, grinning as he took off the cover. "Cannoli!"

Devin couldn't begin to describe his feelings at that moment. Such a simple thing, yet he could see it meant so much to Ewyn...green eyes all wide and bright, and the love clearly visible in their depths.

"Thanks, Dev. You just don't know..."

"Yeah, I do. I'm feeling you, baby." Gazes locked, he ran his thumb across the pouty bottom lip. "Love you." He bent and kissed the soft lips. "Have to meet Tim at the office. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

No way could he tell Ewyn why he had to meet Tim. Hell. The perp they'd caught trying to break into his condo just turned up dead in his jail cell. Damn it. The incident opened up too many possibilities and raised more questions.

With Allister in Hawaii... Unless someone else from the company was involved, Allister didn't have that type of connection, not to the extent of arranging something like this. At least, he didn't think Allister did. Fuck. Would Allister's self-centered ass take jealousy to this extent? Would he expend this much energy on something so petty?

Could Varvarinski be so stupid, with the spotlight already on him?

More importantly, it scared the holy hell out of Devin to think someone wanted Ewyn so badly they were cleaning up behind themselves, and he didn't have a handle on it.

"You'll be okay, baby-boy?"

"Yes. Don't worry about me; go take care of business." Ewyn bit into the cannoli and took a few minutes to savor his first taste before he looked back at Devin. "I'll be fine, now that I'm armed. I'll try to wait up for you."

"You don't have to." Devin watched that mobile mouth with cream covering the lips and that little tongue darting out to lick away some of the residue. "I'll wake your sexy behind when I get back."

Ewyn wiped his hands and stood up. "Love you."

"Back at you, baby." Hands clasping Ewyn's face, Devin grinned. "I love this look on you." His tongue trailed over the cream-covered lips before parting them. "Mmm..." Devin straightened. "Going to change; I'll return as soon as I can." He kissed the tip of Ewyn's nose and moved away before the temptation to linger overpowered his sense of duty.

* * * * *

"What the fuck happened, Tim?"

"Don't know. It's not as if the asshole wasn't a waste of space, but damn. This shouldn't have happened, not on my watch, so to speak. Hell. How *did* it happen?" Timothy paced the small area in front of his desk. "Who could have gotten to him in his goddamn jail cell? More importantly...why?"

"Yeah." Devin sat in the chair, elbows on its arms, and his fingers interlocked, steepled index fingers pressing against his chin. Eyes narrowed, he watched Timothy pace. "The why scares the hell out of me. Especially since I think it's still aimed at getting to Ewyn."

Timothy paused in front of him. "You think that's what this is about?"

"Hell yeah. But why...your guess is as good as mine." Devin stood and went over to the wet bar. He retrieved a bottle of water from the refrigerator. Then, moving about the room, he went on. "Before I took Ewyn away from Varvarinski, I'd only heard of the man. He wasn't a main player in the scheme of things, so he wasn't of any particular interest to me."

"Right. MacGregor has dibs on his ass. Not our jurisdiction, unless the powers that be want him to become a memory."

"Exactly. Now, all of a sudden, I'm on Varvarinski overload. It can't be coincidence."

"You think he had his own man killed?"

"That's a possibility, but... I don't know. Something isn't right. You said Varvarinski played it off when you questioned him. So why bother?" Brow furrowed, Devin paused, looking down at Timothy. "We only had the dumbass for attempted B & E and parole violation. That's why this doesn't make any sense. What is someone trying to hide? Killing the man only draws more attention to the situation. And maybe that's the point. How was he killed?"

"Poisoned. Something slipped into his food or drink."

"Do we know what type of poison?" Devin walked back to the chair and sat down. "That could point us in the direction of who."

"Nothing yet. Toxicology isn't in."

"So, it's someone on the inside?"

"Could be anybody. The sheriff's station where we held him has a food service deliver their meals. They don't have a lot of traffic, so it's easier to deal with the occasional inmate. That's the main reason we housed him there."

"Shit. Leaves the field wide open. But damn if I understand. If it's personal, we're looking at Varvarinski and Allister, or..."

"Yeah?"

"Suppose someone used Varvarinski's man, setting the Russian up for the fall. You said Varvarinski seemed surprised his man had been at my house. If the man had worked for Varvarinski any length of time, he could have had access to Ewyn's number or Varvarinski's cell phone."

"And what... He's so dedicated to Varvarinski, he decided to get revenge against Ewyn for dumping his boss? Naw...that don't compute."

"You're right. I doubt Varvarinski garners that kind of loyalty. Allister could have hired the man, but to have the man killed... Shit. It could be something altogether different, maybe job related."

"No, definitely not job related, not on Ewyn's part. Ewyn has top clearance, but he's not a key player. Just a cog in the wheel, not worth going to all this much trouble over. At most, for the type of information he has access to, whoever is behind this would want him alive to get it, and we have safeguards for critical levels of access."

"Tim, we're not sure they came at Ewyn to kill him."

"Come on, Devin, think about it. For someone to go to such lengths, government employee aside... To come at Ewyn while he's under your protection, then, to get rid of the one person who can tell us what's going on. No, that smacks of serious intent. I believe someone intends to kill Ewyn, if given the opportunity."

"Okay. Your scenario eliminates Al and Varvarinski. Al knows Ewyn works for us, knows Ewyn's level of access, and I've proved to him how far I'll go to protect Ewyn. Gareth, on the other hand, knows I'm a Fed, but he doesn't know Ewyn has the same employer. Neither Gareth nor Allister knows Ewyn is a Calderone. So, if neither Gareth, nor his employers are going after Calderone, where does that leave us?"

"Well, we know it's not about your work. You don't leave traces to come back at you. Damn. Now you're scaring the hell out of me. We've just decimated our case for both suspects." Timothy sighed. "Point of fact... If they're working together, Allister would have clued the Russian in on everything there is to know about you and Ewyn."

"True. Unless Al set the man up to take the fall."

"That would have been a lot of setup in a relatively short time. Even for an Intel agent, Al had a very small window of opportunity to gather the needed information and implement a plan." Timothy shook his head. "No, I can't buy that. So let's go with the theory that Varvarinski is being set up. Maybe someone wants an all-out war between the Russians and Calderones."

"Yeah. Guess I'd better have Ewyn bump up the meeting with the relatives a day or two. Gregorio needs to get on this bandwagon before something happens to Ewyn, and we have exactly that...a full-scale conflict on our hands."

"You've got that shit right. I'm going to talk to MacGregor over at the bureau. Maybe he'll have some angle on the Russian that will help. I'll clue him in on what I can, minus the personal shit -- need to know only. Ewyn is our employee, who had the misfortune to hook up with Varvarinski."

"Agreed. But, Tim, I swear to God, if anything happens to Ewyn, I'll resign, because I'm going after *whoever* is behind this. Done deal."

Timothy nodded. "I understand. Off the record, I'll support your efforts. But hey, maybe Mairianna and Gregorio can shed some light on something we're overlooking...family business or something on a personal level. The father had quite a few enemies, some within his own crime family."

"Right." Devin stood, shook Timothy's hand and left, anxious to get back to Ewyn.

* * * * *

The phone rang several times before it was answered.

"Hello..."

"We need to talk."

"Who the fuck is this?"

"Gareth Varvarinski. Haven't we met before?"

"How did you get this number?"

"From a mutual acquaintance." Varvarinski laughed. "He won't be using it anymore."

"Why? What did he tell you?"

"Listen. Let's get something clear. I run things. No one goes behind my back making their own deals without my approval and cutting me out. I eliminated the middleman; I'm taking over his business. Whatever it is."

Silence. Then, "What do you want?"

"Whatever you were giving him, if it's reasonable. When and where do we meet?"

"I'll get back to you."

"Don't take too long. I don't know what kind of deal the two of you had going, but I'm sure there's someone else out there who will pay for the information."

"I said I'll get back to you."

The connection went dead.

Chapter Fifteen

Devin watched Ewyn drive away before retrieving his cell phone. He pressed #4 and waited.

"You got him?"

"Yeah. Where's he headed?"

"He didn't say, but I think he's going to see his brother."

"Okay, I'll follow. Once I'm sure that's his destination, I'll go in the back way and meet him there. I'll have him on the flipside too."

"Thanks." Devin closed his cell and slipped it back on his waistband as he headed back to his office.

* * * * *

Ewyn pulled up to the keypad post, keyed in his code, and watched the iron gates swing open. He drove onto the circular drive and parked a few feet from the door, but he made no attempt to get out of the Escalade. He hadn't been to the family compound in over a year. It seemed strange coming there, coming home. Nothing appeared changed.

The three-story structure seemed as imposing as ever, situated at the center of five immaculately manicured acres. The trees along the perimeter of the property were symmetrical and perfectly aligned; a service road wended its way along the back of the property to the servants' entrance. The detached, five-car garage had apartments above, which housed the family's personal servants.

Ewyn smiled, remembering how he used to hide out in Patrick's apartment whenever he'd pissed off Greg. He must have been about twelve or thirteen, before he realized the joke was on him. Everyone knew he hid there and considered it fair punishment,

since he sat there for hours; anything he did would have attracted attention.

Ewyn glanced at his watch...one o'clock. He'd left work early, hoping to catch his brother at home. If the family followed their usual routine, they would be sitting down to lunch right about now. Shit. He might as well get it done.

Climbing out of the SUV, he headed for the front door; it swung open as he drew near. Patrick stood in the entrance, wearing a big-ass grin.

"So, the prodigal returns."

"Fuck you, Pat."

"I don't think your Devin would go for that." Ewyn laughed as Patrick embraced him. "So, what brings you here?" Patrick ushered him inside.

"Need to talk to Mom and Greg. Is Greg here?"

"Yeah."

"Is the bitch home?"

"Oh, yeah. I don't know what Cecilia did, but Mairianna has been on her ass all day. You'd think Cecilia would have learned by now. There is no reason why she should cross paths with Mairianna, except at meals. Hell. They lead totally separate lives, in different social circles. I'm beginning to think Cecilia does it on purpose. But why..." Patrick shrugged. "She always comes out on the short end of the stick."

"Please. If the woman had any smarts, she would have noticed by now that even the men in the family don't willingly go up against Mom." Ewyn grinned. "Where is everybody?"

"Out back. Where's your Devin?"

"At the office. If he needs a ride, he'll call or take a company car."

"Did he know you were coming here?"

He looked up at Patrick. "What...you still playing the babysitter? I'm grown now, if you haven't noticed." Shit. He didn't even have to report to Devin about where he went. He just told Devin he had errands to run. Devin didn't question him.

"Fuck. No place like home."

Patrick just grinned down at him and followed him to the back of the house.

Ewyn paused at the patio doors and reacquainted himself with the quiet peaceful setting, before any of the figures seated around the table noticed him.

The crystal-clear shimmer of pool water reflected the sunlight, while the sound of the waterfall cascading into the spa, combined with the runoff flowing from spa to pool, created a calm, soothing atmosphere. He had fond memories of the days he'd spent out there. After a workout in the pool with his brother and his dad, he'd stretch out on a chaise and let the steady rush of water lull him to sleep.

Chairs, lounges, and settees, situated in various, cozy configurations, surrounded the *chiminea*.

Ewyn snapped out of his reverie when he realized his brother had risen from his chair. He took a deep breath and let it out in a huff before stepping outside.

"He won't bite, you know." Patrick chuckled and whacked him on his back. "He loves you, pipsqueak."

"I know."

Ewyn watched his brother's approach, nerve endings twitching, not knowing what to expect. Then his brother smiled, identical green eyes dancing; he moved forward and met Gregorio halfway. Gregorio wrapped him in a warm embrace, hugging him tight; tears stung the backs of his eyes. He'd missed this.

"Hey, baby brother." Gregorio held him at arm's length, planted a kiss on each cheek, then gave him the once-over. "Looking good; missed you." His brother threw an arm across his shoulders and led him to the table where his mother awaited him with a smile.

"Hi, Mom." Ewyn bent and kissed Mairianna's cheek. He nodded at Cecilia, who glared at him in return.

"Hungry?" Gregorio nodded to one of the servants.

"Yeah. I've been so nervous about seeing you, after such a long time, I haven't eaten today." Good thing he was up before Devin this morning. Hell. He'd tossed and turned all night, unable to sleep, worrying about his agenda for the day. He'd told Devin he ate before Devin woke up.

"What's there to be nervous about? We're family."

Ewyn shrugged and settled down next to his mother, watching as another place setting appeared before him. "Of course, if Dev knew, he'd kick my ass for missing breakfast."

"I'd better not hear about it," Gregorio stated.

Startled, Ewyn looked up at his brother. ""What... No! Dev would never..."

"Relax, Ewyn, I'm only teasing. Besides, I hear your Devin is a force to reckon with."

"Baby, it's okay." Mairianna patted Ewyn's hand while glaring at her eldest son. "Stop it, Greg."

"Come on, Mom." Gregorio grinned at Ewyn. "Just like old times, huh? Mom coming to your rescue."

Ewyn felt the heat strafe his cheeks, and just like the old days, he refused to back down. "Yeah... Well, I've learned a few things. Don't mess with me, big brother, I'm a deadly weapon now."

"Whoa...I'm scared of you." Gregorio chuckled. "So, what brings you here? Need something?"

"No, it's all good. I came to invite you and Mom to dinner at our place. I want to formally introduce you to Dev."

"Hmm...serious. Letting him meet the family." Gregorio reached over and ruffled Ewyn's hair.

Ewyn grinned. "Hey, man...watch the curls." Nothing had changed, except Gregorio's surprising attitude of acceptance. Ewyn relaxed.

"Oh, yeah. Wouldn't want to mess up the pretty looks."

"Will you come, Greg?"

"Wouldn't miss it. I'll even be on my best behavior."

"Wasn't worried about that. With Mom there...hell, we'll both be on our best behavior."

Mairianna looked from one son to the other, beaming. "You know it. Don't want to give this Devin the wrong impression, or scare him away, *if* he's what Ewyn really wants."

"Mom!"

“What?”

“I already told you. Dev and I...”

“Give it up, Ewyn.” Gregorio winked. “Until this Devin gets the ‘mom once-over and stamp of approval,’ Mom is not going to believe Devin or anybody else is good enough for you. Hell” -- Gregorio glanced at his wife -- “I wish Mom had been given the opportunity to do the same for me.”

To control the laughter wanting out, Ewyn tucked into his meal. Nervousness abated, he chowed down on the Caesar salad with giant prawns as if he’d been fasting. No sooner had he put his fork down than his salad plate disappeared, replaced by a dish piled high with spaghetti and meatballs in marinara sauce, and his favorite four-cheese garlic bread.

Feeling watched, Ewyn glanced up and caught Cecilia frowning at him. “You’re invited too, CeCe.” He watched her mouth tighten into a hard line at the use of his nickname for her. He only used it because it annoyed her.

“I wouldn’t --”

“She’ll be there.” Gregorio cut her off, head swiveling in her direction. “Won’t you?”

Cecilia nodded, lowered her eyes, and resumed eating without another word.

Ewyn held back the laughter, glancing at his mother, who shook her head and winked. He chuckled.

“Coffee?” Gregorio asked as the servants cleared the table. “Dessert? It’s pineapple cheesecake, one of your favorites.”

“Mmm... Yes, please, on the cheesecake, but no, thanks, on the coffee. Devin weaned me off coffee, so unless you have decaf...” He looked at the maid. “I’ll have milk, please.”

“Oh, that’s right. We’ll have to get the decaf, Greg.” Mairianna smiled. “The flavored kinds, for Ewyn.”

Gregorio laughed. “I can’t wait to meet this Devin. I can’t imagine your spoiled ass letting someone wean you off anything you wanted. Ring through the nose, baby brother?”

Surprisingly, Ewyn didn’t take offense at Gregorio’s remarks. He just smiled thinking

about how Devin spoiled him. "Hell. You are so far off base."

