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Ménage & More

Addison Avery



MIGHTY MEN WITH WEAPONS

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DEDICATION

For the people of Rarotonga. The Cook Islands changed who I am with the best of nature's beauty. If the world is a perfect place, I'll return there soon and if not, I'll always dream of you.

MIGHTY MEN WITH WEAPONS

ADDISON AVERY

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Chapter One

“It’s called the best kept secret in the Pacific Ocean, but I imagine by the time you finish your job there, you won’t find The Cook Islands as palatable as the tourists visiting the South Pacific each year,” the admiral scoffed, narrowing his gaze.

Nate realized the man staring back at him did not like him. He matched the admiral with similar feelings.

Admiral Thomas F. Shoemaker’s resume unfolded like a career document for several officers from the *Who’s Who in the American Military*. He’d served as a U.S. Navy Admiral. Early in his career, he also earned an appointment as Chief of Naval Operations from a former U.S. president, and he chaired more committees in Washington than most socialites in Palm Beach. A man with power and influence, Admiral Shoemaker held his head high and commanded respect.

Nate was fresh out.

He studied his commanding officer only because he trusted him about as far as he could throw him. Given the admiral’s six-foot-five stance and matching superior strength, Nate didn’t think he’d pick him up and toss him aside anytime soon. Turning his back on his equal offered little appeal.

Once a lieutenant in the Navy SEALs, Nate Francisco didn't have a family, and what few recollections he had of a childhood he chose to forget. When several high-ranking government officials offered him a chance to become an independent special operative, he jumped at the honor to serve his country and fight for various causes. Sometimes he gained a little insider knowledge and understood what he fought for, but when he didn't, he seldom let the lack of details bother him.

Nate retained a true license to kill, and he used his *carte blanche* like a free pass. He reveled in unconditional authority and often left as much devastation in his wake as those truer criminals who had gone before him. Those were the men and women he often hunted like animals.

"I've been to the islands before. Any specific one holding your attention, or will I travel between all fifteen?"

"Everything you need to know is in this packet," the admiral said, waving a folder. "Rarotonga is your first stop. If you exceed expectations, it may be the only one you'll make in the islands. You'll meet up with two other operatives, and they'll fill you in on the particulars of their assignments as well."

"Do they have names?"

"No. Right now they don't. Like you, these soldiers don't exist in modern day society. Instead, they traded in their lives to serve their country."

Nate lifted the flap on the envelope. "I wonder if they feel as fortunate as I do."

"You'll have plenty of time to ask them once you meet them. You'll fly on a private jet as my guest to Tahiti. From there, you'll travel to New Zealand and then on to Rarotonga International Airport."

"Retirement looks good on you. A private jet means you've arrived, doesn't it, admiral?"

Sometimes Nate tasted the bitterness on his tongue. The only reason he chose this life was because men like Shoemaker convinced him of the greater good. He was once told of the better way of doing things, the longer life plan for those who underwent the kind of training he endured for the life of an invisible, if not invincible, soldier.

When he first signed up for the honor of living such an extraordinary lifestyle, he thought he had something solid. Of course a young gun in the military often believes he's ten feet tall and not only bulletproof but also better than any weapon used in the military. He signed on for a lonely existence as a man without a home or a future. Soon, he became one of the best because he resented his choices. The displeasure transmitted into his core and made him into one hell of a survivor.

Admiral Shoemaker said, "I imagine this assignment will appeal to you on many levels."

"Is that right?" Why ask direct questions? Why pretend he even cared when he didn't? An assignment was an assignment.

The admiral's wicked smile proved he wanted him to probe for more. Hell, no. Nate would not fish for information. When he wanted more data than he received, he searched for facts on his own. Sometimes he killed for direct leads, and other times he paid for mere clues.

What he didn't do was beg.

* * * *

Donovan Collier leisurely strolled through the cool airport with his navy blue duffle bag over his shoulder. He felt confident he'd spot Admiral Shoemaker without a problem. Even if he didn't, Shoemaker would recognize him. He was the kind of commander who made it his business to study the fellows he led into battle, or, in his case, gave a final kick into the trenches.

Donovan grabbed a Wall Street Journal from a nearby newsstand. A young woman with long, brown hair and big black eyes showed him immediate interest. He never had a problem catching a lady's eye.

"Hello," she said. "Are you an American?"

"Yes," he stated flatly.

Great, just terrific, he thought. The admiral was late, and the woman in heat wanted his attention.

"Are you here on business or—"

"Business," he growled. "And it's none of yours."

She narrowed her gaze and then winked. "I wouldn't be so sure about that if I were you. Follow me, Donovan Collier. Your car is already outside and another one just like you—fabulous personality and all—is waiting there as well. I'm sure you'll get along about as well as a mountain lion and a baby calf. For the record, you're the calf."

He snarled. "Is that right?"

"From what I can tell, one hundred percent accurate." She took off at a sprint, well in the lead. He didn't try to keep her pace. He didn't chase women or subordinates, period.

Once he hit the heat, he saw a taxi waiting for him. She held the door open and said, "Get in." Her tone changed drastically. The chick had grown some balls between batting her eyelashes at the newsstand and opening up the cab door, curbside.

He peered inside the car and locked gazes with the other passenger. He'd know a killer anywhere. He'd smelled enough of them. Besides, they all looked the same. They had stone cold faces and hard, empty eyes.

He sat down on the leather seat and tossed his bag behind his neck-rest.

Great, terrific, marvelous.

Donovan once requested a reassignment because of men like the one seated next to him. This time, a granted transfer was out of the question. Warned before he left Honolulu, he knew this job stuck.

The door slammed behind him, and a hard tap against the roof alerted the driver. Within seconds, they traveled away from the airstrip.

“I’m Donovan,” he said, extending his hand.

“Nate,” the other man growled, ignoring the hand offered.

“I was told there were three on this mission,” Donovan said.

Nate turned to face him. “I don’t care if I fly solo or have an army behind me. I’m here to do a job, and I’m one of the best in the business. Now if you want company, that’s all fine and dandy—maybe the admiral made adjustments for your special needs—but I ain’t your guy.”

Donovan studied the man next to him and gave him a good gawking, a real once-over before he looked outside the window. He caught a glimpse of the beach, but the cluster of palm trees along the road prevented an unobstructed view.

Ah hell, he thought, avoiding the temptation to steal another glance at the man seated next to him. Another one just like the last operative he left behind. He could almost feel the guy’s dick swelling against his ass now.

Yeah, it was safe to assume Nate was most definitely his guy. Time would tell, but time always had a way of shining a light in his favor.

* * * *

Nate didn’t like the set up. The bungalows, while located on the beach, were anything but private. The Polynesian-style huts formed clusters in four groups of five straight across the oceanfront. The island resort sported waterfront activities. Kayaks and sun lounges

were scattered across the sand, and a large sign directed tourists to snorkeling rentals.