"Really." Gregorio looked at Mairianna. "Excuse us, Mother. Ewyn and I have some catching up to do." He told the servants to bring their dessert to his office; he didn't even glance at his wife.

Cecilia surged to her feet, tossed her napkin on the table, and stormed into the house.

"Ouch! I think my feelings are supposed to be hurt." Gregorio chuckled and stood, waiting for Ewyn to join him. They went inside.

* * * * *

Patrick appeared next to Mairianna. "I told you...nothing to worry about."

"Yeah...so far. Go keep an ear out. You know how volatile Ewyn can get, and Greg likes to provoke him."

Patrick nodded and followed the brothers indoors.

* * * * *

Ewyn watched Gregorio make himself comfortable in their father's old easy chair, the creaking, crackling, and squelch of the leather a familiar sound. He loved this room.

He looked around at the multitude of books on the wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling shelves, and smiled when he spotted his collection of kiddie books. Even the old set of encyclopedias he'd received on his tenth birthday still had a place on the bottom shelf. He'd spent many a happy day as a child playing in front of the fireplace or cuddled up in his father's chair reading, while his dad conducted his business, people coming and going.

Ewyn sat down on the leather sofa and curled up in the corner, hugging one of the overstuffed pillows to his chest.

"So, I take it this is for real...you and this Devin."

He grinned. "Dev and I are as real as it gets."

"Should I help you pick out a china pattern?" Gregorio laughed and dodged the pillow Ewyn threw at him. Then, sobering, he asked, "What happened with you and Varvarinski?"

"Cultural clash."

"Yeah, right. I won't probe any deeper, since I can see you're okay and looking good. Been bulking up?"

"Not really. Just eating right, exercising."

They remained quiet while the servants set up the dessert, coffee, and carafe of milk on the coffee table. The servants left as soon as they finished.

"You know I don't understand this gay stuff." Gregorio sipped his coffee, watching Ewyn over the brim of the cup. "But you also know I want whatever is best for you. Always have. So, you'll let me know if you need anything, right?"

"Mmm..." Ewyn forked cheesecake into his mouth before answering. "Yeah. But Dev gives me everything I need. I'm really happy, Greg." Ewyn smiled. "Dev loves me; he spoils me rotten."

Gregorio snorted. "He didn't have to work too hard on that. Hell. You always were a spoiled brat." Gregorio held up his hand. "Let me finish before you hurl yourself at me."

"That wasn't meant as a putdown. I had a hand in spoiling you as much as Mom and Dad...hell, I'd still be spoiling you, if you'd let me. So, if things don't work out with you and this Devin, I want you to know I'll be here for you. I'll never understand what's between the two of you, but I love you too much to lose you over this."

"I love you too, Greg. It wasn't your fault. I needed to get away. I felt I disappointed you in some way --"

"No! Ewyn Kelley...stop. I think we both misunderstood. You have never disappointed me. Never. Even now... If you say you love this guy, who am I to judge? Hell, I'm married to a woman I've never loved. I married out of duty, so I have no idea what love is, or how it's supposed to feel. Unless it's the love I have for you, Mom, and the girls...that love is definite."

"I am so proud of you. Proud of what you've accomplished...proud of you for taking a stand for love, regardless of which way you swing. I couldn't be any prouder if I were your father." Gregorio wiped his mouth and stood. "Dad would be proud of you if he were here." He moved toward the bar. "Marnier?"

"Yeah." Ewyn stood and followed his brother across the room. "Do you really think Dad would be proud of me? I mean...knowing I'm gay."

"Hell yeah." Gregorio stopped and stared straight at Ewyn. "Let me tell you something, little brother. I believe Dad suspected all along, and that's the reason he made me

promise to keep you out of the business. Made me promise to make sure you went to college and finished.”

“No, Greg... He couldn’t...how...”

“I don’t know why or how. For whatever reasons, his suspicions were aroused, and he knew the family, especially the older members, would never respect you as head of the family.”

“So you’ve known all along.”

“No. It never occurred to me when I was younger, and Dad used to say you were special, said I needed to watch out for you...always. I thought he meant because you were so much younger than me and spoiled.” Gregorio grinned.

“It wasn’t until I realized you never brought girls home, Ewyn. Mom said you were a late bloomer, so leave you alone. Then I started noticing and hearing things. Even with all of that staring me in the face, I continued in denial. I didn’t want to believe, because you were such a fucking hardass when you were a kid.

“Hell. What do I know about homosexuals? I think most people, me included, don’t think of gay men as strong or tough. Our narrow minds have one definition of a real man...our definition, which equates gay with weak, effeminate...sissies.”

“But, Greg, Devin is...”

“I know. So were you; there’s the deception. Reality set in when I saw you with Varvarinski.”

Gregorio handed Ewyn his drink and returned to the easy chair; Ewyn remained standing at the bar.

“Ewyn, I love you. And yes, I struggled to wrap my mind around the concept of you being gay, and what it meant to me. I finally realized it didn’t have a goddamn thing to do with me. Hell. You’re my brother, being gay doesn’t change that, and in no way does your choice diminish my love or respect for you. If my actions or anything I said in the past caused you pain or made you doubt yourself... If I’m the reason you moved out, I’m sorry.”

“Greg, it wasn’t you...” Ewyn started pacing.

“I talked to Cecilia. She has always been jealous of our relationship. God knows why. I’ve given her and the girls everything they wanted or needed. She accused me of treating you like my son and putting you ahead of the girls. The self-centered bitch. How

did she expect me to treat you when Dad died? You were just a kid, you needed me.”

“Greg...”

“Don’t worry about Cecilia. If she gives you any more grief, come to me, Ewyn. Don’t ever run away from me again.” Gregorio smiled. “Now, sit down. There are some business matters we need to discuss.”

“I won’t become involved in the business --”

“Not that. This is personal business. In case something happens to me, you need to know. I agree with Mom about the family business...if it comes down to that, sell it to the cousins. Make sure you get a good price. Don’t let them talk you into taking shares. Disconnect yourself from all of it. Understand?”

Ewyn nodded. “The family wouldn’t follow me anyway, Greg.”

“I know, baby. I’m sorry about that, but that’s the way of things.”

“No need to be sorry. I couldn’t do it.” Ewyn stopped next to the chair and stared down at his brother. “Did you have the company investigated too?”

“No.” Gregorio laughed. “Mom’s a trip, isn’t she? I’m the one who asked Tim to take you on...to keep you away from the business.”

“Oh...I didn’t know. Well, considering where I work, it’s not me...the family business, I couldn’t wrap my mind around it.”

“More importantly, Dad would roll over in his grave if you became involved. I promised him I would keep you out of it and keep you safe, even if I’m gone.”

“Greg, please.” Tears welled up in Ewyn’s eyes. “I don’t want to talk about this...about you not being here.”

“I know. But you have to be prepared. Things happen.”

“Is there trouble? Is someone trying to take over? Threats?”

“No. Relax. I’ve done a lot to legitimize the business. Some of the seniors are holding on to the old ways, and out of respect to Dad, I let them. No big deal. The point is, to law enforcement, the Calderone name is synonymous with criminal activity, and will remain so. I don’t want you involved with any of it.

“But you need to know the ins and outs of our personal business. The girls will need you

to administer their trusts." Gregorio grinned and winked. "Put all those years of college and that graduate degree to good use."

Ewyn laughed. "Funny, Greg."

"Seriously, if I'm not around, Mom will need you. In that respect, you will be head of the family."

"Yeah. You're right."

Ewyn walked over to the couch and made himself comfortable.

* * * * *

"Hey, baby. Where have you been?" Devin wiped his hands on a towel, adjusted the temperature on the oven, and then he joined Ewyn at the table. He bent and took a nice long kiss.

"Went to see the folks. They're coming for dinner on Saturday. Is that good for you?"

"Sure. I'll alert the cleaning service." Devin poured wine into a glass and handed it to Ewyn. "So, what's got you so down, baby-boy?"

"Not down. My mind's on overflow from all the shit Greg threw at me."

"Shit?"

"Well, business stuff."

Devin's eyebrow arched.

"Hey!" Ewyn laughed. "Not that business. Personal family shit like burial plots, insurance, who-gets-what crap. Brought to mind just how vulnerable my brother is because of the family trade. I wish he had an alternative."

Devin grabbed Ewyn's wrist and tugged him over to his lap. "Hey..." He kissed the tip of Ewyn's nose. "I hear you. Your brother has made quite a few changes. Someday...who knows."

"Yeah. But someday might be too late, Dev."

"I know. I'm sorry. I know how much you and your brother mean to each other."

"No, I'm sorry. I'm bringing us both down. If I recall, we promised we wouldn't let

outside shit come between us.”

“Baby-boy, if it’s something that’s bothering you, and you need to talk about it, that’s not the outside shit I...”

“Ooo...” Ewyn grinned. “What smells so good? What’s for dinner?”

“You little shit.” Devin swooped in for another long deep kiss. “Mmm... I have two rib-eye steaks, saturated in a Caribbean jerk marinade, cooking in the microconvection, potatoes baking in the oven, and baby spinach salad chilling in the fridge. We have a half hour before it’s ready.”

“Shower first.”

“Oh yeah.” Devin goosed the tight little ass.

Ewyn peeped, slipped off his lap, stuck out his tongue, and dashed toward the bedroom. Devin hopped up and took off after him, catching up with him in the bedroom. He grabbed baby-boy around his waist; lifting him off the floor, he hauled a wriggling, laughing Ewyn into the bathroom.

He stopped in front of the shower door. Ewyn’s body slid down along his, cute little butt stroking his hard-on. His hands worked baby-boy’s slacks open, easing inside to palm the hot, pulsing cock before sliding up the svelte form. He raised the bottom of Ewyn’s shirt and slipped the material over his head.

Ewyn turned in his arms. Devin stared down into passionate green eyes and grinned. “We have twenty-three minutes left.”

Baby-boy blinked several times before his dazed look dissipated. “Oh...shit! Don’t want to ruin dinner. I’m hungry.”

Ewyn stripped out of the rest of his clothes in record time. Stepping into the shower, he started the water, and then he turned to watch Devin remove his clothes. He always had time for that show. All that muscle rippling and flexing...shit. His hand moved down over his prick, nice and slow, fingers toying with his balls. His eyes remained on Devin, watching as taut ass and filling cock came into view.

Devin stepped into the shower, grabbed his shoulders, and spun him around, pressing him against the wall. Devin’s hands glided down his arms and grasped his hands. Raising his hands above his head, their fingers interlocked, Devin pressed their hands flat against the wall. Devin’s lips nudged his ear, while Devin’s cock teased the crease of his ass.

"No preliminaries, baby...spread them."

Devin's words shimmied down Ewyn's spine to his dick, expediting the fill process. He moved his feet apart, ass pushing back. He turned his head to the side, lips touching, tongues teasing.

"Ready, baby-boy?"

"Bring it." Ewyn fed the words into the warm, accessible mouth waiting to claim his.

Devin released Ewyn's hands and mouth. His prick tapped at the tight little hole, requesting entrance. He lubed up and pushed forward, received a grunt, a responding shove backward, and a foul expletive as he slipped all the way inside the tight heat.

"Fucking A, baby. Goddamn."

Movements synchronized, Ewyn's hands were braced against the wall to keep him from drilling baby-boy's head through it. Hands gripping the slim hips, his thumbs kneaded the supple flesh of the little behind.

"Going to, Dev... Shit!"

"Oh, yeah, baby..."

One hand glided around Ewyn's slick body and grasped the hard cock. Ewyn stiffened, little ass going tight; hot sperm surged out over Devin's fingers. Baby-boy's sphincter contracted around his dick, and he felt the rush spark. Muscles tensing and his head thrown back, he growled, "Fuck... Ewyn!"

His cum flooded the tight little channel; his hand still clutching the throbbing cock, he pulled the lithe body back against him. With the hot water cocooning their bodies, Devin held on tight, riding out the shockwaves rocking their bodies until they subsided.

Ewyn pulled away, turned, and wrapped himself all over Devin. Big, firm hands clasped his ass. His mouth devoured Devin's, then drew back. His tongue licked and teased, his lips dotted the firm mouth with kisses; his teeth nibbled.

"I love you, Dev."

"Back at you, baby." Devin grinned and let Ewyn's body slide down his; he reached for a washcloth and the soap. "We have six minutes."

Ewyn blinked... "Say what?" He launched himself at Devin, tickling, poking, laughing. "I just poured my heart and soul into loving...and you..." He gasped, more breathless than

Devin. "You're worried about dinner?"

Devin captured both of his wandering hands. Holding them high above his head in one of his big paws, Devin soaped him up with the other hand. Devin thoroughly washed him all over, then discarded the washcloth to use his hands on his cock and ass, fingers teasing.

"Stop...Dev!" Shit. He did it again...squealed like a girl. "Come on...dinner!"

"Oh...so you did hear what I said."

"Asshole."

"True. But you love me anyway." Devin released his hands.

Ewyn scooted under the cascading water, rinsed hair and body, then flipped Devin off as he darted for the shower door. He wasn't quick enough; he felt the sting on his ass when Devin popped him with the washcloth. Glaring over his shoulder, he stepped out of the shower and closed the door before he mumbled, "Bastard."

"I heard that."

Grinning and rubbing his ass, he ambled over to the vanity. He snatched up a bath towel, wrapped it around his body, and headed for the kitchen. *Hell*. He was hungry. Damn if he'd let the meal be ruined.

Chapter Sixteen

The doorbell pealed.

"Dev...they're here! Ooo..."

Ewyn gaped at Devin's fine self all decked out in dark brown slacks and a honey gold cashmere sweater, which complemented the color of Devin's eyes. Devin wore burnished bronze Italian loafers on his feet. Blond hair shining, the waves were brushed back from Devin's features and tied at the nape of his neck, exposing the gold earring, studs, and ear cuff riding up along his outer ear.

"Damn, you're a sexy fucker. Looking good...how do I look? Let me get the door... Shit! I'm babbling."

Devin strolled over to Ewyn, bent and kissed him long and hard, then withdrew and stared down at baby-boy.

“Ewyn. Calm down. The help will get the door; you did a fantastic job with the dinner; you’re looking good; that sweater brings out the color in your eyes, although I like you better naked; and I promise I won’t arrest your brother or shoot the bitch he married.” He grinned. “Now your mother with the skills, she’s a whole other story. I’ll play that by ear. Okay...ow! You bit me. What?”

“Very funny, Dev.”

“Are you calm, now?” Ewyn nodded. “Then let’s go greet your family.”

Devin’s eyes fixed on the tall, muscular frame of Ewyn’s brother as he followed Ewyn into the living room. He didn’t know what to expect from the man, considering his job and the fact he was fucking the man’s brother. As he approached Gregorio, it surprised him to see the same prismatic green eyes of his lover staring back at him. That alone put him at ease.

Gregorio had jet black hair like Ewyn’s and Gemma’s, not curly, but cut short and styled. Although Gregorio couldn’t be classified as pretty like Ewyn, his handsome, clear-cut features were classic Calderone.

Ewyn appeared at his side and nervously clutched his arm. Devin smiled down at him. “Hey, baby. You going to introduce me?” Ewyn’s fingers relaxed their grip.

“Greg, I want you to meet Dev. Devin Nilsson...Gregorio Calderone.”

Devin clasped the hand held out to him. “It’s a pleasure, Greg.”

“Same here,” Gregorio responded as the two men shook hands. “Should I call you Dev, also?” Gregorio grinned down at his brother before turning to his mother. “Let me introduce you to our mother, Devin.”

Devin followed Gregorio across the room, Ewyn clinging to his hand.

“Mom, this is Devin.” Gregorio made the introduction. “Mairianna Calderone...Devin Nilsson.”

Devin took the tiny hand of the diminutive woman smiling up at him. Mrs. Calderone’s size explained Ewyn’s small-boned stature. Hell. Gregorio obviously took after the father; Devin had seen pictures of him.

“It’s a pleasure, Mrs. Calderone.”

“Call me Mairianna, Devin. The pleasure is all mine.” Mairianna patted the sofa. “Join

me, or is dinner about to be served?" She looked up at Ewyn.

"No, Mom, we have time for drinks."

"Oh...good. Sit, Dev. I may call you Dev, right?"

"Please do. I might not answer to anything else." Devin winked at Ewyn and took his place beside Mairianna. "Oh... Hello." He noticed the woman sitting in the chair in the corner. "Did you forget somebody, baby-boy?"

"Cecilia. Sorry about that." Ewyn glanced at his brother, expecting Greg to make the introductions.

Gregorio grinned and asked, "Did I hear drinks mentioned?"

Hard-pressed not to laugh, Devin turned to Mairianna and noticed her lips twitching. He started to rise; Mairianna stopped him.

"Stay, Dev. Greg and Ewyn can get the drinks." Mairianna looked at the woman in the chair. "Cecilia, this is Devin. Devin...Greg's wife, Cecilia. So...Dev, tell me about yourself, your parents, siblings, all the stuff a doting mother needs to know."

Devin snorted; the woman had skills. "I think we're going to get along fine, Mrs. -- sorry -- Mairianna."

"I'm sure we are. You've done wonders for my baby, and for that alone, I'll be forever grateful." Mairianna kept her voice low. "Greg doesn't know about that Russian. I don't want any trouble, Dev."

"Let me ask you something, Mairianna. If it came down to trouble, as you called it, and doing whatever it takes to save Ewyn's life... What would you choose?"

"Shit!" Mairianna's eyes widened. "Do you mean..."

"Yes. I need to talk to Greg first. One of us will fill you in, if that's okay."

Mairianna patted his hand. "Sure, son. Whatever it takes."

Ewyn walked over to the sofa, curious as fuck to find out what his mother and Devin were whispering about. "What's so hush-hush?" He handed his mother her white wine. "Let me in on the secret."

"No secrets, baby." Devin looked at Ewyn, right brow arched. "Don't I get a drink?"

"Oh...shit. Sorry." Ewyn went back to the bar and told his brother to fix a Chivas on the rocks.

"He doesn't know?" Mairianna stared at her two sons.

"He knows enough to be aware of the danger."

"Is it that Russian?"

"Not sure. That's why I need to talk to Gregorio."

"Okay...sure. You do whatever you have to. But, Dev, keep me in the loop."

"Oh, I intend to. Ewyn told me you have skills." He watched a flush spread across her cheeks. "We may very well need your talents."

"Not a problem. Enough said for now. Talk to Greg."

"After dinner. Ewyn went all out to impress his brother, to show him he's not a baby anymore. He planned and fixed the entire meal by himself."

"Hmm." Mairianna smiled. "You know that won't stop Greg from teasing him, right?"

"I know. But Ewyn needs this to complete the cycle. So I hope Gregorio will give him props...uh...credit, just this once."

"Cycle?"

"Yeah. His self-esteem. I don't know all the psychobabble, but I figure everyone treating Ewyn like a baby had a lot to do with him allowing that son of a bitch...pardon my language..."

"No need. I've call the bastard worse. Go ahead."

"I think the whole baby thing contributed to Ewyn allowing the abuse. Of course, that's my unofficial analysis of the situation. Now, don't get me wrong," he said and grinned. "I spoil the hell out of Ewyn. The only difference is I let him know he has rights as an adult to express himself. *I'm* amazed at his improvement since he's been here."

"Whatever you're doing, or have done, I appreciate it." Tears welled up in Mairianna's eyes. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Dev."

"I'll do anything for Ewyn."

"That's all this mom needed to hear."

* * * * *

"My compliments to the chef." Gregorio raised his glass. "Who's your cook, Dev?"

"You're sitting next to him."

Ewyn blushed when his brother turned startled, identical eyes on him.

"Are you shitting me?"

"Nope. Ewyn did it all. The planning, the cooking...he even has dessert for us."

"Baby brother..." Gregorio stood and raised his glass to Ewyn. "I told you several days ago, how proud I am of you. There are no stronger words to say what I'm feeling right now. *Salud!*"

Devin and Mairianna raised their glasses and repeated the salutation. Cecilia ignored them all and continued to eat.

Ewyn, sitting at one end of the table, stared down its length, heat infusing his cheeks and tears clouding his vision. His gaze locked with Devin's, and he mouthed the words, "Thank you."

Devin winked, shifting on his seat. He so wanted to grab Ewyn's sexy behind, haul him off to bed, and fuck baby-boy senseless. To help maintain his composure, he gulped down the rest of his wine, hoping it would help him chill the fuck out. *Shit*. With baby-boy's mother sitting right next to him...

Oh-kay...that helped.

Devin leaned back in his chair and relaxed. He took the opportunity to get his first good look at Cecilia. From the way Ewyn talked about her, he had expected... Actually, he didn't know what to expect. He sure as hell wasn't expecting this petite, raven-haired, blue-eyed beauty. Hell. You never could tell about people from just looking at them.

Although she appeared flawlessly beautiful, he detected traces of frown lines on her brow and fine lines of discontent around her mouth beginning to take hold. And her attitude... Oh, yeah, one unhappy woman.

The servers removed the dinner dishes and replaced them with dessert plates, cups, and saucers.

"What's for dessert, baby?" Mairianna asked.

Ewyn grinned, looking over at his brother. "Guess, Greg."

"Hmm... You made it yourself...let me see. Your favorite dessert is cannoli. Don't tell me you can make cannoli, or I'll have to hire you."

Ewyn laughed and shook his head.

"Okay, it has to be...ah...cheesecake?"

"Yes!" Ewyn beamed. "Can you believe it? I can cook now."

"Baby, we've always known you could do anything you wanted to, if you set your mind to it." Mairianna smiled at her baby son. "Didn't we, Greg?"

Gregorio winked at Ewyn. "Absolutely."

Devin watched the interaction between Ewyn and his brother; it warmed his heart. He imagined if his brothers had lived, he would have had the same type of closeness. He probably would have been just as spoiled as Ewyn, considering the age difference between him and his siblings.

With dessert finished, everyone moved back into the living room.

"More coffee?" Devin asked the room in general as he watched a server bring in a tray with coffee, cups, and saucers, and place everything on the table. "Now, if you'll excuse us, Greg and I have some business to discuss." He saw Ewyn's startled look, baby-boy starting to fidget. Damn.

"Greg, could you wait about ten minutes, then join me in my office?"

"Sure."

"Ewyn..." Devin strolled into the bedroom; Ewyn trailed behind him.

No sooner had the door closed behind baby-boy, than he yanked the slim body hard up against him, mouth devouring Ewyn's, hands sliding down to cup the tight little ass. Resurfacing for air, his fingers brushed stray tendrils of hair from Ewyn's forehead.

"What's the matter, baby? You did good. I am so goddamn proud of you." He swooped in for another sweet kiss as soon as Ewyn opened his mouth. "Mmm...I've needed that since we sat down for dinner."

Smile shaky, eyes downcast, Ewyn leaned into him, plucking at his sweater before finally looking up, eyes shadowed.

“Why are you going to talk to Greg? Why can’t I come...hear what you have to say?”
“Ewyn...” Devin ran his thumb across the pouty bottom lip. “I need to talk to your brother about what’s happened and what I suspect could happen to you. Some of what we talk about may involve your brother’s business, so I can’t allow you to hear it, or even be aware of anything to do with that. It would defeat your father’s whole purpose...wouldn’t it?”

Ewyn nodded.

“Baby, I love you. If you were seriously hurt or worse, I’d die -- or go crazy.” Wide green eyes lit right up, Ewyn’s mouth forming a silent O. “Yeah, baby...that much. I am not too proud to go into the enemy camp, so to speak, and ask for...beg for help.”

“But, Dev... Greg will start a full-scale war over Varvarinski beating me. You’re not going to tell him, are you? He’ll be pissed at me.”

“Ewyn. Greg loves you. Give him some credit. This is personal...not business. You told me yourself, Greg would make it personal.”

“Yeah...”

“So, if this turns out to be Varvarinski, Greg will want Gareth because the man beat you *without* knowing your connection to the Calderone name. Personal, baby...nothing to do with the family; the Russians won’t want any part of it. And Greg will go with whatever plan I devise, because he’ll want the individual who set this in motion.” Devin kissed the tempting mouth.

“Whoever is behind this made it *very* personal to me, *and* your brother, when they chose you as their target. I promise I’ll keep you in the loop, as long as it doesn’t involve my work or your brother’s. Deal?”

“Oh... Okay.” Ewyn leaned in for another kiss, then looked up at Devin. “I’m still trying too hard to please everybody, aren’t I?”

“Yes, you are, when you don’t have to prove a *damn* thing to anyone. Besides, while I’m with your brother, someone has to stay and entertain your mother and the bitch.” Devin grinned.

Ewyn’s sexy laughter had his groin tightening right up.

* * * * *

"Have a seat, Greg." Devin moved to the credenza behind his desk. "Want something to drink?" Devin fixed himself a Chivas on the rocks.

"No, thanks, I'm good. Nice setup you have here."

"Thanks." Devin made himself comfortable in the chair behind his desk. "Baby-boy has put it to good use."

"Yeah, I noticed. Ewyn is looking good. So tell me about Varvarinski."

"What makes you think this has to do with him?" Devin sipped his drink and watched Gregorio over the brim of his glass.

"Because Ewyn got all twitchy when I asked him why he left the asshole."

"Did you know Varvarinski was abusing him?" Devin saw something spark in those expressive green eyes, so like Ewyn's, before a shuttered look closed it off.

"Let me explain something to you, Devin. My relationship with Ewyn is more like father-son because of the age difference and our dad dying while Ewyn was still in his teens. When Ewyn insisted on leaving home, his sexuality was not the issue. I understood Ewyn's need to be on his own, to be a grown-up, and to get out from under the family stranglehold." Gregorio smiled.

"I, in particular, and the family unit as a whole, always smothered Ewyn with too much love and protection, so I figured it was time to let him go. Knowing my mother, I knew Patrick would have Ewyn's back, so I stopped hovering, stayed out of his life, there if he needed me." Eyes narrowed, Gregorio stared directly at Devin. "So, having said all of that... Do you think Varvarinski would still be alive, if I'd known he was beating my brother?"

"No... And that brings me to what's going on."

They talked for a little over two hours, coming to an amicable agreement. Devin stood and shook Gregorio's hand.

"Thanks, Greg."

"No. Thank you, Dev." Gregorio nodded. "I won't pretend to understand what's between you and Ewyn, but you have my full support. I can see you care deeply for Ewyn by the way you look at him when he doesn't know you're watching. I like that. Moreover, Ewyn is so into you, it's hard not to notice. I'm trusting you with his welfare and his life. Don't let me down."

Gregorio stared into space, a smile lifting the corners of his mouth. "Ewyn has always been special to me, from the day he came home from the hospital. There I was, a teenager, spending more time with my baby brother than hanging out."

"Understood. Done deal." Devin moved to the credenza and refreshed his drink. "Another thing. I'll keep Ewyn up to speed, feed him information on a need-to-know basis."

"You think that's wise?"

"For now, yeah. Not having seen your brother for some time, you don't know how nervous and unsettled he had become, letting that bastard beat on him." Devin shook his head. "He's better now, regained quite a bit of self-confidence, but the signs are still there. So I want to be the one keeping him in the loop, so I can monitor his reactions."

"I still find it hard to believe Ewyn would let someone kick his ass...hell. Ewyn used to be the original 'wild child.' He'd take on anybody...shit, he'd start it."

"Tim told me. And I found *that* hard to believe, until Ewyn threw down with my ex."

"Excuse me?"

"Yeah. The Allister Teague I mentioned, my ex...baby-boy threw down with a trained killer."

"Damn!" Gregorio hooted. "Now *that's* my baby brother. What brought it on? Didn't Ewyn know the man killed for a living?"

"Oh yeah, he knew. Evidently, Allister called him a baby, said Ewyn wasn't man enough for me, intimating I'd take Allister back. Did I mention Allister is about your size?"

"Fuck!"

"You got that shit right. Scared the hell out of me." Devin downed the rest of his drink. "Then that incident with Varvarinski's man... Ewyn held up under the immediate pressure, but it stressed him. I thought he'd revert."

"Well, you're the best judge of how to handle Ewyn, now. I'll get the ball rolling on my end, get my people on this, and I'll check with Pat to coordinate his times. You'll keep me apprised of everything on your side..." Gregorio held up his hand. "I know...unless it involves your work." Laughing, he stood up. "You say Tim is okay with you involving me?"

"Yeah. Whatever it takes to keep Ewyn alive, we're all on the same page." Devin escorted Gregorio back toward the living room.

"One last thing, Dev." They paused in the kitchen. "Was Ewyn hurt bad?"

Devin didn't even pause to consider what Gregorio meant. "Let's just say what I saw, the bruising... We're talking about the first night I met Ewyn and didn't know him, yet I wanted to go against all I believe in and kill that bastard Varvarinski." He could almost taste the anger rising. "That's how much it affected me then, and the memory remains indelibly imprinted."

"From the emotion in your voice, I'll count on you to take care of the bastard, regardless of the outcome of our current collaboration."

"Absolute."

"Good. And I'll have a talk with Pat and my mother. They should have told me."

"It's your call. But they did what they thought was best," Devin remarked as he and Gregorio entered the living room. He saw Ewyn look up, tension in every line of his body, and anxious green eyes scrutinizing him. Devin smiled and winked; baby-boy physically relaxed.

"Sorry, Mairianna, it took longer than I expected. I see the servers have cleaned up and left." Devin looked around. "Does anyone need anything?"

"No...thank you, Dev, I'm a little tired. Ewyn gave me the grand tour." Mairianna winked. "You have a lovely home."

"Thank you."

"I think it's time we said our good nights." Mairianna looked at Gregorio, who nodded. "Thanks for a lovely evening, Dev. Getting to spend quality time with my baby, after such a long time, made my day."

"Maybe Devin and Ewyn will come to dinner at our home next time." Gregorio helped his mother up, then turned to Ewyn. "I can't compete with your cooking, but I can assure you, we'll serve something you like." He ruffled Ewyn's hair.

"Hey..." Ewyn halfheartedly punched Gregorio on the arm. "Watch the curls."

Laughing, they moved toward the door; Gregorio stopped and looked back at his wife. "Coming, Cecilia?" His wife jumped up, brushed by him, and stormed out the door. "I guess that's a yes." Gregorio shook Devin's hand, hugged his brother, and shepherded

his mother out to the elevator.

Devin draped his arm across Ewyn's shoulders, and they stayed in the doorway until Ewyn's family boarded the elevator. Then he closed the door, grinning down at Ewyn. "Did you enjoy yourself, baby?"

"Yes. Thanks, Dev."

"Hey... This is your home too. We just had our first dinner party together, which *you* made a success."

"Are you going to tell me about your conversation with Greg?"

"Yes." He kissed the tip of Ewyn's nose. "Can it wait until tomorrow? I'm wiped."

"I'm drained too. Shower?"

"Hell yeah, albeit a quick one." Devin swooped in for a kiss. "Then bed."

"Sounds good."

Unable to resist the little round ass and hot, lithe body, all wet and slick, the shower took longer than Devin had intended. He did love him some hot, passionate shower sex with Ewyn, who always made the extra time spent worthwhile.

Feeling refreshed afterward, Devin climbed into bed, settled down with Ewyn nestled up against him, and told Ewyn as much as he deemed necessary about his conversation with Gregorio. After he answered Ewyn's questions, they snuggled in, and Ewyn's light rhythmic snores were the last sounds he heard before dozing off.

* * * * *

"Baby, wake up." Devin nuzzled the soft lips, sucking on the pouty bottom one.

"Hmm..." Ewyn's lids fluttered, then blinked several times as the sleepy, green-eyed gaze focused on Devin.

"Have to go, baby-boy."