Stepping onto the tiny porch of their scantily appointed accommodations, Nate ducked his head and walked inside. “How quaint,” he grumbled, looking around the area.

“I’ve stayed in worse,” Donovan said.

Nate walked into the bedroom. There, he found a king-size bed located directly under an oval window. He’d noticed a single day bed in the living room and a full service kitchen off to the left. Turning to the right, he eyed the dressing area and full bathroom complete with an oversized walk-in shower.

“We could ask for another cabana. I’m sure they have huts with two bedrooms.”

“There’s a convertible bed in the living room,” Nate reminded him. “I hope it’s comfortable.”

“I’ll just check with guest services,” Donovan persisted, walking over to the bright red phone on the nightstand.

His finger touched the first number, and Nate pressed down on the necessary buttons to disconnect the call. “We’re not here on our honeymoon, sweetheart. We stay where Shoemaker books. There’s a reason he wants us in this bungalow.”

Donovan shrugged. “Suit yourself. I’m taking the bed.”

Nate didn’t argue. Instead, he slung his bag on the mattress and unzipped the canvass. Pulling out his weapons first, he had one of his guns loaded and locked within a few seconds, taking time to adjust the sights. If Donovan was smart, he would understand the obvious. The bed was taken and the room belonged to him.

Nate felt the hairs standing up on the back of his neck and turned around. “What the hell are you doing? Waiting for instructions?”

“I don’t take orders from you,” Donovan reported.

“Then don’t just stand there looking like you might need them. Get your gear unpacked. Go outside and look around. This is a small island, but I’m not familiar with this particular resort. We need to

know how many employees are here at all times. When the shifts change, when the housekeeping staff arrives and when they leave, when guests check in and check out, arrivals and departures to and from the airport, and of course, we will want to familiarize ourselves with the guests already here. We should have our orders by the time our third leg shows up.”

At this point, the best Nate could hope for was a soldier who looked more like Rambo than George Clooney. He wouldn't bank on a miracle.

Nate returned to his work. Unpacking another gun and a few grenades, he opened a drawer in the bedside table and casually tossed the weapons inside. A few seconds later, he heard his sidekick leave the room.

Thank God, he thought. Nate closed his eyes and shook his head. He couldn't get started on this one. Oh, hell no. The last time he mixed business with pleasure, he almost lost his life. A sexy Marine with too much family money and political pull had been left for dead in a deserted POW camp in Afghanistan. He was sent in to save him when no one else even acknowledged he was still alive.

He saved him, all right. Then, he fucked the hell out of him for two weeks while they lived like animals and fought like wild men to cross over the rough terrain and weather the worst of droughts—by far one of the poorest climate conditions he remembered. Regardless of the natural heat, he kept things burning one degree hotter between him and a man he later affectionately called his little soldier boy.

No, he didn't want a replacement for what he shared with some twenty-two-year-old overgrown kid. What he experienced in Afghanistan and the weeks following his assignment held as a once in a lifetime deal, one he took a pass on just to save his soul. He didn't think he could survive another relationship that almost was, let alone a good hard fuck with someone who looked like Donovan.

Walking over to the doorway, Nate narrowed his focus when he spotted the other operative rummaging through his luggage. He honed

in on Donovan the man, not Donovan the killer, just a few feet away. He studied him carefully as he unpacked his rig, placing each weapon in a meticulous line straight across the exotic wood bar lining the living room wall.

Donovan had dark hair, a little salt and pepper in his circle beard, one he kept clean-cut and perhaps only grew for an assignment. Most of the men who fought beside him in the past kept clean-shaven whenever possible. Too many days in the field left many ISOs viewing razors as a luxury item.

“Did you say you’ve been here before?” Donovan asked, snapping a clip into the butt of his gun.

Jolted by the sound and the fact that he allowed himself a brief moment of indulgence, Nate walked by Donovan. “It’s been a long time,” he snapped over his shoulder. “I’ll be back.”

Before he heard a reply, Nate stepped into the sand and walked toward the ocean. He took maybe twenty steps when his nostrils flared, allowing him the opportunity to inhale the sea air. The palm trees whispered in the background. The waves gently lapped forward, and the grace of nature tempted him. He rolled up his pants, removed his designer shoes, and tossed them behind him.

Nate had always been mesmerized by the beauty found in the South Pacific. In the late evenings, the blue water turned a dark turquoise and crystallized enough to entice the naked eye and capture a man’s soul. The clear water was an attraction for swimmers and divers. Nate enjoyed the advantages the sea provided even though there were obvious disadvantages.

A man couldn’t hide under these waters, but he’d certainly know where he stood and what swam around him. Right then, the ocean held more appeal than the mission set to begin.

Damn it all. Nate wished the calm sea intrigued him as much as the man waiting to fight beside him. “Fuck me,” he said, kicking a spray of water and stumping his big toe on a clump of tiny pebbles.

Yes, indeed, there were few doubts about where he was headed. This particular job would likely get downright messy.

Chapter Two

Donovan relaxed in the hammock and watched Nate pace. Nate was over six feet of nothing more than sexual frustration and hard core anxiety. Donovan knew something about stress, especially when he added to the mechanisms causing another man's uneasiness.

He locked his fingers and stretched his arms forward, watching his muscles flex. He snickered. He hadn't been called out as a beautiful man for nothing.

Most women swooned at his feet and cried their share of tears when they discovered his sexual orientation. Hell, it was the most amusing part of his job. When women were targets, he enjoyed taking them to bed and watching their dismay, never mind their discomfort, when they discovered the truth.

Sometimes he was really quite twisted. He got off on telling a woman he fucked that the reason he could only take her in the ass was the obvious. He liked riding in the backseat. It was the only way to drive.

"Dinner is served buffet style," Nate barked, a raspy catch to his voice. "Personnel," he pointed to a man digging up beach umbrellas, "claims it's covered with our stay."

"And I'll bet you aren't the kind of guy to spend money out of pocket when something has already been taken care of for you, huh?"

"I don't spend my dough," Nate informed him. "Now if you were looking for a quiet romantic dinner in, I'm sure I can swing for candlelight."

He didn't smile. He didn't act sincere. He was all fuck and no foreplay. Donovan didn't need a man like Nate to screw up his day, or maybe later, his orders.

Donovan let Nate's snide remark slide. "I hear the island spreads are pretty good."

"If you like pineapple," Nate complained.

"And I take it you don't?"

"I don't like much of anything I can't lock one hand around."

"You can't fist a pineapple?" Donovan asked, grinning.

Apparently, Nate didn't find him amusing. He stalked inside and a few minutes later reappeared in khaki shorts and a bright pink Polo.