Ewyn jackknifed, coming wide-awake to find Devin fully dressed. "What's wrong?"

Devin moved to the head of the bed and sat down. He relaxed against the headboard and pulled Ewyn onto his lap. He brushed stray tendrils of curly black hair from baby-boy's brow and saw the indecision flare up in the depths of those sexy eyes. Damn.

"Hey. Nothing is wrong, a call...work. I hope I won't be gone too long. If I am, and something comes up that you don't think you can handle on your own, don't hesitate to call Mick first, since he's the closest." He watched Ewyn try to hide the fear shadowing those luminous eyes. "Then call Tim and Gregorio. I want all bases covered."

Ewyn's hand came up and moved over his face and mouth, the trembling fingers contradicting the calm front baby-boy tried to present. The hot body snuggled in, lips nuzzling his neck; warm breath tickled his skin.

"Don't worry about me, Dev. I'll be okay."

"I'll always worry about you. But until this shit is resolved, even more so." Devin's hand roved over the sexy form, grazed across the head of Ewyn's prick, and came to rest on the little round ass. "I'd better go before I'm tempted to follow my instincts." He lifted Ewyn's face and kissed him, long and deep. "I love you, baby. Take care." He shifted Ewyn from his lap and stood.

"I will. You be careful too. Love you, Dev."

Devin left the room without looking back, knowing if he did, he'd never make it out of the room in time to make his connection.

Ewyn heard the front door close and hopped up, moving to the dresser. He retrieved his gun and returned to bed. He slipped the gun under his pillows, and then he snuggled in on Devin's side of the bed, face burrowing into the bedding. He inhaled Devin's scent, smiled and relaxed; he promptly dozed off.

Chapter Seventeen

Ewyn knew Devin didn't tell him everything.

Devin took the spoiling thing to a whole other level with that edited version of what was going on. The man really needed to stop trying to shield him from all the bad shit in the world. Hell. The secrecy made Ewyn more determined to check the shit out for himself. He would start with Mick.

Devin had been out for three weeks, and so far, nothing out of the ordinary had interrupted Ewyn's daily routine, yet he sensed something hovering. He felt like that *Peanuts* cartoon character, Pigpen, as if a cloud of ominous-shit-waiting-to-happen swirled around him. He didn't want any surprises.

He left work and headed across town to the Silver Fox. He pulled up outside the bar and

glanced at his watch...seven o'clock. Hell. He might as well have dinner there.

Ewyn climbed out of the Escalade and headed inside. He spotted Mick behind the bar talking on his cell. He strolled over, sat on the stool in front of Mick, and heard, "Yep, got it. Go take a break, I'll let you know." Mick disconnected and turned those steely blues on him.

"Hey, babe. What brings you here?"

"Devin's out, got a little lonely. Wanted some company."

"Cool. Tag will be here shortly. Since it's one of my quiet nights, we'll hang with you."

Ewyn looked around and noticed there were very few patrons scattered about the place. "Is Jason in?"

"Always."

"I thought I'd grab something to eat."

"What would you like?"

"I'll have the chicken strips, potato salad, corn on the cob, and a Heineken. Can I eat here at the bar with you?"

"Sure thing, kid. However, if we wait until Tag gets here, he'll join us, and we'll get comfy, grab a booth. He joins me on Mondays for dinner, so we get to spend some extra time together."

Ewyn grinned. "Oh... If I won't be intruding, that would be nice. Thanks, Mick."

"No problem, and you won't be intruding. Be right back." Mick walked away, headed for the kitchen.

* * * * *

"Talk to me." Varvarinski leaned back in his chair.

"Do you know the Silver Fox?"

"Yeah. You have my money?"

"I've got your fuckin' money. How soon can you get there?"

"Twenty minutes."

The caller hung up.

* * * * *

Ewyn wandered over to the jukebox, put in a few coins, and stood pondering his choices before making several selections. Headed back to his seat, a flash of bright light slanting across his face drew his attention to the front door. Feet faltering, he stopped midstride.

Gareth.

Bottom lip gripped between his teeth, hands clenched, he looked around for an escape route. Too late. Gareth headed straight for him. He started to retreat, then moved forward intending to walk right past the man. Gareth grabbed his arm.

"Well...well. How's it hanging, babe? Looking good."

No cowering. Ewyn looked up, eyes narrowing, he stared straight at Gareth. "Let go of me."

"You think you can make me," Gareth sneered. "I'll let you go when I'm ready, and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it."

"No... You'll let go of him now or lose that hand." Mick spoke from behind Gareth.

With his focus centered on Gareth, Ewyn hadn't noticed Mick approach; Mick wasn't alone. The Shemar Moore look-alike Taggart stood next to Mick, his stance threatening.

Gareth let Ewyn go and turned. "Sorry, just greeting an old friend."

"Yeah, well...if you ever greet this old friend again while I'm around," Taggart remarked, his deep baritone voice as threatening as his posture, "you'd better learn how to do it without using your hands. Got that?"

"The door is behind you." Mick stepped aside and nodded toward the entrance.

Gareth grinned, raised his hands in mock surrender, and headed toward the door. He pushed it open, glanced back over his shoulder, and looked at Ewyn. "See you around, babe."

"Fuck you, Gareth." Ewyn refused to look away. Shoving his hands in his pockets in an attempt to control the trembling, he continued to stare until the door closed behind

Gareth.

Surprisingly, it wasn't fear that had him shaking. He was fucking pissed. Seeing Gareth again, and finally recognizing Gareth as nothing but a bully, made Ewyn realize what a coward he'd been, allowing someone like Gareth to intimidate him. Well, never again.

Smiling, Ewyn looked up at Taggart. "Thanks. Twice before, we've been thrown together in this type of scenario, yet we've never been introduced." He glanced at Mick, who made the introduction.

"Nice to meet you, Kyrk." Trembling under control, Ewyn held out his hand.

"Same here." Taggart clasped his hand and winked. "But call me Tag. Everybody does."

"Sure...Tag." Ewyn grinned. Getting his first good look at Taggart up close and personal...oh, shit yeah, the man had it going on.

His gaze flicked from Taggart to Mick; both men were *all* that. Well...until compared to his Devin... Fuck, from his perspective, no one could compare. However, looking at these men and remembering what Allister looked like in the altogether, Ewyn couldn't fathom what the hell Devin saw in him. His pint-size ass wasn't *even* in their class...*shit!*

Mind babble.

A fuckin' run-in with that son of a bitch Gareth had his insecurities getting all rowdy and had him reverting. This shit had to stop.

"Are you okay, Ewyn?" Mick asked.

Ewyn flinched. "Oh...yeah. I'm not going to let that bastard intimidate me."

"Good deal. Our food is up. Let's go eat."

Ewyn followed Mick and Taggart back to the bar. They picked up their meals, moved to one of the booths, and settled down.

* * * * *

Business picked up by the time he finished eating.

Ewyn snuck out when Taggart went to the bathroom, and Mick went into the kitchen to pick up an order. He had the distinct feeling they were babysitting him at Devin's request, which led him to believe he knew the meaning behind Mick's words when he'd first arrived. Shit. With his brother involved, Devin had probably enlisted Patrick as

another babysitter. He didn't like it.

More to the point, he didn't want to infringe on any more of Mick and Taggart's quality time. Hell. Been there, done that. With Devin gone so much, he knew the value of their alone time together.

Smiling, Ewyn walked around the side of the building, heading for the Escalade. He'd had a good time, laughing at Mick and Taggart's war stories about their jobs, which helped him put Gareth out of his mind.

Until now.

He spotted Gareth's white Lexus parked at the back of the lot and hesitated, started to turn back, then decided to brave it out. He had his gun in his briefcase. If he could make it to the SUV...

A shadow loomed up behind him.

Shit!

He should have waited for Taggart or Mick to walk him out to his vehicle.

* * * * *

Devin unlocked the door and stepped into the condo, surprised to find the place in total darkness. Brow furrowed, he flipped on the lights.

"Ewyn?" No response.

Nerve endings sending signals, the thundering rhythm of his heart pulsed in his ears. He snagged his cell from his waistband and pressed #2, Ewyn's number...voicemail. He swung around and headed for the door, pressing #4...

The door swung open, and Ewyn walked inside.

"Dev!"

Ewyn hurled himself at him. Feeling the wriggly body climbing all over him calmed his racing pulse, had his cock twitching. He devoured the kissable mouth, feasting on the warmth and the taste.

"Baby, you had me worried."

Ewyn leaned away, frowning. "Why?"

"Look at the time, Ewyn. It's ten-thirty. What happened? Did you have a problem with the truck?" He let the slim frame slide down his body, swooping in for another kiss before he released his hold. "Where's your cell?"

"Oh...in my briefcase, turned it off. Sorry. I wasn't expecting you tonight, so I went over to the Fox. Had dinner with Tag and Mick. Had a great time." He grinned. "Believe me, I intended to check for messages as soon as I came home."

"Hmm... No problem. But you have to expect me to be worried about you."

"I know. Didn't mean to upset you." Ewyn glanced up at him. "Gareth showed up."

"Oh... Are you okay?"

"Tag and Mick took care of him, made him leave. It's all good."

"Are you sure?" Ewyn's eyes slid away from his. "What?"

"Nothing...honest. I'm okay."

"Ewyn... I'm going to check in with Mick in the morning..."

"Okay!" Ewyn glared up at him. "Gareth did grab me. I stood my ground, Dev. Mick and Tag intervened. No biggie."

Something wasn't right. Ewyn's cavalier attitude seemed way out of sync. "That's all?"

"Yes, Dev... Fuck. Stop babying me. I said I'm fine."

Devin stared down at Ewyn trying to read the look in the green-eyed gaze, which Ewyn quickly shielded. Ewyn wasn't telling him something, but he wouldn't push it, for now.

"Good. Come on...shower. I need your sexy ass in the worst way." He draped his arm across Ewyn's shoulders and turned him toward the bedroom.

"Did you just get in?" Ewyn slid his arm around Devin's waist.

"I just got home, but I've been in town a few hours. Had to check in at the shop first. Why do you ask?"

"Just curious. If I had known you were back in town, I would have called and left a message...asked you to meet me at the Fox."

"Didn't know when I'd finish up at the office. I'm here now, so let's go make up for time wasted."

"Oh, hell yeah." Ewyn chuckled, stripping out of his clothes as he headed for the shower.

* * * * *

Devin lay with Ewyn sound asleep and snuggled up against him when his cell's ringtone intruded into the silence. Devin noted the time as he flipped it open...two-thirty.

"Nilsson."

"Devin, it's Mick."

"What's up?"

"They found Varvarinski dead in his car, out behind the Fox."

"Shit!"

He glanced down at Ewyn, hoping he hadn't disturbed him. Baby-boy snuffled and turned over onto his own side of the bed. As usual, his first night back, he had worn Ewyn's sexy behind out.

Devin eased out from beneath the covers, stood up, and slipped into his robe. "How?" He headed out of the room, making his way toward his office.

"Stabbed to death. Up close and personal."

"Damn. I hear he confronted Ewyn tonight."

"Yeah, that's why I'm calling to check on Ewyn, make sure he arrived home okay. The baby slipped away from us."

"How the fuck did that happen?"

"Place got busy..."

"Where was Pat?"

"On a break. Tag and I had Ewyn. Would have called you sooner, but the locals just left."

Devin heard the call-waiting beep and glanced at the caller ID. "Hey... Meet me here in the morning, around ten. Got another call."

"Later."

Devin pressed talk. "What happened, Pat? Mick just called."

"Yeah. I arrived back at the Fox and found the pipsqueak had skipped, cops all over the place. Just got kicked myself. We need to talk."

"In the morning around ten, meet me here. Ewyn will be at work, so he's covered." Devin sighed. "Damn."

"Yeah... Tell me about it. See you in the a.m."

Devin disconnected. *Goddamn it.* He pressed #1 as he walked into his office.

"Devin, I heard."

"Hell. Word traveling at the speed of light?"

"It's on the news. Has Ewyn seen it yet?"

"No. We need to talk, Tim. Ewyn was there tonight."

"Oh, shit."

"Right. I understand Varvarinski was stabbed. To get that close, had to be someone he didn't fear or someone he trusted. Does this eliminate Allister?"

"Maybe. Tomorrow?"

"Mick and Pat will be here. Can you join us around ten?"

"Got it."

Devin returned to the bedroom and found the lights on, Ewyn awake.

"You don't have to go out again, do you?"

"No, baby." He moved to the armoire and turned on the television. He changed the channel to the local news, disrobed, and climbed back in bed.

"What's..." Ewyn stiffened, head swiveling toward the television. On the screen, a man

identified as a police detective, holding a knife in his gloved hand, had Ewyn's undivided attention. Ewyn recognized the knife; he recognized the name of the murder victim.

Devin watched Ewyn. "Something the matter?"

"Uh... Did they say Varvarinski...uh, Gareth was killed?"

"Yeah. Know anything about that?" Ewyn whipped around to face him, eyes narrowing.

"Why would I know anything about it?"

"Ewyn... Do you recognize that knife...those distinctive Russian symbols? Because I do, and the last time I saw it, I tossed it behind the driver's seat of the SUV. How did it end up sticking out of Varvarinski?"

"What are you saying, Dev? You think I..." Tears welled up in his eyes. "Fuck you!" He jumped off the bed and rushed toward the bathroom.

"Ewyn, wait!"

"Fuck you!"

The door slammed closed behind Ewyn; Devin heard the lock turn.

Hell. What was he supposed to think? It wasn't meant to be an accusation. He needed to know what Ewyn knew so he could work out a plan to cover baby-boy's ass.

Damn it!

Devin bounded off the bed and headed for the bathroom; he knocked on the door. "Baby, I had to ask, it's the nature of my job." He knocked again. "Come on, Ewyn. We need to talk."

Silence.

* * * * *

Ewyn sat in the dark, huddled up on the end of the vanity with his arms wrapped around his knees. Devin didn't trust him...never should have asked...

The last time he'd seen that knife, Gareth had it. The implication of it being used to kill Gareth, with his prints all over it...hell.

He'd only had time to open the door on the Escalade before Gareth confronted him in

the parking lot. Gareth had grabbed his arm and prevented him from getting inside the truck and getting to his briefcase. Remembering the knife behind the seat, he'd snatched it up for protection; Gareth wrestled it away from him.

What Gareth planned to do to him, he didn't wait around to find out when headlights from a car pulling onto the lot distracted Gareth, who turned toward the lights. Gareth's inattention gave him enough time to scramble into the truck and make his escape. Damn it. He should have gone back inside and told Tag.

Wait a minute...that car.

Now that he thought about it... Although his ass was scared shitless, and all he'd wanted to do was get away from Gareth, he'd glanced at that car. Just a brief glimpse as he'd passed it, before looking up in the rearview to make sure Gareth wasn't following him. He'd seen Gareth moving toward that car as he turned the corner...

Oh, fuck! It couldn't... They made more than one of that make and model Mercedes. Besides, she wouldn't, would she? How would she know where to find Gareth?

Hell. What was he thinking? If Devin had his ass watched, what would stop his mother from having Gareth tailed? After what she had said about Gareth and knowing that Gregorio would have told her about his conversation with Devin... She would have known Gareth's man had come after him, and that would have made her more determined to exact revenge.

Still, she couldn't...she wouldn't... Wait. Patrick drove his mother's car, too, and Patrick was there, he was one of his babysitters.

No, that wouldn't work. Gareth would recognize Patrick as a Calderone bodyguard; Gareth wouldn't let Patrick get close to him, just because of the nature of the business. Gareth wouldn't be suspicious of a woman, even a Calderone. If his mother planned it, arranged to meet Gareth... Could his mother cold-bloodedly kill someone in that manner?

Damn. What did he really know about her life outside of being his mom? She was, after all, a mob wife, and then there was her family. While most of her relatives were in law enforcement, there were quite a few members who were gangsters. The Irish ran a good game when it came to organized crime too. If he remembered the stories correctly, his Irish grandfather and great-uncles had been notorious in Boston, back in their day.