Donovan sat sideways in the hammock. "Well, don't you look..." *Good enough to suck, sip, or swallow.* He went with, "Obvious."

"Obvious?" Nate arched a brow.

"Trying to look like you fit in as a tourist?"

"Something wrong with what I'm wearing?"

Everything. "Nothing."

A forced smile curved Nate's mouth, and his lips shaped into a completely devilish grin. "I'm ready to go when you are. If I look good enough to tempt, why don't you go ahead and dig in?"

Donovan stood, started to pass, and changed his mind. Why the hell not? Since their first introduction, Nate and Donovan shared an unspoken understanding. They were of like minds through and through. Potential lovers, even if they never acted on desires, often connected within seconds of an initial meeting.

He gave Nate a firm pat on the cheek and stared directly into the man's eyes. "You know what's wrong with you?" He didn't wait for a reply, but he did pause. "You've had blue balls for so damn long, you'll fuck just about anything without a cause or a meaning behind each and every thrust. That's what these missions do to men like me and you."

Nate's jaw set, and before Donovan prepared for retaliation, Nate kicked the door closed and pinned him to the floor. Sitting across his

chest, the angry beast unleashed in a powerful form, and his neck veins pulsed with fury.

“You think you wanna take me?” Nate asked, gripping his wrists.

Donovan allowed his body to relax under Nate’s weight. Then he said, “I could give you good fight, soldier. But I’d hate to mess up that pretty pastel covering your body.”

Nate drew back.

“Go ahead,” Donovan invited. “It’s not gonna help matters. A thrown punch certainly won’t change things.”

Nate swallowed hard, stared harder, and probably grew stiffer.

“You gonna take that swing or let me up so I can shower and change for dinner?”

Nate took a deep breath, one he barely concealed. There was a peculiar yellowish tint covering his brown eyes with a thick gloss. Those were the eyes set and controlled by his killer instinct.

The woman at the airport was wrong when she compared Nate to a mountain lion. Donovan believed he was staring into the hungry eyes of a true tiger, one who possessed guts and claimed plenty of personal glory from mere survival. He gawked anyway. Donovan wasn’t the kind of man to look away first, turn the other cheek, and avoid a good fight.

After a few minutes passed, Nate released him, and Donovan sighed when he stood on his feet again. Most men who tried something so stupid would’ve been decked, but Donovan refused to hit a man who already had his back against the ground.

They stared at one another for a lingering moment. Then Nate walked outside. Donovan headed for the shower. Once there, he locked his left hand firmly around his cock and tugged his dick through a closed fist. Squeezing his eyes shut, he captured the recent image of the man he’d soon have nearby for assistance.

* * * *

Colby Carrington watched Donovan Collier and Nate Francisco from a safe distance. He refocused his field glasses a few times as they moved through the serving line. Finally, they were directed to a table right smack dab in the middle of the restaurant. He bet his friend Nate loved every minute of the wide-open exposure.

He could almost hear him now, bitching and griping about where they were seated, how vulnerable they were. Too damn bad for Nate. Or maybe not.

Before Colby enjoyed one too many chuckles, he saw Nate motion for one of the wait staff, and soon he pointed out the precise table he wanted. That was Nate. He was nothing if not thorough to a fault. Still, for a few seconds, he allowed himself a rare weakness, and anyone on the opposition would have seen the advantage. A shooter would've taken his shot and reveled in Nate's carelessness.

Colby didn't pull the trigger, but he could have. If required to take the perfect shot, death's kill, he would've had opportunity, and life as Nate had known it would've been over.

"Not now, my friend," Colby muttered, eyeing the gun at his side.

Colby arrived two days before Nate and Donovan for a reason. He knew Nate better than most but considered Donovan young blood with too many kills under his belt. Donovan was the red flag, the reason Colby knew this mission wasn't just another job.

Amateurs like Donovan, regardless of how good they were or how talented they appeared, rarely worked with seasoned operatives. Many of the operatives had reputations for short fuses. One or two good soldiers lost their lives right after training because they were assigned to a tough mission with the wrong son of a bitch. Donovan was seated directly across from hell's worst.

Donovan Collier had something special. Colby wasn't sure why Donovan was a rare find, but he undoubtedly had *something*. His skills placed him across the table from Nate Francisco.

Nate was an ISO who would, in fact, cut off a man's pecker and hand it to him across the table if he stepped out of line. He'd never

stop eating his steak dinner in the process. In fact, he might even ask the loser to pass the salt as he drew his last breath.

Colby dropped the binoculars, narrowed his gaze, and rubbed his chin. The stubble alerted him to the obvious. He hadn't taken the time to shave. He'd been wound up like a ticking time bomb since he received his assignment.

Raising the glasses to the bridge of his nose, he asked the million dollar question. "Who'd you piss off, asshole?" He stared harder. "What the fuck did you do to deserve a seat next to Nate Francisco?"

He scoured the restaurant, looking for familiar faces. No one stood out or acted particularly interested in Nate and Donovan. So far, all registered guests checked out and proved non-threatening for the time being, which added credit to Colby's bizarre theory. The targets weren't among the current vacationers, if they were tourists at all.

* * * *

Nate scanned the crowd. He glanced to the left and right. He memorized faces, the discreet way some of the women snuggled closer to their companions, enjoying the island ambiance and romantic atmosphere of the restaurant. Then he focused on vocal inflection, the rise and fall of various pitches in the voices heard throughout the room.

Donovan kept a keen eye on his plate and Nate, but Nate noticed he didn't seem too interested in the comings and goings of the guests in their midst. Donovan's lack of concern irritated the hell out of him.

"What?" Donovan asked suddenly.

"I didn't say anything," Nate stated dryly.

Instantly, Donovan rolled his shoulders back, tossed his napkin on the table and reached for something at his side. He only turned his cheek slightly to the left, but it was enough for Nate to see the distinct difference in his facial expression.

Nate prepared for whatever headed their way, and by God, whatever the threat, the crisis approached fast and moved too damn close for saving grace. He needed a true miracle, and since he let his guard down, he probably needed one in the next several seconds.

Chapter Three

Donovan sensed the danger. With only a sixth sense to go on, Donovan reacted fast. No one ever understood Donovan's remarkable instincts, and he himself didn't like to rely upon them. Yet there he was in a middle of a restaurant, using his attacker's own blade to slice the bastard's throat.

Those in the crowd didn't act scared or leery of the hostile sudden approach. They shouldn't have. They never saw the perpetrator stroll into the dining hall or draw the shiny weapon he fully intended to use.

Nate looked surprised when the man made his way into the room's center and pushed right past the maître d'. By the time Nate reached for his side, perhaps to draw a pistol, Donovan gripped his assailant's weapon. Instead of using his own weapon, he slickly reached around the enemy's waist and pinned the knife to the fellow's chest, maneuvering it upward and slanting it toward the young man's throat.

He held his palm firmly to the wound and gritted back stark anger. Death filled his senses, and the sudden kill flared his fury.

"Get him out of here, now," Nate barked, pointing to the open doors leading to the outdoor swimming pool.

With the corpse in hand, Donovan positioned the man's right arm over his shoulder and carried his slumped form like he was helping the injured, or perhaps assisting someone who drank far too much. Refusing to notice the blood spilling from the man's neck and soaking his fingers, he took four steps to the safety net of open air and then rushed toward the cabana. Ignoring the wet sand beneath his unsteady footing, he hurried past one hut and then another.

He strode across the porch, nudged the door open with his hip and dropped the body to the floor. Immediately, the bedroom and bathroom were checked, and then he called to Nate upon his entry, “We’re clear.”

“Not quite,” he said. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

Donovan glared straight ahead and shook his head once, the adrenaline still pumping through his heart and veins. “If I’d relied on you, we would’ve been killed!”

Nate knelt over the fallen form. “How’d you know?”

“A feeling,” Donovan said.

“A damn feeling, that’s the best you can do?”

“Luck,” Donovan said, changing his story.

“Luck won’t save your life again and again. Everybody runs out of good fortune sooner or later,” Nate snapped. “What the hell tipped you off?”

“The air changed,” he muttered.

“Is that right?” Nate said, clearly irritated to the point of no return. “What the fuck are you...some kind of psychic or something? I didn’t even see this fellow!”

“I know,” Donovan said calmly. “But I saw him when it mattered most.”

A door slammed and another voice filled the room. “Neither one of you spotted him when you entered the restaurant.”

Nate and Donovan drew their weapons and aimed them toward the doorway. There, Donovan discovered by far the sexiest man he had ever spotted in his life.

“Nate.” The soldier tilted his head but avoided eye contact. He reached around Nate and extended his arm toward Donovan. “I’m Colby Carrington,” he said.

If Donovan had been a woman, he might have fainted when he gripped the operative’s hand. They locked gazes when their palms met. Donovan felt the tension slice through the confined quarters and

noticed how uneasy Nate seemed after watching the way they connected on a handshake.

“So, you two know one another?” Donovan asked, amused and definitely interested in how well they were acquainted.

Nate and Colby stared at one another. Contempt flashed bright in Colby’s light blue eyes, but then they immediately showed something else. Concern, maybe? Fear, perhaps? Oh no, there was something else there, an alluring quality too deep and full of meaning.

Donovan had been in bed with the hardest of men. He recognized that particular look. He’d been the recipient and the one delivering such a cold glare.

“We’ve been on assignment together,” Nate bit out.

“Hmm,” Donovan said, leading. “Where?”

“Afghanistan,” Colby replied. “And it was a long time ago.” The edge in his voice wasn’t necessarily bitter but driven by unsettled emotions.

Shit, Donovan thought. Nate and Colby had definitely been lovers, but some obstacle—perhaps even the job—drove them apart.

Nate returned his focus to the dead man. “You saw this bastard in the restaurant before we got there?”

“He’s been parked on the sand outside this hut since you two arrived,” Colby said, clearly amused.

“Do you think of these missions as mini-vacations or something? You were outside most of the afternoon. While you were soaking in the rays and dipping your toes in the ocean, could you have possibly noticed a light on your forehead?” Donovan asked Nate, pointedly.

“No way. I didn’t see this guy. I would have remembered him,” Nate said confidently.

Colby smiled. His dimples were absolutely addictive. “He was here, Nate.” He thumbed thin air over his shoulder and said, “He’s the registered guest of the cabana next door.”

Nate didn’t argue, but his blood pressure probably peaked. His face turned bright red, and his balled fists hung low at his sides.

“I had your back,” Colby said, winking once.

Nate’s lips formed a tight line. He stalked into the bedroom and reappeared with a death kit. A body bag unfolded when he snapped the small box top, and a bottle of solution rolled to the floor. Used by government agencies only, the clear liquid would ensure finger prints weren’t lifted. The kit also guaranteed operatives protection. Once bodies bagged appropriately were found, officials in the right agencies instantly realized one of their own delivered the person’s death.

“Thought you were a pro?” Donovan asked popping the lid off the bottle while Colby and Nate lifted the man onto the black sack perfect for a dead man.

Nate dropped an arm and then a leg onto the tarp-like material. Before Nate snatched the opportunity to defend himself, Colby said, “He’s one of the best. He saved my life once.”

“Once?” Nate questioned, arching a brow. “I seem to recall fourteen days of guerilla warfare where I saved your butt time and time again.”

“One mission, one life saved. It doesn’t matter how many grenades you tossed or how many times you drew your knife or fired a gun. It’s the end result. The last second of the last hour is the only one that counts,” Colby said.

Nate held the zipper. Donovan poured the liquid over the body, drenching the man’s skin with the fluid reminder that at least one man wouldn’t make it out of Rarotonga alive. Nate closed the bag, sealing off any potential evidence.

“Now, genius,” Colby began. “Where should we dispose of him?”

“I don’t know, Colby. Since you seem to have all the answers, why don’t you decide?”

“I always find solutions, Nate. It’s the questions I hate.” He turned to Donovan and said, “I know the perfect place. There’s a small perfume factory on the south end of the island. We’ll drop him off

there. With any luck, the scent of his decomposing body won't alert authorities until we're long gone and out of here."

Chapter Four

“Do any of them have a clue who their targets are?” Admiral Shoemaker asked, pacing the floor of his expansive new office.

Dressed in black slacks and a bright red shirt, the young woman staring back at him acted more attentive than usual. Perhaps she had an eye for older men, those with clout and power.

“If anyone suspects anything, it’s Carrington,” she said, flipping through her notepad and glancing up only once. Her gaze held at his belt, and she flinched, returning immediately to the summarized scribble she tried to pass off as detailed memos.

“Something there of particular interest, or do you want me to be impressed by scattered notes?”

Swallowing a few times, she looked up. “Admiral, with all due respect, sir, I try to be as thorough as possible when I’m working with you. I know you expect the best on your missions. I won’t let you down.”

Narrowing his gaze on the rise and fall of her chest, he smiled. “I have every reason to believe you won’t. In fact,” he said, licking his lips, “why don’t you come on over here and show me what a good team we make. I think it’s long overdue, don’t you?”

The brunette stepped right into place, just like they all did before he cut them loose. Sometimes he wondered if they suspected their time on the payroll was coming to an end. Her hands went to his neck, and she latched onto his lips like she’d kissed them a few too many times.

Karen Whitaker kissed him without passion, no tongue or even a low moan in an attempt to force a heat filled sigh. They only mashed

their lips together, and she reached then for his belt, loosening the strap as quickly as possible.