Shit. After he promised Devin no more secrets -- but his mother...

Holy fuckin' hell.

* * * * *

Devin stood leaning against the doorjamb for at least ten minutes before he heard the lock turn. Baby-boy sat right on the edge of the vanity, eyes shimmering with tears. Ewyn wiped his eyes, started to jump down off the counter, but he got to Ewyn first, pushing between his legs. He felt Ewyn shiver.

“Dev, we need to talk.”

“Sure, baby. Let’s get back in bed where it’s warm.” Skin ice-cold, Ewyn wrapped around his body, snuggling in. He stared down into turbulent green eyes as he moved toward the bed. He put Ewyn down and settled next to him as he pulled the covers over them. Ewyn nestled up to him, shivering. “What happened, Ewyn?”

“I don’t know. Honest, Dev.”

Hell. Their first night together, Devin told him he wouldn’t compromise. So he couldn’t tell Devin about his mother until after he talked to her. That hurt, deceiving Devin... Still, he had to be sure before he told Devin, maybe talk to his brother.

Besides, he wasn’t lying, he really didn’t know what happened, he could only guess, and he hoped his speculations were wrong.

“When I left the Fox, I saw Gareth’s car parked out back, and I know I should have gone back inside to get Mick or Tag. I didn’t want to bother them. Moreover, I wanted Gareth to know I wasn’t afraid of him anymore.

“Gareth came up behind me and grabbed me, but I managed to get the knife, only to protect myself...” He took a deep breath. “Gareth took the knife from me. I was able to get away, and Gareth was alive when I left.” Voice notching up an octave, he blurted, “I swear, Dev!”

“Okay. Calm down. We’ll work it out.” He absently kneaded the little round ass cheeks. “The police will want to talk to you, because too many people saw you there tonight.”

“Oh, no. And now my prints... I’m going to cause you more grief, aren’t I? I told you I would be more trouble than...ouch!” Hand going to his ass, he rubbed where Devin pinched him.

“No, baby, don’t even go there. We’ll work something out.”

“You don’t sound so sure.”

"I'm positive. If the police consider you a suspect...if it comes to that before I can figure out who is behind this...unless they can prove otherwise, we'll make a case for self-defense. Considering your history with Varvarinski, I'm positive we'll work it out."

"I don't need a defense, Dev. I didn't do anything!"

"I believe you, but we have to be prepared. I wish you trusted me."

"Dev!" Ewyn came up on his elbows. "I...why..."

"No, baby-boy. Don't compound the lie. You know something. I won't pressure you. You have to want to tell me. Don't wait too long."

Detecting the note of disappointment in Devin's voice, tears welled up in Ewyn's eyes. He lay down and snuggled up to Devin's warmth. "I'm sorry," he whispered, closing his eyes.

He'd go see his mother in the morning. Then he would tell Devin everything. He didn't want to lose Devin's love or trust because of his family. He'd already made that clear to -

His eyes sprang open. Devin was in town at the time of the murder, and Devin had vowed he'd have a little one-on-one with Gareth.

"Devin!" He sat up and swiped the tears from his cheeks, anger vibrating along his nerve endings. "You think I...you were here...in town. You..." He looked down at Devin and saw the slow smile tilt the corners of Devin's mouth. Devin didn't even bother to open his eyes when he responded.

"Is that what you think of me, Ewyn? Think I'm a coward...to blame you... Fuck!" A harsh laugh exploded out of him. "Go to sleep, baby-boy. We'll work it out."

Not once did Devin look at him.

Ewyn settled back down, moving to his own side of the bed. Well, Devin could...damn. What was he thinking? Why would Devin use a knife? He could have made the kill legitimate, used his gun to make sure it looked that way. Although, using the knife Gareth had tried to use on Devin would make an ironic type of justice. Besides, if Devin did it, he'd take credit for it, wouldn't he?

Fuck. Listen to him. Devin had just accused him of lack of trust. And for him to consider Devin doing something that would leave him vulnerable, put the spotlight of suspicion on him... Ewyn couldn't think anymore, couldn't keep his eyes open. His own soft snore sounded in his ears as his world faded.

Devin reached up and flipped the light switch, smothering the room in darkness. He remained awake for some time, listening to Ewyn's snuffling, interspersed with whimpering. He didn't want to believe Ewyn didn't trust him enough to tell him what he knew. He thought he had earned Ewyn's complete confidence. Didn't baby-boy know he would do all in his power to protect him, even from prosecution?

Fuck. That cut deep.

Where the hell did they go from here without trust?

Chapter Eighteen

He had to get his own car.

Ewyn didn't feel comfortable using Darrell's car, but he needed to talk to his mother; he needed to resolve his trust issues with Devin. He had tried to check out a company car, but none had been available. Subsequently, he had to borrow transportation.

Devin dropped him at work and went off somewhere in the truck. Devin said he had a meeting, which seemed odd he would take the SUV. Normally, Devin took a company car and left the Escalade for him.

Damn. He never had car problems before. He'd used family cars until he went to live with Gareth. It never occurred to him to get his own car, because the family cars were always at his disposal. He thought he was hot shit, driving a different late model car whenever he wanted. Then, at Gareth's, he'd used whichever car was on hand in Gareth's garage. Gareth made sure his people had a car available for him, at all times.

Could he have been any more of a needy asshole?

Then, in keeping with his usual codependent habits, with Christmas just three months away, his first thought had been to ask Gregorio to get him a Beamer. Now wouldn't that have gone over *real* big with Devin, assuming he and Devin were still a "them" at Christmas?

Hell. Bottom line... He almost had enough money saved, so it was time he took the next step toward being his own man and bought his own car.

Ewyn pulled up in the family driveway and climbed out of the car. He used his key to enter the house and immediately ran into Cecilia.

Shit.

"Is Mom here?"

"Of course, you little pansy. Where else would she be?"

He grinned. The insults didn't hurt anymore, bounced right off him. He wasn't the insecure kid she used to harass. Well...most of the time he wasn't insecure, and definitely not with this woman. He had the comebacks now.

"Why, CeCe...were you always such a bitch?"

"Faggot!"

"Cecilia!"

Ewyn and Cecilia whipped around. Ewyn watched his mother's approach. Cecilia, cheeks flushed, and her stance defiant, confronted Mairiana.

"What? He is one. I'm not going to hold my tongue anymore, I don't care what you or Greg say." She glared at Ewyn. "Pretty little momma's boy, coming home to whine. Probably the reason he's a little fag --"

The slap cut off her tirade, Mairianna hitting Cecilia hard enough to snap her head to the side.

Fuck!

Ewyn didn't know whether to laugh or cringe. Everybody knew his mother could be tough, but this... In an instant, he sobered. His mother's display reminded him of his reason for being there.

"Mom..."

"In a minute, baby." Mairianna never took her eyes off Cecilia. "I'll join you out on the patio."

Ewyn hesitated, not sure he should leave the bitch with his mother. Although both women were equal in size, his mother wasn't a young woman. If Cecilia struck back...

"Go on, Ewyn."

He shrugged and headed for the patio, glancing back at the two figures before they moved out of sight. He took a Perrier from the mini fridge and made himself comfortable. His mother rejoined him just as he uncapped the bottle. He took a drink.

Dressed casually in deep purple slacks and a pale lilac short-sleeved blouse, she wore white sandals on her feet. His mother's aging beauty made her appear calm and serene, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Mairianna settled down into the chair next to him.

"Sorry, baby. I hate violent displays."

"I don't get Cecilia, Mom. I don't live here, we rarely see each other, yet her animosity seems to get worse."

"She's pissed because you and Greg made everything right between you. Hell. She acted like that with the girls, the last time they came down from school. They won't come home anymore, except for the holidays. Greg and I go up to see them, so they don't have to put up with the aggravation."

"Damn. Jealous of her own children? Being an only child, I know she doesn't have any blood relations left, but doesn't she have friends?"

"In this business," Mairianna sneered. "Friendship is an iffy commodity. She has acquaintances. But I doubt if she's close to any of them...not with her personality. She does the rounds and socializes. There's a lot more she could do to keep herself occupied. Hell, I always have and still do. That's how you survive as a wife in this world."

"Mom, she needs professional help."

"Yeah. Greg and I talked about it, but that's not the way of things. Too much at risk, having her talk to an outsider." Mairianna smiled. "Don't waste time worrying about her, baby. What are you doing here this early in the day? Shouldn't you be at work? Where's Devin?"

"Said he had a meeting. Why?"

"You're alone...where's..." His mother paused as if she wasn't sure she should continue.

"Where's who, Mom? What's going on?"

"Why are you here?"

"Mom... Haven't you seen the news?"

"No. I rarely watch the news." Mairianna leaned forward and clutched his hands. "Why? Did something happen to Devin? What is it, Ewyn?"

"Calm down, Mom. You think I would be sitting here so calm, if something happened to Dev. *Pul-lease.*"

"Baby, don't make me slap you too." Mairianna relaxed, grinning.

Ewyn laughed. "It's Varvarinski...Gareth. Someone stabbed him last night."

Eyebrow arched, his mother stared. "You thought that was important enough to skip work to come tell me." She snorted. "Why the hell would I care about that scumbag?"

"I thought I saw your car at the Silver Fox last night. That's where they found Gareth's body, stabbed with the knife you saw in Dev's truck and were so curious about."

"So you think I..." Mairianna rolled her eyes. "Please. Give me some credit. If I had killed the bastard, there sure as hell wouldn't be a body to autopsy, wasting taxpayers' money. And what the *hell* is a Silver Fox?"

"It's a bar over in San Bernardino."

"A bar... Hell. The last time I went into a bar, I think prohibition had just ended." She grinned. "No, seriously, baby, you know I only drink wine. Why the hell would I go to a bar? We have an excellent wine cellar right here."

"Besides, Patrick had the car last night. But tell me what you were doing over there?"

"Pat..." Ewyn shook his head. Why bother? "I was having dinner and drinks with my babysitters; Pat should have joined us. And yes, Gareth showed up, we had a run-in out behind the... What?"

Mairianna stared, one eyebrow arched. "For your information, I know where Pat was, which eliminates him as a murder suspect. But where were your other babysitters, as you called them, when you had this confrontation outside?"

"I ditched them."

"Baby, tell me you didn't... Not that anyone could blame you after what you went through with that SOB."

"You know, you're as bad as Dev. I did not kill the bastard. He confronted me, but I left him alive and well in that parking lot. Damn it! What's up with all this suspicion? If I didn't kill him when he was kicking off in my ass --"

"Ewyn Kelley! Don't get an attitude with me. I need to know so the family can provide adequate defense, if it becomes necessary."

"Yeah...I know. I'm sorry. That's what Dev said too. But since I didn't kill anyone, there's no need for a defense. Hell." Ewyn released his breath in a huff. "You and Dev seem so on the same page; are you in on all this babysitting crap?"

"Yes, I fully approve, and Greg does too. It's not crap."

Ewyn rolled his eyes.

"Listen to me, son. You had to have bodyguards as a kid; it's no different now. Accept it."

"Mom..."

"No! You do whatever Devin tells you. Someone out there is playing for keeps, and until we know what this is about, or who's behind it... *Shit!* It just occurred to me. With the Russian dead, either someone else is involved, masterminding the whole thing, and Varvarinski became a loose end. Or Varvarinski never had anything to do with what happened."

"But Gareth's man tried to break into our place."

"Yeah. Suppose someone hired the man to make Gareth look guilty. Someone did get to Gareth's man in his jail cell."

"What?" Ewyn gaped. "When...how? Nobody told me."

"It happened a few days after they caught him. Money talks, baby. People like that are only loyal to money; I should know. The Calderone and Kelley clans have a few who would sell their mothers for a buck.

"So, yeah. You do what Devin says, and don't ditch your protection again. Until we know otherwise, someone out there still wants a piece of your ass. For whatever reason."

"All right! Where's Greg?"

"He left just before you arrived. Said he had a meeting. Why?"

"Shit!" Ewyn leapt to his feet. "Sorry. Have to go, Mom. Greg's probably with Dev. Damn it! They have to stop keeping me out of the loop." He headed for the front door, his mother right on his heels.

"Baby, they're doing it for your own good."

"Yeah, I know. But when is everyone going to let me grow up? I need to know what's happening. I should have some say in how I live or die."

"Ewyn..."

"No, Mom!" He turned to face her. "I'm gay. *Not* a baby, *not* a momma's boy...I am *not* helpless. I'm a man! Don't you understand?"

"You will always be my baby, Ewyn." Mairianna reached up and hugged him. "But I understand, and you're right. They're meeting at the condo. Go take your place beside Devin and make them respect you as a man, as a Calderone."

Ewyn kissed his mother's cheek. "Thanks, Mom."

"I love you, baby. Be careful. I couldn't be more proud of you than I am at this moment."

Ewyn strolled over to the car and climbed in. Looking back as he drove away from the house, he saw the curtains on an upstairs window flutter. He shook his head. Had to be Cecilia. Probably checking to make sure he left before she came back downstairs.

He would never understand the bitch.

* * * * *

Devin arrived at the condo and found Mick, Taggart, and Timothy in the hall outside his door. "Come on in." He unlocked the door and led the way inside. "Something to drink...help yourselves."

Everyone had made themselves comfortable when the doorbell pealed.

"Stay, Devin, I'm closest." Mick opened the door; Patrick and Gregorio walked into the room.

Timothy stood, embraced Gregorio, shook hands with Patrick, and then he turned to introduce Gregorio to Mick and Taggart.

Devin saw the startled looks on the two faces before both men turned to him.

"Uh, Devin... I think we're missing a piece of the puzzle. If this is about Ewyn..." Mick glanced at Gregorio. "Tim's nephew, your significant O, Ewyn Kelley, right? How the hell does Calderone come into this? Enlighten me."

"Yeah. I didn't tell you before, because I didn't want the Calderone name to affect how you looked out for Ewyn. After what happened last night, all of us need to be on the same page. If you have a problem with continuing once you know all the players, I'll understand. But let me explain everything first.

"Ewyn is Tim's nephew, by marriage, and his name is Kelley. Ewyn Kelley Calderone; Gregorio is his brother." Devin went on to explain everything he could. "Whatever you decide, I hope you respect me enough to keep this between us." He sat back and waited for the two men to make a decision.

"Oh, hell, I'm in." Mick looked at Taggart. "I'm on my own time, I can do whatever I goddamn please. But Tag has to play by a whole other set of rules."

"Tag..." Timothy spoke up. "If you're not working on anything critical, and you want in, I can cover your ass...talk to MacGregor. I'll request he sub you out to us. He owes me a few favors. And, as Devin said, officially, we're working this from an agency standpoint. Ewyn is a government employee...critical MOS. Unofficially, we're it, our game."

"Listen..." Taggart looked directly at Calderone. "I don't care about any of that or Ewyn's family shit."

Devin looked at Ewyn's brother. Gregorio tensed, eyes narrowing as he stared at Taggart.

"Hey..." Taggart said, still watching Gregorio. "No offense intended. But I've been on board since the first night I saw that frightened kid up here trying to be so brave. And because we're friends, Devin."

Gregorio glanced at Devin. Devin grinned and winked; Gregorio's lips twitched as he relaxed in the chair.

"What?" Taggart looked from Devin to Calderone. "Did I miss something, say something wrong?"

"No, you didn't say anything wrong." Devin smiled. "Just the opposite. However, the first time you saw Ewyn, baby-boy had improved one hundred percent from the scared kid who first came to me."

"Shit." Gregorio stood, went to the bar, and retrieved a Perrier from the minifridge. "I didn't need to hear that."

"Sorry." Devin shrugged.

"Are you shitting me? Because of Varvarinski...his people?" Taggart looked at Timothy,

who nodded. "Well, hell yeah, I'm in, whether MacGregor approves or not. I have vacation time."