Nipping at her jawline, the admiral said, “I want you to give me a blowjob. While you’re down there on your knees, you think about those soldiers we have out there in combat already in the throes of their mission. Fantasize about those big bad boys with their hands all over one another. You do that for me, okay?”

Yeah, she could do him up right with those boys plastered in her mind. He might even enjoy himself, too, thinking about three hard and ready pawns.

She nodded and unhooked his belt. Giving the strap a swift tug, she disposed of the leather quickly and released his zipper. Then she grabbed his soft shaft. To his surprise, never mind his horror, she laughed.

“What’s wrong, Admiral? Still can’t get a stiff dick for the ladies?”

His reputation, apparently widespread, irritated the hell out of him. Coughing, he tried to play it off while she stroked him. He didn’t harden to her satisfaction, and she eyed him curiously, like she expected an explanation.

He owed her nothing.

“I bet I know one or two men out in the field who could do the trick for you a little better than I can,” she taunted.

He did, too. One of them once stood precisely where she now knelt, looking at him like he wanted to challenge his authority but never daring to cross the line.

Nate Francisco made him hard that day. Damn hard.

Realizing the memory brought with it consequences, Admiral Shoemaker stuffed his dick back in his pants about the time the swell became apparent.

Grinning, Karen said, “That’s precisely what I thought, too, when I saw them. All three of them can ride me any day of the week.”

Clearing his throat, he started to say something, but instead changed his direction. “You’re fired,” he bellowed, walking over to his desk.

“On what grounds?” she retorted.

“Trying to use sex to better your position, sexual harassment, or inability to deliver sufficient information to ensure a completed mission. Take your pick.”

Karen seethed, and he could see the anger in her eyes. She wasn’t like the others after all.

She hadn’t worked with his soft cock and tried to encourage him like the ones before her. She never dropped her mouth over the slight swell of his dick or tapped his balls like sucking his sack would make a difference.

He was a gay man intrigued by testicles, not breasts. Karen Whitaker refused to waste her time trying to arouse him. He was beneath the effort, and her attitude left a sour taste in his mouth.

Now, this operative wasn’t going down without a fight. When she stormed out and the door crashed against the wall behind her, he realized he made a grave error, and miscalculations were often costly mistakes he really couldn’t afford.

* * * *

“I need to speak with Nate Francisco,” the woman drawled.

Nate recognized the voice immediately. She only spoke a few words at the airport, but the woman trying to conceal her true identity on the phone—for whatever reason—possessed an unforgettable Southern twang.

“Who is this speaking?” he asked, eyeing Donovan and Colby. They waited for two days to receive their orders. Forty-eight hours of pure hell is what they endured, especially Nate. The testosterone levels were overkill, and the act of avoiding a confrontation with Colby, nearly impossible.

Fortunately, Colby slept the first day away. The second he spent roaming the island trying to figure out who approached Donovan and Nate with an order to kill.

“We’ve met.”

“I know,” he said. “But without proper introductions. You never offered a name.”

“You know what that means, I presume.”

“You’re one of us, or at least you believe you are. Women have no business in our line of work.”

Laughter filled the line.

Nate thoughtfully considered hanging up since his tolerance for women ran low. Instead, he hit the speaker option and returned the phone to the cradle.

Abruptly, the chuckling stopped. “Pick up the phone, Nate. I don’t want to talk to anyone in the room except you.”

He snatched the phone again and walked toward the bedroom. “All right, I’m listening.”

“Tomorrow morning at eight o’clock, you’ll go to the airport. You’ll board the morning junket to Mangaia. I’ll meet you at baggage claim. Pack light. It’s only a day trip and one I promise you’ll enjoy.”

“I doubt it,” he grumbled.

“Don’t worry, big boy. I know about the skeletons in your closet. I realize I don’t have the right body parts to keep you busy on the beach. But what I have to say will interest you.”

“I’ll be there.”

“I know you will,” she said confidently. “And if you hear from the admiral, it’s in your best interest not to mention this phone conversation.”

The line went dead. Nate hung up.

“What was that about?” Donovan asked.

Colby and Nate exchanged a glance. He knew something. God in heaven, help him. He could still read Colby Carrington like a daily paper.

Colby sat on the edge of the sofa. “Let me guess. The caller was the pretty brunette the two of you met at the airport. Petite little thing with coal black eyes and a fiery temperament, big breasts and broad ass?”

“I wouldn’t know anything about her,” Nate grumbled.

“I heard her voice. It’s her,” Colby said.

Nate respected that about Colby. Since the day they first met, Colby honed in on certain attributes, voice inflection and personality traits, as well as other things some operatives dismissed as unimportant but Nate believed often saved an ISO’s life.

Nate started by him. “I’m meeting her in the morning. If the admiral contacts any of us, we’re not to mention her phone call.”

Donovan raised his brow. “Admiral Shoemaker is in charge of this mission,” he reminded.

Locking gazes with Colby, Nate said, “Call it a hunch. I’m meeting her. I want to see what’s on her mind. Maybe she’s the target. Maybe we are.”

Nate was betting on the latter, and he also wagered on something else. The information he needed and wanted wouldn’t come cheap.

Chapter Five

They rode in a noisy as hell Brazilian twin-engine prop-jet aircraft. Nate left at eight o'clock and arrived at eight-forty. Only three passengers occupied seats on the plane. One of them, a woman, was dressed to the hilt. From her straw hat and wide rimmed sunglasses to her short, backless purple sundress and inappropriate spike heels, Nate knew her in an instant, even in disguise.

Instead of acknowledging her presence by making light of her ridiculous need to go to extremes, he kept her in his focus for the duration of the trip—all of forty minutes—and allowed her to lead the way after landing on a crushed coral runway. A small shed, which would've better served as a couple of horse stalls, sported the sign—Mangaia Terminal. Nate already knew there wasn't a baggage claim to speak of and little need to meet the woman anywhere since she traveled from Rarotonga on the same flight.

The oldest island in the Pacific, Mangaia wouldn't have been Nate's first choice for a meeting place. Then again, he thought, as he grabbed Karen's forearm, he never wanted this meeting at all.

"Let go of me," she said.

"Not on your life," he replied, rushing her into a nearby utility vehicle, called utes by the locals.

Scrambling around, the woman continued to wiggle, trying her best to break free. Nate's grip never changed.

Once inside the ute, Nate tapped the driver on the shoulder, and he turned around. Grinning, Colby Carrington shifted in his seat and said, "I guess this is as good a place as any. What kind of information are we buying here today, Miss Whitaker?"

Surprised, Karen took a quick intake of air and held her breath, glaring from one ISO to the other. Her lips formed a true pout, and she set her jaw, apparently determined to remain silent.

They would soon help her with her deteriorating attitude. In her mind, and Nate never doubted the way she most likely felt, she assumed Nate had betrayed her.