"Good deal," Timothy said. "If the end result points to organized crime, it gets turned over to MacGregor." He glanced at Devin and Gregorio. "Otherwise, we clean it up. Agreed?"

Everyone agreed.

Devin took over the conversation. "So, what's everyone's take on what happened last night? We know the police will want to talk to Ewyn; Tim's handling that. Now, I don't believe Ewyn had anything to do with Varvarinski's murder, but I think he knows, or suspects something he's not telling me."

"What makes you say that?" Gregorio came back to his chair and sat down.

"I'll explain in a minute. First, I want everybody to fill me in on what happened on their watch...from the time Ewyn left work, until he arrived at the Fox --"

"Yeah, everybody, I want to hear it too." Ewyn spoke from the foyer, his glittering green gaze locked on Devin.

"Hey, baby-boy. What are you doing here?" Devin stood, moving toward the bedroom. "Excuse us," he said to the room in general. "We'll be right back. Ewyn..." He let baby-boy precede him into the bedroom; the door closed behind them.

"Oh, shit." Timothy grinned. "I hope he doesn't hurt his feelings."

"Naw..." Mick glanced at the bedroom door. "Devin loves that kid too much."

Gregorio laughed. "Uh...Mick... Tim meant Ewyn. Devin is going to be the one on the short end of the stick. I recognize that look."

Laughter filled the room.

Chapter Nineteen

Ewyn watched Devin walk over to the bed, sit down, and lean back against the headboard. Devin made himself comfortable, long legs stretched out, ankles crossed.

"This shit has to stop, Dev."

"Oh... Which shit would that be?" Devin put his all into not laughing. *Goddamn*. Baby-

boy looked so fucking cute with his serious on.

"Don't, Dev. Don't make fun of me. I'm fuckin' pissed. I shouldn't have to learn shit from my mother that you should have told me."

"Really..." Devin saw the petulant gaze turn stormy only seconds before Ewyn hurled himself at him. He dodged the blow aimed at his face and caught Ewyn's flailing arms before baby-boy could do any damage. He rolled with the wriggling body and pinned Ewyn beneath him; he devoured Ewyn's mouth. "Mmm...baby. What's got you in such a shit-fit?"

"Don't play me, Dev." Ewyn struggled to get loose.

"Play you? I am so fucking turned on, I'm tempted to take your bad ass, right now, regardless of the company in the other room. Might need those cuffs, huh?" He watched some of the fire go out of those pretty eyes, his cock reacting to the writhing form. "And we both know how you get a little boisterous when you come." He winked.

"Dev!" Ewyn squeaked. "You wouldn't."

"I would and I will, if you don't calm down and tell me what has your insides in a twist." He sat up and pulled Ewyn up to straddle his lap. "Go on, what's up?"

"Mom told me about the guy who tried breaking in here; they found him dead in his cell. Why didn't I hear that from you, Dev? We're supposed to trust each other." Tears welled up in Ewyn's eyes.

"Baby, I told your mother and your brother that I would tell you when I thought you were ready to deal with these things. You've come a long way, Ewyn. Remembering how you were when you first came to me, with all this shit coming at you so fast, you think I want you to revert to that insecure man, frightened of having his own voice?"

"So yes, I made the decision to feed you information when I thought you could handle it. If you trusted me, you wouldn't question my decision. Goddamn it! You should trust me enough to know I don't have any ulterior motives for what I do for you. I love you, more than I can put into words. I hoped my actions proved that."

Ewyn stared into the depths of those mesmerizing predator eyes and saw the sincerity. His breath caught on a sob as he leaned forward and gently kissed Devin's firm mouth.

"I'm sorry. You're right. You believed in me from that first night, and yet I keep questioning everything you do for me." He swiped a tear from his cheek. "I'm just so goddamn tired of being treated like a child, and I want everyone to stop. I'm a man, Dev!"

"Hey! I never treated you like *a* baby, not in the sense you mean. I treat you like *my* baby, as in I love you so much I want to make your life special. And I know you're very much a man...mine! I wouldn't have you any other way. If I've slighted you somehow because of my attitude, I never meant to."

"Damn, Dev. That's... You didn't... I don't mean..." Tears leaked out onto his cheeks. "I love you so much, and I want to be *your* baby, but I want to be treated like your equal too."

"Oh..." Devin grinned. "Top?"

"Hell no." A shaky giggle escaped before Ewyn could control it. "I don't mean like that. In that area, we're perfect just the way we are."

"You've got that shit right. I love this tight little ass." He watched the blush spread across Ewyn's cheeks. "Come on, we have company." He shifted baby-boy from his lap. "And you're right. This is your life someone might be trying to snuff out; you should be involved in every aspect of defending it."

"Really, Dev?" Ewyn threw himself against Devin, taking possession of his mouth.

"Mmm... For the kisses alone, I'll give you any information you want." He swatted the little ass as Ewyn slipped off him and the bed. Ewyn laughed, wiped his eyes, and started for the door. Devin's next words stopped Ewyn in his tracks. "Trust works both ways, baby."

"Oh, Dev, I'm sorry. If I want to be treated like a man, I have to act like one, huh?"

"True."

Ewyn climbed back on his lap, snuggling in; baby-boy told him everything about the night before, his suspicions, his fears, and his mom's speculation.

"After what Mom said... Do you think Gareth being at the Fox last night was another attempt to get at me?"

"I don't know, baby. My question is... If so, how did he know you were going to be there? Or, was he there to meet the mystery person in the car, saw you arrive, and decided to fuck with you? Hell. You told me Gareth always hung out at Misty's. You had to insist he come with you the night we met."

"That's true."

"So it couldn't be coincidence, Gareth at the Fox; it wasn't his normal haunt. Also, did this other person know you were going to be there? If so, how? You went there on the spur of the moment. Even Pat didn't know in advance. None of it makes any sense."

"I never intended to keep anything from you, Dev. I just needed to find out the truth and let Mom know that I intended telling you everything, regardless of her involvement."

"Thank you, baby." He stopped Ewyn when he started to slip from his lap. "One other thing. I agree with your mom."

"About what?"

Devin tilted Ewyn's chin up; their gazes locked. "Don't ditch your protection again. I left you at work without the truck for a reason. Your safety. How did you get to your mother's?"

"Darrell lent me his car. I took it back; he dropped me off here."

"Hmm... Until this is resolved, talk to me...tell me if you need to go places." Devin kissed that sweet mouth. "I need to make sure someone has you covered."

"Promise." Ewyn leaned into the kiss. "Maybe I should get my own car."

"Not until I get a handle on this." He shifted Ewyn from his lap and swatted his butt. "Let's go join the others."

* * * * *

"Hey..." Gregorio grinned as he came out of the kitchen wearing an apron. "I went ahead and prepared lunch. Wasn't sure how many rounds the throw-down would go."

Ewyn stuck out his tongue. "Funny, Greg." He moved toward the table where Timothy, Mick, Taggart, and Patrick were seated. They were tucking into baby spinach salads complete with sliced apples, diced hardboiled eggs, croutons, and what looked like ranch dressing. He swiped a taste of Patrick's.

"Mmm, bacon ranch and..." He reached for more, Patrick smacked at his fingers, but he managed to snag a slice of meat, popping it in his mouth. "Ooo...yum, sweet Italian sausage. I want salad, I'm starved."

Gregorio came over to him; fingers clasping his chin, his brother tilted his head from side to side, then laughed. "No bruises...we have a winner."

"Asshole." Ewyn hauled off and punched his grinning brother, just as Devin brushed by him and goosed his ass when he passed. "Dev!"

Feeling the heat of embarrassment warm his cheeks, Ewyn ignored all the grinning faces and moved about the kitchen fixing plates of salad for him and Devin. Then he joined Gregorio and Devin at the counter.

Devin left his stool, moved to the center island, and returned with two glasses of wine. He handed one to Ewyn.

"So bring me up to date," Ewyn mumbled around a mouthful of food.

Everybody just stared at him, their lips twitching.

"What? Dev said I can hear everything."

Devin turned Ewyn's face and leaned toward him. "Baby, if you could see your lips... We usually keep that look private." Devin's finger flicked the corner of Ewyn's mouth coming away with white, creamy dressing, which Devin sucked off his finger.

"Oh..." Ewyn felt his face flame again. He snatched up his napkin and wiped his lips.

The room filled with laughter.

After lunch, everyone returned to the living room to review what they knew. Devin sat in the chair in the corner; Ewyn sat on the floor cuddled between his legs, arms resting on his thighs. "Pat... When you left Ewyn with Mick, where did you go?"

"Back to the house. Since Mick had Ewyn for dinner, I spent the time with Mairianna, keeping her up to date. Then I had dinner with her before heading back to the Fox."

"Okay. So let's say Varvarinski went to the Fox to meet the perp. Why choose the Fox as their meeting place? Gareth wasn't a regular there."

"Nope. Before last night, only there that one time with Ewyn," Mick interjected.

"So no one knew Ewyn would be there...unless" -- Devin looked at Pat -- "someone is tailing Ewyn."

"Not anyone I picked up on," Pat said. "That doesn't mean someone wasn't there. And, if so, that would explain why Varvarinski showed up."

"Does that mean Gareth was set up?" Ewyn asked.

Devin grinned, fingertips brushing over the back of Ewyn's neck. "I think you both were, and you gave the perp the weapon, baby."

"Oh, no..."

"Don't sweat it. This is too well thought out. If another weapon had been used, your being there would have led the cops to you. People saw you...saw your confrontation with Varvarinski inside the bar." Ewyn leaned his head back on his lap, glaring up at him, green eyes ablaze.

"Fuck! This pisses me off, Dev."

Everybody grinned.

"Yeah, baby, and you're not alone." Devin glanced over at Gregorio. "Are your people onto anything?" Gregorio seemed preoccupied, staring off into space. "Greg..."

"Oh, sorry. What..."

"Your people onto anything..."

"No." Gregorio stood. "I have to go. Keep me in the loop." He hurried from the room, leaving a roomful of stunned people behind him.

"Greg..." Ewyn hopped up and followed his brother.

"What the fuck..." Taggart looked around.

Patrick said, "There goes my ride."

Ewyn came back into the room. "Said he had a meeting." He looked at Devin and shrugged.

"Hmm... No problem." Devin turned to the others in the room.

They spent another hour speculating on the possibilities, and reached no definitive conclusions. Before the party broke up, everybody had an assigned area to investigate and their designated times for keeping an eye on Ewyn.

"We have to move on this," Timothy said. "Someone is cleaning up. Until now, Ewyn hasn't been hurt, but I believe that's due to ineptness. I think whoever is behind this will come at us better equipped the next time."

"Agreed." Everyone spoke in unison.

"Come on, Pat, I'll give you a lift," Timothy said.

Devin walked the group to the door. "I'll touch base with Gregorio."

With everyone gone, Ewyn and Devin returned to the kitchen and made short work of cleaning up. Then they settled down in the living room with Devin sprawled out on the sofa and Ewyn cuddled up beside him toying with a strand of blond hair, twirling and untwirling it.

"Do you think someone is trying to hurt me, Dev? Or just trying to scare me?"

"I think someone intends to kill you. So far, they've been toying with us. What we need to figure out first is why. Then we'll have who."

"With Gareth dead, maybe he didn't send his man. They play for money, and whoever can pay the most can get anything done. I lived with them for almost a year, Dev. There wasn't any loyalty there."

"Yeah. I thought Allister and Varvarinski were working together, trying to get back at both of us, until someone took out Gareth's man. Made me rethink. I only connected the two because Gareth's man came at you right after your run-in with Allister. Still..."

"You think it has something to do with Greg. He's mostly legit now. Besides, they don't usually go after family members."

"True. However, I don't think it has anything to do with your family's business, since you aren't part of it, and you would sell out if anything happens to Greg."

"I don't know why he suddenly bolted out of here."

"Baby, he probably had a meeting. We were here quite a while."

"Yeah... What about Allister?"

"We'll know soon enough, if he's involved. Tim is bringing him in; he'll be here tomorrow."

"Oh..." Ewyn sat up. "You're going to see him?"

"Hey, what's this about?" Devin pulled Ewyn back down. "I have to see him, I need answers."

"Tim can question him."

Devin tilted Ewyn's chin up. "You can't possibly think I have any reason for being with Allister, other than my concern for your safety." Ewyn lowered his eyes. "Fuck! Ewyn... Why is it everybody except you, to include your mother and brother, can see how much I love you?" He sat up and shifted Ewyn from his lap.

Startled, Ewyn gripped Devin's arms. "Dev...no, I'm... Don't be angry."

"Bedroom, mister. I think you need a show-and-tell refresher." Devin grinned and caught Ewyn in his arms when baby-boy threw himself against him, taking them both down on the sofa.

Always a heartwarming sound, Ewyn's laughter rang out.

Chapter Twenty

"Come in, Devin." Timothy stood and shook his hand. "Allister is on his way up."

"So what do you make of all of this, Tim?"

"If we eliminate Allister, I think Greg needs to dig a little deeper. It has to be coming from his end. We've exhausted every avenue from our perspective. With Varvarinski out of the picture, we're at an impasse."

"True. What do you make of Greg running out yesterday?"

"Haven't a clue. He went quiet after lunch."

The knock on the door preceded Timothy's admin entering the room, with Allister close behind.

"Sir..."

"Thanks, Roger. Don't want to be disturbed."

Eyes narrowed, Devin watched Allister move to the sofa and sit down, making himself comfortable. Hell. Since being with Ewyn, he couldn't imagine what he ever saw in Allister.

"Devin." Allister smiled over at him.

He ignored the greeting. "Al, did you hire one of Varvarinski's men to try to scare

Ewyn?”

“What the fuck...” Allister looked stunned, eyes moving from him to Timothy. “Tim... What is this shit about? Ewyn...who is Ewyn?”

“Answer the question, Al,” Timothy said.

“And who the fuck is Varvarinski? Is this why you brought me in? Why would I care about this Ewyn, whoever he is? Or send someone...”

Devin came up out of his chair towering over Allister. “Don’t fuck with me, Al. If you don’t recognize the name Varvarinski, obviously you’re in the wrong line of work.”

Allister eased away from Devin and stood up. “Tim, what’s going on? If we’re talking about the Russian mob...well, hell yeah, I’ve heard the name. I don’t *know* the man!”

“Okay. Sit down, Devin...calm down, Teague.” Timothy moved to the wetbar. “Water, coffee...” He took a can of soda from the refrigerator and returned to his chair. “Here’s the deal, Al. The man you met at Devin’s and tried to kill...”

“No! That’s bullshit. I didn’t try to kill the little shit. He attacked me; I defended myself.”

“Well,” Timothy said and leaned forward in his seat. “At least we’ve established you do remember him. Someone tried to break into Devin’s, and our assumption is they were after Ewyn. This happened the night after you attacked him.”

“I swear to God, I know nothing about it! Hell yeah, I was pissed, but to what...attempt to kill some kid? No way! Why would I? Devin made it clear he didn’t want me...wanted the little bastard.” Allister glared at Devin.

Devin grinned. “Yeah, and he’s well worth it, Al. By no means is he a kid.”

“Fuck you!”

“You wish.”

“Okay, boys. The playground is closed. Focus.” Timothy looked at Allister. “Before you say another derogatory remark about Ewyn, you need to be aware of two crucial facts. Information, which I don’t expect to leave this room.”

Devin took over. “One... Ewyn Kelley -- the little bastard, I believe you called him -- is Timothy’s nephew.” Devin had the pleasure of seeing Allister’s arrogant, self-satisfied expression turn to surprise, then embarrassment. “Yeah.”

"Hey... I didn't..." Allister stuttered, "I never meant..."

Devin held up his hand to stop further comment. "Two... And this is *the* crucial fact, Al. Ewyn Kelley Calderone..."

"Fuck!" Allister came up out of his seat. "But that's..." Allister glanced at Timothy.

"Yes, it is. You qualify to keep your job, after all." Devin grinned. "I guess you can see why it would be to your benefit to be honest with us."

"Devin, I swear... I realize I fucked up, acting like an ass that day at your place. Hell, it pissed me off to know you found someone else so soon. I thought... Well, you were so..."

"So...what, Al? Stupid...gullible... Cared more about you than you cared about me?"

"Fuck it. Yes! You were so serious about everything."

"Yeah... What made me think a relationship worked that way?"

"Okay! So I let my jealousy have free rein, took it out on Ewyn. He wasn't supposed to look like... Someone so...shit, there's no other way to describe the kid...*man*. Not only is he a sexy little fucker, he's damn near fucking pretty."

Devin hooted. *Hot damn!* For a self-centered bastard like Allister to notice someone else's looks, much less acknowledge them...hell. His baby-boy had it going on.

"Payback's a bitch, huh?"

"So I'd heard, and now have firsthand experience. But hey..." Allister smiled. "I'm over all that. I've already met someone, met him on the plane to Hawaii. I apologize...to you and Ewyn. And I swear to God, I don't know anything about what's happening here."

"Even without knowing Ewyn's family connections, hell, the man is an employee. I wouldn't go after him like that."

"Shit!" Devin and Timothy spoke in unison.

"Okay, Teague, relax." Timothy looked at Devin. "We're back to the Calderones."

"I guess." Devin looked at Allister. "Thanks. Sorry about this."

"It's all good. I can see why you thought what you did. I acted like an ass. Is there anything I can do to help? Apologize to Ewyn?"

"No. You're on the next flight out." Timothy stood and headed for the door. "Thanks, Al. Take care." Timothy ushered Allister out the door. "Roger, make sure Teague makes his flight."

"Yes, sir."

Timothy closed the door and returned to his chair. "You believed him, too, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Seeing him again, I realize he's too self-centered to carry a grudge. What about his finding someone else already?"

"Yeah, that's where we found him. He's already living with some stockbroker."

"Then his selfish ass didn't give me and Ewyn a second thought once he hooked up." Devin shook his head. "A stockbroker, huh? Good thing; Allister is high maintenance." He stood up. "I'm going over to talk with Greg, again. We'll go over everything we know and anything else we can think of, until we get an answer."

"Keep in touch. I have Blanchard covering your ass until we resolve this. Find out what's happening, Devin."

Devin nodded and left. He retrieved his cell phone and pressed #2. Ewyn answered.

* * * * *

"Hey, Devin." The two men clasped hands. "Come into my office. Where's Ewyn?"

"Pat's taking him home. Going to stay with him until I get there. I called Mick and Tag, told them to meet us here. I hope that's okay."

"That's fine. For Feds, I like them. Especially Taggart."

"Hmm..." Devin arched an eyebrow.

"Hey!" Gregorio snorted. "Not that way."

"Just kidding. Ewyn calls him a Shemar Moore look-alike."

"I thought he reminded me of somebody; leave it to Ewyn to recognize who." Gregorio moved to his desk, pressed the intercom button on the phone, and ordered dinner for four.

"What happened yesterday, Greg?"

"I had a meeting." Gregorio met and held Devin's stare.

"Okay. Where's your mother? I'd like to say hello."

"She's a little under the weather. I think all of this is a little too much excitement for her. She's older than she looks, and you never heard that from me. But I'll let her know you sent your regards."

"Thanks."

The door opened. Mick and Taggart were ushered into the room.

"Yo, Devin...Calderone." Mick shook hands with both men. Taggart smiled and nodded as he moved around the room looking at all the books on the shelves.

Their food arrived; the servants set up a table and served the meal.

"Shit." Taggart wiped his mouth and took a sip of wine. "If someone told me a month ago that I'd be sitting in Calderone's home eating an excellent meal, drinking fine wine, and enjoying the company, I would have shot them. No offense."

"None taken." Gregorio smirked. "But think about it from my perspective. My baby brother is fuckin' a Fed, I've welcomed Feds into my home, and I'm collaborating with Feds. Holy hell. My gangster card will probably be revoked."

Mick and Taggart burst out laughing. Devin choked on his wine, spewing, coughing... "Fuck!" He looked over at Gregorio to find a dancing, green-eyed gaze identical to Ewyn's watching him. *Déjà vu*.

Gregorio winked. "Coffee, anyone...water?" He looked at Devin. "Ewyn told me you were a freak, didn't drink coffee."

The servants removed the remnants of dinner and the table, then brought in an urn of coffee, several mugs, and bottled water. Once they set everything up on the bar, they retreated.

"He called me a freak?" Devin grinned. "So, what's everyone's spin on this? Allister is out. Varvarinski and his man eliminated. What's left...what are we missing?"

"I think it comes back to Calderone," Mick said.

"Yeah," Gregorio agreed. "But I'll tell you this. It's not business."

"What do you mean?"

"This stays in this room, right?" The others nodded. "I'm about a year from getting out, when the cousins buy out the last phases. I'm done. Everyone in the business is aware of that. So, the family, associates...coming at Ewyn... They know if something happens to Ewyn, it would only hold up the process, because I would use every resource in my power to retaliate. No one in the trade wants that."

Devin stared. "But Ewyn told me..."

"I know. Wanted him to be prepared, but I couldn't...can't tell him about any of this until it's a done deal. You need to know everything, Dev, so you'll be able to help him when I'm not here." Gregorio looked at Mick and Taggart. "Your people are aware of this."

"I'm going to drop out of sight for a while. Ewyn has to take care of Mom and the girls until all of this is over."

"Damn." Devin ran his fingers through his hair. "That eliminates the business associates aspect. What's left? Are the cousins happy with the deal? Could it be a disgruntled associate from the past?"

"I'm looking into it. Hell. My people are looking at Dad's old friends and enemies."

The door opened, and Mairianna entered the room. Everyone stood; Gregorio moved to assist her. The others remained standing, waiting for her to sit, before resuming their seats.

"Mom, what are you doing out of bed?"

"Hi, Dev." Mairianna turned to Mick and Taggart. "I don't think I know you."

"Hello, Mairianna." Devin wanted to laugh. "Let me introduce Michael Tavis and Kyrk Taggart."

"Ma'am."

Mairianna nodded at both men. "Nice to meet you."

"How are you feeling? Heard you were under the weather." Devin moved to the sofa and sat beside her. "Should you be out of bed?"

"Oh, I'm feeling fine, nothing to worry about. Just these old bones showing their age, maybe a touch of stomach flu."

"Mom, why are you here?"

"I know what's going on, Greg. I finally figured it out." She looked around. "Can I talk in front of them, Dev?" Mairianna grabbed Devin's hand, fell against him, and passed out before she could utter another word.

With similar stunned expressions on their faces, everyone in the room sat immobilized.

* * * * *

"So, Pat. What do you think this is about?" Ewyn moved about the kitchen fixing dinner.

"I'm not sure. But I think your mother is on to something. She's been on the phone practically twenty-four/seven since the Russian bit the big one. Calling in favors -- she has all your father's old cronies working on this."

"Damn. Mom is scary. I didn't know she was so connected. And tough. Shit. Last time I went to the house, she slapped the holy hell out of Cecilia."

"What! When...for what?"

"The usual shit. Cecilia was ragging on me, and Mom walked up on us. Shocked the hell out of --"

"Oh, fuck!"

"What?"

Patrick jumped up and headed for the door with Ewyn close on his heels. "Got to go. Call Tim...I'll get in touch with Devin and Greg. Where's your weapon? Get it...lock up behind me."

"Pat..."

"Damn it! Just do it, Ewyn." Patrick rushed out the door, turning back to yell, "Lock the door, pipsqueak!"

Ewyn followed him out the door. "Pat!" He stared at Patrick's back as the man banged on the elevator call button, then turned and hauled ass toward the stairwell, disappearing from sight.

What the fuck?

Ewyn pulled his cell off his waist as he strolled into the bedroom and over to the dresser. He pulled Devin's gun safe from the drawer and retrieved his gun. Hands trembling, he headed back to the front door to double check the lock and the safety latch. Patrick's urgency scared him.

"Tim?"

"Ewyn, what's up?"

"I'm not sure. Pat just ran out of here. I'm alone."

"Fuck! Why would he... Shit. I'll get some men over there. It better be a fucking emergency...pulled his ass off... Hold on."

Ewyn heard the beep, then silence. He paced while he waited for his uncle to come back on the line.

"Ewyn..."

"Yeah."

"They're on their way. Dorsey and Sanders. You'll recognize them from the last time. Now, where the hell did Pat go?"

"I'm not sure. I think he went to the house, something about Mom. Tim, I don't know, but I'm afraid for Mom, now. Wait, I have another call...hold on."

"Baby-boy..."

"Dev! What's going on?"

"Listen, baby. I'm on my way to you. Your mother collapsed; she's on her way to the hospital."

"No! Dev, what happened?" Tears stung the backs of his eyes. "I'll go be with her."

"Not alone. Greg is with her. Not sure what happened. I'm almost there, baby. Mick and Tag are headed your way too. Don't open that door for anyone but them..."

"I have Tim on hold. He's sending Sanders and Dorsey."

"Okay, that's good. No one else, Ewyn. Promise me."

"Promise. Dev, what's going on?"

"I'm not sure. Pat called, told me he left you...on my way out when he burst into the house rambling about your sister-in-law..."

"CeCe... what about her?"

"Baby, I'm not sure. I'm pulling into the garage. Tell Tim everything is okay."

"Sure." Ewyn pressed talk. "Tim, Dev's here. I'm okay."

"Good. Greg just called. Gemma and I are on our way to the hospital. Tell Devin to hang on to Sanders and Dorsey until we know what's happening."

"I will. Thanks. Tell Greg I'll get to the hospital as soon as I can." He closed his phone.

"Ewyn! Baby, open up."

Ewyn flipped the safety latch and yanked the door open. "Dev..."

Devin pulled the trembling body up against him. "It's okay. Damn. I think I broke all sorts of speed records."

"What's happening, Dev?"

"Did you know your mother hasn't been feeling well lately?"

"Yeah, but she said it was nothing. Said she might be getting the flu, been doing too much lately...just tired."

"Yeah. That's what she told me tonight. She said she knew what was going on and who was behind it."

"Who, Dev...Cecilia?"

"I don't know, baby. Mairianna collapsed before she could tell us. Then Pat called, sounding panicked, worried about your mother, asking if Cecilia was home. Hell, I came to you. Left Greg to deal with Pat and Cecilia."

"I need to go to the hospital."

"Okay. I'll take you."

"Let me turn off the dinner. And put this away." Ewyn lifted his sweater, pulled his gun from the back of his waistband, and pressed the safety as he headed toward the

bedroom.

Devin grinned, watching the wiggle of that cute little ass. He caught up with Ewyn in the doorway and kissed him long and hard.

The doorbell chimed.

"That will be Sanders and Dorsey. Go on, baby, lock that up. I'll get the door."

Ewyn moved to the dresser, took out the gun safe...

A shot rang out.

Chapter Twenty-One

Ewyn dropped the box. Gun gripped in his hand, he released the safety as he rushed into the living room. Devin sat propped up against the doorjamb, blood oozing from his shoulder, face chalky, dazed.

"Oh, fuck! Dev..." Ewyn ran across the room, heart thundering, he dropped to his knees. "Dev..." Another shot rang out, splintering the wood just above Ewyn's head. Without thinking, he whipped around, fell against Devin as he returned the gunfire...two shots, in the direction of the stairwell. He heard a muffled curse, started to rise...

The elevator dinged; Devin yanked him down.

"Let me go, Dev!" Ewyn tried to scramble away. "I'll kill the fucker!"

"No! Stay down, baby..." Devin held on. "Stay down!" He snatched the gun from Ewyn's hand, rolling on top of him. "Move!" Devin body-crawled them out of the doorway.

"Devin...it's Dorsey. Coming your way... Okay?"

"No...stairwell."

A volley of shots rang out...echoing, becoming muffled, moving away from them.

"Who, Dev?" Ewyn tried to wriggle from beneath him. "I think I hit somebody."

"I don't know, baby. Didn't see..." Devin forced the words out between clenched teeth, his breathing sounding harsh in his ears, the pain overcoming the adrenaline rush. "Looked through the peephole...nothing. Thought it was Dorsey and Sanders being cautious...called out as I opened the door... Pain exploded in my shoulder. Fucking

stupid...wasn't expecting..."

Sanders appeared in the doorway talking into his cell. "Yeah... Agent down. Need an ambulance at that address, ASAP. Yes, twelfth floor." Sanders flipped his phone closed, rushed into the kitchen, grabbed a towel, and returned to Devin.

"Dev... Are you going to be all right... Fuck if I don't want to kill somebody!" Ewyn angrily swiped the tears from his cheeks. "I can't lose you." Devin rolled off him, and Sanders tried to help Ewyn to his feet; Ewyn waved him off. "Not me, help Dev!"

"I'm okay, Ewyn. Honest. It burns like a motherfucker, but it's not life threatening. He doesn't want to move me before the paramedics get here. Just in case." Sanders knelt down, ripped Devin's shirt from his shoulder, and applied the folded towel to the bullet wound.

More shots, distant...silence.

Sanders grabbed Ewyn's hands and pressed them down on the towel covering Devin's wound. "Keep the pressure there." Sanders jumped up and ran out the door.

"Baby... Get them to take you to the hospital so you can be with your mother."

"No, Dev. I'm sorry, but you come first. We promised...that first night. I'm not leaving you."

Devin grinned. "Come here, you." Ewyn's soft lips brushed across his before he laid siege to Ewyn's appetizing mouth.

"Well...excuse the hell out of us," Mick said from the doorway. "I guess your injury isn't serious, if you're able to get busy."

Ewyn leaned away. "Fuck you, Mick!"

"Whoa..." Taggart strolled into the room, grinning. "The kid's got a mouth on him."

"Fuck off...not a..." Ewyn bit back the rest of what he wanted to say when he saw the shocked looks on the paramedics' faces as they were ushered into the room, followed by Timothy and Gregorio.

"Greg..." Ewyn stood and went to his brother. "Mom?"

"She's fine. Left her sleeping --"

"By herself!"

"Calm down, Ewyn. Pat and Gemma are with her."

"Oh...sorry. I should have known. Sorry. What's wrong with her?"

"I'll explain everything later." Gregorio glanced at the paramedics, then looked down at Devin.

"You okay."

"Yeah. Just a scratch."

"Dev..."

"We're ready to move him." The paramedics, with Mick and Taggart's help, lifted Devin onto the gurney.

"Where are you taking him?"

"Saint Bernadine's. Bullet has to be removed."

"Oh...I'm coming with you." Ewyn moved toward the gurney.

"Come on, Ewyn. We'll take you." Mick took Ewyn's arm when he started to follow Devin. "They're not going to let you go in the ambulance."

Ewyn looked at his brother and uncle.

"Go on. Tim and I will stay here and wait for the locals...clean up. Then we'll meet you at the hospital."

"Yeah." Timothy patted him on the back. "I have to wait for my guys to report in."

"Okay, thanks." Ewyn hurried to join Mick and Taggart, who waited for him at the elevator.

Dorsey and Sanders came out of the stairwell, headed for the condo, just as Ewyn, Mick, and Taggart stepped into the elevator, the doors closing after them.

* * * * *

Ewyn paced around the waiting room until a nurse came to get him.

"Mister Kelley?"

He looked at Mick and Taggart. They nodded, and he left the room with the nurse. She led him to recovery; Devin was the only occupant.

Devin's eyes were closed, and he still had that pale look about him. Hesitantly, Ewyn approached the bed. "Dev..."

Devin's eyes sprang open. "Hey. All I get is a 'Dev'?" Ewyn clasped his head with those slim fingers and leaned down, mouth all over his. "Mmm...much better." He hauled Ewyn up onto the bed with him.

"Dev, no!" Ewyn landed right on top of him. "Oh, shit. Did I hurt you...are you okay?"