“Miss Whitaker,” Colby began. “I was a POW long enough to think about the things I wanted out of life and the things I didn’t. I had time to rehash mistakes and relive them again and again. When facing death on a daily basis, never mind the brutality of some life endings, a person has the opportunity to consider the wrongful steps he has made, just in case he has to walk down similar trails again.”

“Why are you telling me this?” she snapped.

“As a POW, I placed my faith in a system that couldn’t wait to let me down, something I’d hate to see you do. I trusted in the honor of good men and was raised to believe that most men were decent creatures. I’m not the same young man who once went off to war in hopes of defending my country. I’m a hard, egotistical male waiting for a bullet to take me, a knife to slice me or a bomb to destroy me.

“I’m not a believer in friends. I’m a maker of enemies. You’re going to tell me about my latest one, and you’re going to do that before you view me as the worst enemy you’ve ever known.”

Nate tugged her closer, wrapped his arm tightly around her shoulder and said with a nod, “Let’s take her on a little sightseeing tour, what do you say?”

Grinning, Colby glanced in his rearview mirror. “I thought you’d never ask.”

* * * *

Karen took in the scenery. In truth, it was the only reason she chose Mangaia. The oldest island in The Cooks, Mangaia offered Karen a chance to experience true beauty one last time before her life

came to an end and the final curtain call drew near. It had drawn closer and closer since the first day she'd been paired with Admiral Thomas Shoemaker.

The ute stopped at the edge of a tiny trail not far from the small landing strip. Colby hopped out and quickly opened the back door. Holding out his hand, he said, "We'll follow behind you."

Shivering when she placed her hand in his, she was shocked when he gently pulled her from the old cloth seat and helped her regain her balance until she found her footing in deep, bone white sand. Nate ignored the hand offered, and Colby chuckled.

Karen knew their history. She also understood why they were all brought together, but specifically, she read the detailed files of Nate Francisco and Colby Carrington. They were once allies, dependent on one another for survival. Then, they became friends and lovers. Soon, they'd become bitter enemies.

Stumbling down a red dirt path, Karen turned around and studied the men behind her. Both were exquisitely handsome with chiseled, masculine features and broad shoulders. Towering over her by several inches each, she dared to think of the possibilities, of what she'd give to have them both take her for carnal pleasures, erotic enjoyment.

They walked about eighty steps and discovered a narrow beach and hidden lagoon at the mouth of the path. The view was breathtaking, and yet complete sorrow filled her heart the second she saw the ideal location in front of her.

They planned to kill her.

Nate said, "Turn around."

She faced him with honor, without fear and with few regrets. If they killed her without hearing what she came to tell them, then they'd suffer the consequences and reap what they'd chosen to sow.

Colby nodded toward the sea. "This is a spectacular spot, isn't it?"

"Yes," she agreed.

"Nate always loved the beach."

Nate shot him a quick glance, and Karen studied Colby. Did he already know about the specific details of the mission? Had he used the meeting she arranged to gain the upper hand? Would he kill Nate Francisco right in front of her?

Nate grimaced. "We're not here to rekindle memories."

"Why are we here, Nate?" Colby asked, scorn in his expression, anger in his voice. The tables flipped, and Nate never flinched.

Nate directed his response to Karen, seemingly unaware of Colby's sudden change of demeanor. "I guess you have all the answers, don't you?"

Detecting uncertainty in Nate's voice and the building instinct to survive in Colby's, she said, "I don't think I'm the enemy here."

Nate immediately switched his focus back to Colby. Both men drew weapons. Colby drew a gun and Nate a knife, something Colby would've most likely contemplated from the beginning.

"What the fuck?" Nate screamed. Beads of sweat scattered across his brow.

Colby never broke a sweat. Preparation and expectancy, something Karen realized Colby possessed, proved he held the advantage. Oh yes, without a doubt, Colby Carrington was fully aware of the mission at hand.

"You know about the assignment," Colby accused, never taking his eyes off of Nate.

"I'm still waiting for orders just like you are," Nate said.

Colby's veins pulsed with visible fury. "That's bullshit and you know it!"

Karen watched the men as they moved together a few steps, then broke away, placing a little distance between them. She took quick breaths, afraid the tiniest of sounds would ignite adrenaline or fuel tempers.

"What are you trying to say? You think I know something about this tour that you don't?"

“Wake up, Nate,” Colby said, squeezing the gun still tighter with a locked aim. “You aren’t enlisted as a soldier anymore. Tours are a thing of the past. We’re on something else here, and you damn well know who your targets are.”

“I feel like I’m on a fucking rollercoaster whenever I’m around you! What the hell are you suggesting?”

Colby jerked. It was a slight but visible gesture and so quick Karen almost didn’t see his arm and jaw twitch with the involuntary movement. Nate was still able to get inside Colby’s head, just like their files read. Nate was an alpha male, and he dominated wherever he trod.

Nate’s left eye twitched, and Colby’s brows raised. He pointed the gun then and aimed it at Nate’s head. Nate quickly moved the jagged edge to Colby’s throat. Karen backed completely away.

“What the fuck is this about, Miss Whitaker?” Nate asked, out of the corner of his mouth.

She didn’t say a word.

“Whitaker!” Colby shouted. “Tell him!”

“Tell me what, damn you!” Nate screamed, sweat beads bubbling at a steadier rate straight across his wrinkled brow.

“Tell him what the mission entails.”

Karen smiled, realizing with complete certainty then that she had, indeed, been right all along. Nate Francisco didn’t know why he was called upon for a special operation in the middle of the South Pacific.

Colby Carrington, on the other hand, had been well prepared from the very beginning. His paranoia guided him into thinking and believing the worst.

Nate pressed the tip of his blade against Colby’s throat, and Colby mashed the gun a little firmer against Nate’s head.

“Damn it!” Nate released the knife with an angst-ridden cry, never flinching when the weapon fell to the white gritty ground.

Shocked, Karen stared at him in disbelief. She saw defeat in his eyes, something she’d never witnessed in any of the operatives. Nate

Francisco had one vulnerable soft spot, a true weakness—his name was Colby Carrington.

Colby ground his molars until it sounded like he broke off a back tooth. Karen had seen bloodshed many times. She'd watched grown men, friends in fact, murder their partners in cold blood on an ordered hit. She'd witnessed fast kills, slow torture, and sudden death when least expected.

No one was going to die here today. No one in the next few minutes or even the next hour, but someone would explain. When Colby dropped his weapon, too, and then grabbed her arm, she sensed that *someone* was her.

Chapter Six

Karen closed her eyes and listened to the soft swishing sound of the water. The hot temperatures made the ocean feel like a warm sea bath. Her knees made small indentions in the sand, and she reveled in the gritty grime of the grain-like texture as moist puddles formed around her. She felt like she was sinking in quicksand, and nature provided a constant reminder. The men in front of her were her only lifelines.

“Sit down,” Nate said sharply.

“What about my dress?”

“It’s already ruined,” Colby promised, pointing to the tear she caused when she knelt down in the first place.

Nate twirled his forefinger downward, insisting on her compliance.

She sat on her bottom like an obedient dog ready to serve her master. Only, she wasn’t a Dom’s pet or an ISO’s companion. Trained in firearms just like the men standing nearby, Karen was experienced behind the gun and could hurl a knife with the deadliest of operatives.

“Start talking,” Colby ordered.

That’s when she felt the grin spread across her lips. “Colby, if anyone has this mission figured out, it’s you. Maybe you should fill in the blanks for Nate.”

Nate glanced over his shoulder. “What’s she talking about?”

Colby addressed her. “You couldn’t possibly know what I suspect.”

“Actually, I do,” she said. “You arrived here two days before Nate and Donovan. You checked everyone out and always returned to the cabana reserved in Nate’s name.”

“Meaningless. I’m thorough. That’s all.”

“Then,” she continued, drawing out the one syllable, “You watched as Donovan and Nate enjoyed an island dinner. You were tempted to take your shot, something you wouldn’t have done unless you were one hundred percent certain of your target. But you were, weren’t you, Colby? You suspected you were the hunter and the hunted, yet you still couldn’t take your shot, could you?”

Nate shouted, “What the hell is she babbling about?”

“Tell him,” she encouraged in a diabolical fashion, her tone changing at once. “Tell him how your finger twitched on the trigger. Explain how you tossed those field glasses to the wayside, picked up your weapon and loaded it. Tell him about the sights you adjusted and how you gripped your gun only to throw your weapon to the ground and ignore the signs. Everything was in place. The orders handwritten on the wall. You had a target. A mission to complete, but you chose to ignore the orders you hadn’t fully received. Why? Tell him why!”

Colby charged forward and yanked her up. “What the hell are you talking about?” He shook her.

“You’re the target, damn it! He’s the target. All of you, even Donovan, were sent here to destroy one another.” She leaned back and watched the way her revelation was received. Then she laughed, an absurd finish to the information she provided. “Ah, but you weren’t sure, were you?”

Nate’s breathing never changed, but those damn cold eyes of his blinked back fury. She saw the red rims of anger outline his pupils. The mark of rage staining his cheeks was precisely what she wanted to see.

“What’s Donovan got to do with this?” Colby asked.

“I imagine you’ve been asking yourself that since the beginning. A good-looking gay man placed here on a mission with you and Nate sort of complicates things, doesn’t it?”

“His sexual orientation means nothing to me,” Colby said.

Karen shook off Colby’s grip. “I don’t have to tell you anything. Everything you’ve had to go on—whether it was a gut feeling or something else, a tip perhaps—has been right.”

“I’d work on the attitude if I were in your shoes,” Colby advised, clasping his hand around her forearm once more. “I don’t play games, Miss Whitaker. I expect answers when the questions asked directly affect my life.”

“Self-preservation,” she hummed. “I know all about safeguarding one’s own life. In fact, I’m willing to tell you everything you need to know. But first, you’re going to promise me something in return.”

“What?” Nate asked, seemingly uninterested.

“She wants us to guarantee her safety,” Colby enlightened Nate. “And if we keep her neck from snapping, it will be one of the biggest mistakes of our lives.”

* * * *

“Donovan Collier?”

Admiral Shoemaker recognized the young man’s voice. He still had the excitement and energy. Donovan most likely anticipated his orders long before now. He probably couldn’t wait to start the pending mission. Little did he know, he was already in the combat zone.

“This is Donovan.”

Shoemaker spoke with authority. “Your assignment is to dispose of the men working with you as quickly as possible. Once the mission is complete, leave Rarotonga and head to Aitutaki. There, you’ll check in at the Aitutaki Beach Villas and wait for further instructions.”

He'd never make it that far.

Nate and Colby wouldn't let an inexperienced ISO deliver death sentences without pulling a pin or detonating a bomb before they took their last breaths. They were trained to kill even if it meant taking their own lives in the process.

Donovan might take the last shot, or possibly even stab his victims to an unexpected death, but they would avenge their own demise on their way out. They wouldn't go down as mere casualties. Men like Nate and Colby never found eternal rest unless they guaranteed their extinction wasn't completely in vain. An eye for an eye took on new meaning when killers lingered behind the sights.

"I don't understand," he said.

"The hell you don't," Shoemaker barked. "Your orders are clear. Take out the two ISOs sharing a cabana with you. They're both fully trained, independent special operatives who have been released from duty pending quietus. You'll receive further orders in Aitutaki."

"Yes, sir."

The line disconnected. Admiral Shoemaker hit the speaker option and pressed one for his secretary. When she came on the line, he said, "Marg, get my son on the line. I have some news I can't wait to share with him."

* * * *

Donovan sat on the edge of the sofa. He stared at the floor, the precise place where Nate pinned him the first day they met. He remembered the arousal, the way he grew hard under Nate's touch.

God in heaven help him, he never imagined an assignment like this one. How in the hell was he supposed to take out someone who had been the source of his fantasies for several days? Better still, how did he snuff out two fires when the smoldering remains of one lost love prohibited him from feeling anything at all for nearly three years?

He took a deep breath and caught a hint of the wild musk scent Colby Carrington wore. The fragrance was masculine and almost natural, but the real appeal was in the knowledge. The person behind the cologne made him hard with crazy lust despite their differences.

The hired gun in a mix of supreme artillery talent, Donovan was the most inexperienced of the lot. Why did Shoemaker think he was the man for the job?

Then, the truth slapped him in the face. The disposal of two ISOs potentially meant the demise of many. Was he next?

Chapter Seven

Nate didn't like swapping secrets or protecting skin. Other than saving his own hide, he never worried about covering anyone else. Even when he traveled to desolate places, Nate knew his life held more value than those he was hired to save. An invaluable member of a highly selective force, hundreds of thousands of dollars went into his training. He was an investment, or he should've been.

"I don't believe you," he blurted out.

Colby shrugged. "It's true. I suspected what this mission entailed when I came here. Then I saw Donovan Collier seated across from you, and everything made sense. Collier pissed off the wrong man in charge. I heard about him in the field and suspected he would. The higher ups aren't particularly crazy about a young gun with attitude, and Donovan has plenty.

"Then, on the other hand, we have you to consider. You have an enemy collection none of us want. I imagine you wear several targets on your back."

"And I guess you're more like Goldilocks trapped inside a deep dark forest with nowhere left to run and hide," Nate said.

Colby chuckled. "I've been in plenty of beds since I last saw you, Nate. I can disappear under a warm blanket where no one will ever think to look. You know me. I get around."