"Baby, I'm fine. Just a little scratch."

"Scratch... You were shot. They had to remove a bullet. You could have been killed. If they don't get them..." Ewyn's hands fluttered over his face.

Devin grinned.

"What?"

"I love baby-boy babble." He kissed the gaping mouth.

"Okay...break it up. They're coming to move you to a room." Mick spoke from the doorway; Taggart stood behind him grinning. "Come on, Ewyn. They have to prep him to move him. We'll meet him in his room."

"Are you sure? Dev... You want me to wait?"

"I'll be okay. I'll see you there."

* * * * *

By the time they had Devin settled, Timothy and Gregorio had arrived. Ewyn sat on the bed holding Devin's hand as if he never intended to let it go.

"Give the man some breathing room, Ewyn." Gregorio spoke from the doorway.

"Fuck you, Greg."

"Baby, I'm okay. I promise, I'm not going anywhere." Devin looked down at their clasped hands.

Ewyn laughed and relaxed his grip.

"So what happened, Tim...Greg? How's Mairianna?" Devin turned to the men seated around his bed.

"Mom's okay," Greg responded. "Still sleeping."

"We caught one man coming down the stairwell," Taggart told the group. "He shot at us, we returned fire. Dorsey had the other one, but the man died before he could question him." He looked at Ewyn. "I believe your badass self killed him, Ewyn."

Devin and everyone else turned to stare at Ewyn. Their stunned expressions had Ewyn grinning. "I told you, Greg. I'm a deadly weapon."

Gregorio laughed. "I guess so. Goddamn... Good shot, baby brother."

"Not a baby anymore." Devin ran his fingertips down the side of Ewyn's face. "Not if he made a killshot from his position in the doorway. Hell...he was on his knees. I couldn't have done better."

"Fuckin' A." Ewyn beamed. "So what does this come down to, and can we expect any more?"

"No. It's over," Gregorio told him.

"How can you be sure? Was it Cecilia?"

"Yes."

"Bitch! Greg, I'll kick her fuckin' ass." Ewyn jumped off the bed. "Where is she? Did they arrest her?"

"No, you won't kick her ass."

"Greg..."

"She's disappeared."

"No! Get the fuck out of here. How...when..."

"Calm down, Ewyn. She wasn't in the house when Pat got there. She may have left before Mom came down to talk to us, or she left during the commotion over Mom." Gregorio shook his head. "Hell. Without those two men, the only indication of her involvement would have been her sudden decision to get out of Dodge."

"Damn!" Ewyn sat down. "Why? What made her do it? Did she kill Gareth?"

"Not personally. One of his own men did the dirty for her. Hell..." Timothy turned to Gregorio. "Do you realize you were probably next?"

"Yeah. That occurred to me. I have my people on her ass; she won't get far." Gregorio turned to Devin and Ewyn. "Tim and the FBI are looking too. The Feebs don't want her stupidity to fuck up my retirement."

"What...? Dev... Greg..." Ewyn looked from one to the other. "Retirement... What's going on?"

"I'll tell you about it later, baby." Devin closed his eyes. "Sorry, everyone. I'm wiped. Do you mind?"

"No. Everything will keep until they release you." Timothy stood and moved toward the door. Everyone else followed. "They'll release you tomorrow, as long as there are no signs of fever or infection. Hell. You're healthy, shouldn't be a problem."

Gregorio looked back at Ewyn. "Are you staying?"

"Yeah. If they'll let me."

"Not a problem. I'll take care of it." Gregorio left the room, returning moments later, "I've taken care of it." He hugged Ewyn. "I'll pick both of you up tomorrow, then."

"Will you explain to Mom? Tell her I'll get over there as soon as I'm sure Dev is okay."

"Relax, Ewyn. Mom will understand."

"Hey, Mick...Taggart, thanks. I owe you." Devin shook their hands.

"No, you don't." Taggart grinned.

Once everybody left, Ewyn cuddled up to Devin. "Scared, Dev."

"Baby... I'm going to be all right."

"No, when you were shot. The blood...never saw anyone shot. You... I thought I was going to lose you."

"Shh... It's okay, baby. You did good. Let's rest now." Devin dozed off.

Ewyn stayed awake for quite a while, clinging to Devin.

* * * * *

Gregorio dropped them off, said he would return later.

Once he had Devin settled in bed, Ewyn went to the kitchen to prepare a light meal for Devin. Just as he headed back toward the bedroom, the doorbell pealed. He walked into the bedroom and found Devin getting out of bed. He hurried across the room, set the tray down, and then he pushed Devin back on the bed.

“No, Dev, you’re supposed to rest.”

“Fuck rest. Until your sister-in-law is found, or we’re sure she doesn’t have any more cronies out there after you...”

“Is this your example of the trust we spoke about before?” Ewyn glared as he settled the tray on Devin’s lap. Moving to the dresser, he retrieved his Beretta and slipped it into his waistband just as the doorbell chimed again. “I’ll take care of this, Dev.”

Beaming, Devin relaxed against the headboard. Damn, his baby-boy had come a long way.

He waited until Ewyn left the room, and then he jumped out of bed and took his gun from the safe. He went to the bedroom door and positioned himself so he would have a clear shot at whoever stood on the other side of the front door. He watched Ewyn peer through the peephole, then unlatch the door. Gregorio and Timothy stood there.

He relaxed his tense posture and quickly returned to bed. He slipped his gun under his pillows, sat back, and started eating. He looked up and smiled when Gregorio, Timothy, and Ewyn came into the room.

“Any word on your wife?” Ewyn asked as he climbed onto the bed and settled next to Devin. “Have a seat.” He pointed to the chairs by the window.

“Not a word from my end.” Gregorio looked over at Timothy. “You have anything?”

Timothy shook his head.

Devin looked at Gregorio. The green-eyed gaze, so identical to Ewyn’s, locked with his. Devin knew, without a doubt...Calderone lied. No one would ever see Cecilia again. His mind wanted to object, but in his heart, he understood. He had been prepared to do the same to Varvarinski, make the man disappear for what he had done to Ewyn, if the man had still been standing after their investigation. He chuckled.

"What?" Ewyn looked at him quizzically.

"Oh... Just enjoying my meal." He winked at Ewyn. "This soup is delicious. What kind is it? I've never had it before."

"Oh." Ewyn beamed. "Pepper Pot. Never had it before, either. Thought I'd give it a try."

Gregorio laughed. "So you're using the wounded man as the guinea pig?"

"Hey..." Ewyn started to get up; Devin grabbed his arm. "Okay." He grinned and settled back.

Timothy cleared his throat, looked at Devin and smiled. "Told you."

"What?" Ewyn looked from Devin to Timothy. "So what are we going to do? Is it over?"

"Yeah. The men in the stairwell...Calderone minions." Gregorio shook his head. "My own fuckin' people."

Timothy took up the conversation. "Yeah. Once we were able to identify them, we were able to track them back to Cecilia. The money trail led to her.

"I had a word with MacGregor. He put me in touch with his Russian mole. There's a shake-up coming down the pike for Gareth's group. The perp who dusted Varvarinski...showed up at the FBI offices, gift-wrapped and singing his heart out."

"What if Cecilia hires someone else, comes after me again?" Ewyn looked at his brother.

"Not going to happen. I've put the word out. She's persona non grata now, with all the families. Who is she going to hire? No, she'll lay low, change her name, her appearance. However, she'll eventually run out of money; I'll find her. Relax, little brother."

Devin looked at Gregorio. "I think you should tell him. He can handle it. I think he's earned the respect."

"Yeah. You're right. Come on, Ewyn...let's take a ride. I need to talk to you."

"But I can't leave Dev..."

"Go on, baby-boy, Timothy will keep me company until you get back."

The minute the door closed behind the Calderone brothers, Timothy turned to Devin.

"What do you think he's done with her?"

"I haven't a clue. But I'll bet a month's pay no one will ever see her again. He wouldn't take that chance with Ewyn's life."

"Not only Ewyn's life -- Mairianna's too. I believe Greg figured it out the other day when Pat said he went back to the house for his break and to keep Mairianna in the loop. On several occasions, both Pat and Mairianna caught Cecilia eavesdropping on them."

"So that's how she knew Ewyn would be at the Fox and set Varvarinski up." Devin frowned. "Why Ewyn first?"

"If Greg died first, everything would be Ewyn's, to include being trustee of the children's trust funds. Ewyn wouldn't give Cecilia anything."

"Moreover, with Ewyn dead, his trust fund reverts to Greg's girls. Cecilia probably assumed she would be their trustee when Greg died." Timothy shook his head. "What she didn't know... Greg arranged for a law firm to manage everything, if something happened to him and Ewyn. Hell. In his line of work, he covered every eventuality."

"So, she didn't know about him selling out?"

"No. Furthermore, in two years, if Ewyn and Greg were out of the picture, Nicole, their oldest daughter, would become trustee of the estate, when she turned twenty-one. Greg had everything set up to exclude Cecilia."

"So, she did all of this for nothing. Fuck." Devin couldn't believe he could have lost Ewyn over that. "And what was her reason for going after Mairianna?"

"Pure hatred. We'll never know the whole story, but I'm glad we didn't have to go public with it. Too many people would have been exposed. Could have ruined Greg's retirement plans." Timothy leaned back in his chair. "So... Drama over. Back to our usual shit...lying, murder, covert operations..."

"Yeah." Devin grinned. "Piece of cake."

* * * * *

"So what's going on, Greg?" Ewyn settled back in his brother's car and waited.

"She planned to kill all of us, but she had to take you out first." Gregorio went on to explain about Cecilia.

"Son of a bitch! She was fuckin' crazy. Did she really think she could get away with it?"

“Sure, if it was blamed on the Russians.”

“Damn.” Ewyn shook his head. “What are you going to tell the girls?”

“I already told them that she went on a world tour, needed some time away. They don’t care; she alienated them too.”

“You think you’ll ever find her?”

“Yeah. Eventually. But don’t worry about it. Let me fill you in on my retirement plans. Devin knows what’s coming down. He’ll help, if you need help.”

“Greg...”

“Let’s take a stroll around the park, Ewyn, and I’ll tell you everything.”

The two brothers climbed out of the car.

* * * * *

Three months later...

Devin closed the front door and rushed to the bedroom. Baby-boy lay sprawled on Devin’s side of the bed, sound asleep. He’d promised Ewyn that he would be home for Christmas. He’d made it with ten minutes to spare. Sweet.

He took the box from his pocket and headed for his office. It still amazed him to see the place all lit up with Christmas decorations, a seven-foot pine tree decked out in all its finery, flocked, and little lights twinkling.

He hadn’t done Christmas since he left Sweden. He usually ignored it. Even when Allister lived with him, they’d exchanged gifts, but they didn’t get into the decorating.

Ewyn had him decorating the day after Thanksgiving.

He put Ewyn’s present under the tree and looked at the dozens of other gifts there, wrapped and arranged neatly according to size. He chuckled. They all had his name on them.

Devin returned to the bedroom and moved over to the bed. He ran his fingertips down that too-pretty face, smiled, and then he went into the bathroom. He took a quick shower, pulled on his sweatpants, and headed for the kitchen.

He gathered everything he needed to prepare a full breakfast for two...hell, at one in the morning, he couldn't stop grinning. Ewyn gave him this...the happy-to-be-alive feelings. He couldn't wait for baby-boy to wake up, to see Ewyn's face when Ewyn opened his present.

"Dev..."

Devin looked up to see his naked, sleepy-eyed lover standing in the entryway...sexy as ever. Heart thundering, he held out his arms. Ewyn threw himself at him.

"You made it." Ewyn wrapped around his body.

He took total possession of that sweet, inviting mouth. While reacquainting himself with the flavor, he moved toward the bedroom. Hell... It had been too long.

Fuck breakfast.

* * * * *

Devin opened his eyes to find Ewyn sitting at the head of the bed, glaring down at him.

"Morning, baby. Don't I get a kiss?" Ewyn leaned over and gave him a quick peck on the lips. "Whoa... What's up with that?"

Eyes flaring, Ewyn glared. "I saw my *one* gift under the tree. I know it's supposed to be about the thought...not the gift...But damn, Dev... That little box...couldn't have been much thought."

Devin hooted. "Did you open it?"

"No. We're supposed to open our gifts together. I'm waiting." Ewyn hopped off the bed and headed out of the room.

Devin grinned. Damn, he loved his baby-boy. He rolled out of bed, slipped on his sweats, then hurried to follow the cute little ass wriggling through the condo.

Ewyn plopped down on the floor in front of the tree; arms folded, baby-boy glared up at him as he entered the room. He dropped down beside Ewyn.

"You know, baby, you're right...you're not spoiled."

Ewyn just glared and handed him his first gift. He opened it and smiled. A dark brown cashmere sweater. "Thanks, baby." He leaned over and took a quick kiss. "Your turn."

He handed Ewyn his present.

Ewyn rolled his eyes, took the gift from Devin's hand, and tore off the wrapping. When he saw the square, medium-sized jeweler's box, he glanced up. "Dev..."

"Go ahead, open it."

Ewyn opened the box and just stared, mouth rounding into a silent O.

"Yeah. I think you owe me an apology."

Ewyn stared down at the car keys for several seconds before snapping out of his stupor. He jumped to his feet and headed for the door, then he stopped and ran back. He threw himself against Devin. Mouths meshed; tongues danced.

Surfacing for air, Ewyn said, "Dev... What... Is it downstairs...I don't have to wait, do I?"

"It's a Mustang GT convertible, tungsten gray. I thought that suited your personality, baby. All lean lines, sexy... And yes, it's downstairs. We can get dressed and go test-drive it now, if you want."

Ewyn's fingers threaded through Devin's hair. Gaze steady, he stared into Devin's eyes. "No, Dev, it can wait."

"Excuse me? After that performance you subjected me to. What the hell could be more important?"

"You. You're more important. Love you...want you something fuckin' fierce, Dev. *That* can't wait."

Laughing, Devin rolled his almost-too-pretty, loving, sexy-ass baby-boy beneath him. "Goddamn, I love you." Devin's head lowered, and he claimed what belonged to him.

Sweet.

Chapter Twenty-Two

High up in the hills outside of Rome, at a room on the top floor of a cloistered monastery, the knock on the door went unanswered.

The nun opened the door.

A woman sat in a chair staring out the solitary window. No movement, breathing barely

discernible, and not even blinking, she held a rosary clenched in her hands. She didn't even react to the opening door

"Go in. You won't disturb her. She's been like that since you brought her here. We feed her, bathe her, and even talk to her, but we get no reactions from her. Her mind has shut down."

"That's okay, Sister Angelina. Maybe that's her penance for her sins. I won't stay long. I just came to ease my conscience and say good-bye."

"That's probably for the best." The nun nodded and backed out of the room.

"You really have the nuns fooled, don't you? Well, it doesn't work with me. I know you can hear me, so listen up. The only reason I let you live is because you're the mother of my children. I don't know how long you can keep up this performance, but I promise, you will never leave here alive. You have my word on that."

"I told the girls you died in a terrible car crash, nothing but ashes. They weren't broken up about it. Then, that's your own fault. Try to make the best of what's left of your life here. This is my last visit."

He turned, headed for the door, opened it, then paused. He looked back over his shoulder; he caught her off guard. She stared directly at him, a spark of hatred lighting up those deep blue eyes. He grinned.

"Good. I wanted you to be aware of what was happening to you."

Gregorio Calderone quietly closed the door, along with that chapter of his life.

 THE END 

M. E. Reid

Currently residing in Bullhead City, Arizona, I am very reclusive and spend my time divided between reading, writing, and enjoying the company of my two dogs, Apache

and Mason. My other interests and hobbies are creating tee shirt designs and slogans, creating greeting card designs and verse, and Forensic Science reality shows. I have eclectic tastes in music.

Depending on the genre, for writing purposes, I use various pseudonyms.

For more information, please visit <http://m-e-reid-puts-it-in-writing.com/>.