Nate flinched, the truth unraveling before his very eyes. He didn't want to hear about Colby's past lovers or future duty calls. He wanted the kind of things only one man understood how to give him, the precious experiences he had no right to think about then. What he needed was another chance to hold Colby in his arms.

He'd fuck the life out of him given the chance. If he didn't remember the mutual feelings they once shared—regardless of how short-lived—then he really didn't give a damn if Colby wanted to go ahead and take him out. After seeing him again, Nate reached a decision. Life wasn't worth living if he couldn't remember what they'd meant to one another and experience those same feelings once more.

Nate concentrated on Karen. She was scared. No doubt about it, the woman knew fear, and tremendous anxiety stained its pretty mark on her rosy cheeks. He liked to see the evidence of weakness, but he sure as hell didn't like it when others considered him a weak link, one easily disposed of when the time was convenient.

"This doesn't make sense," he said. "What the hell is Shoemaker thinking?"

Colby gripped Karen's shoulders. "You'd better start talking."

They didn't have to persuade or ask her twice. "Donovan Collier was on a mission with Admiral Shoemaker's son."

Nate narrowed his gaze. "Darby Winslow?"

"Yes," she said. "Winslow is—"

"Shoemaker's illegitimate son," Nate finished.

"How'd you know?" She seemed surprised.

Dumb bitch probably thought he'd sit down and start a campfire so they could share war stories. Conversation wasn't his forte. "What about him?" he barked.

"Winslow and Donovan Collier were lovers."

Colby found Karen's statement interesting enough to laugh outright. "Damn. I see why Shoemaker is pissed."

"No, you don't understand what this means," Karen assured.

"Sure, I do," Colby replied. "If Winslow's file is opened, then Shoemaker will be exposed for the two-timing bastard he's always been."

"Exactly," Karen said. "In fact, his file has been opened. Shoemaker suspects there's an investigation pending."

“Darby Winslow has always been crooked.”

“Like father, like son,” Nate said, pausing and redirecting his focus. “So he wants rid of Donovan? I might understand why someone like Shoemaker would want to hide his son’s lover, but why does he want us out of the picture?”

Colby’s color drained from his cheeks. He released Karen, and at the same time, she said, “Colby knows Winslow, too. Don’t you, Colby?”

Nate felt a sudden tug at his heart, and Colby backed away from both of them. She continued. “Nate, you’re the loose wire in a ticking time bomb. You haven’t slept with Winslow, or if you have, Shoemaker doesn’t know about it.”

Colby clenched his fist and glared at Karen. She was, in Nate’s best estimation, two minutes shy of taking her last breath.

“Nate?” he narrowed his gaze.

Nate shook his head. “I don’t know him. I know about his mental illness, something about lost loves and things I’d never understand. Outside of hearsay, something I don’t have time for, I don’t know anything about him.”

Karen looked satisfied. “Then the only explanation for the contract on you is the one I first assumed, anyway.”

Nate and Colby locked gazes. Nate didn’t pray much, but right then he decided to ask for a simple favor. He didn’t want her to reveal why his name was up for grabs, why his number had suddenly been called and a hit existed just for him.

Smugly, she said, “Admiral Shoemaker believes you’ll kill anyone and everyone associated with the death of one very important person in your life.”

“No one is important in my life, so I don’t think you have grounds for such a theory.”

“It’s not a theory,” Colby corrected. “You and I both know the truth. If anything ever happened to you, I’d kill the son of a bitch who took his shot.”

Nate swallowed tightly. Maybe he should remind Colby of the recent attempt on his life and the gun Colby recently pointed at his head.

He couldn't look at Colby. Everything he didn't want to say, Colby expressed without hesitation or warning. There was most definitely a legitimate reason Colby hadn't taken his shot when he had one, if he gained one, at the restaurant. Maybe their distorted feelings for one another explained why they avoided personal contact at every corner since their arrival in the islands.

Colby Carrington was the love of Nate's life. Oddly enough, their love remained untarnished by the separation of months or the miles placed between them. If anything, their feelings grew stronger. Now, with everything out in the open, all he could think about was the one person he wanted to protect. But first, he needed to fuck him, and he intended to screw him right.

* * * *

Karen saw the sexual tension building. Then, she saw it crumble around them. The self-control of two hard and ready males deteriorated right before her very eyes.

Colby took one step and then another. Nate backed away only once. Then, as if a dam broke free, Colby went to him. Nate clasped his hand around the nape of his neck, and fireworks would've paled in comparison to the explosive beginning.

Their mouths met. No, they more or less crashed together. Tongues and teeth, licks and nips. Good Lord, she'd never seen anything so erotic in all of her life, and she'd witnessed a lot.

Nate Francisco was going to fuck Colby Carrington right there on the sandy beach of Mangaia. She couldn't have orchestrated such an event if she tried.

All she could think about as Nate fumbled with Colby's belt was how hungry he looked. Damn if she hadn't been right about him.

From the moment she met him, she suspected the truth. A dark lover, one controlled by mediums even those he trained under couldn't pinpoint, Nate went after what he wanted, and no one stood in his way.

Karen knew the real reason Admiral Thomas Shoemaker wanted Nate out of the picture. Colby was only half right. Shoemaker wanted this Nate, the beast, unleashed. The lust driven, famished male, the kind of man who took what he wanted and feasted for hours on end, Nate was without a doubt the kind of lover Shoemaker craved.

The smacking of lips was sexy enough for show, but heaven help her when the men stepped out of their shorts and stripped off their shirts. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do then. She longed to join them, participate in the experience, and indulge in the festivities of a reunion apparently delayed for one reason or another.

Nate tugged at Colby's cock, and as she'd heard—and God help her, she'd listened to one recording after another as Darby Winslow described his encounters with Colby—he was, without a doubt, huge in size. Colby mumbled something against Nate's lips while both men stepped out of their shoes and away from their fashionable clothes.

Nate only gave her a sideways glance. "Join or watch. I don't care either way."

Observing didn't hold any measure of appeal unless they included her in the throes of the penetrating action. Too much heat existed in the air to simply go play in the water and pretend not to notice the sex on the beach.

Undressing, Karen gaped at the two men. They touched one another intimately, like each caress was one they'd carry with them long after they left the islands, assuming they'd leave there at all.

Nate, an obvious top—and she read a lot about gay relationships—slowly pulled at his own cock while toying with Colby. They dropped to the sand, and Colby's arms flew around Nate's neck.

Rolling across the white ground, Nate was on top and then on the bottom. *Rolling, rolling, rolling.* They seemed to wrestle like two boys frolicking around for the first time. Their cocks touched, their hands clasped, and Karen crawled over to join them, feeling like an intruder, a lover imposing on a situation she refused to leave unattended.

To her surprise, Colby and Nate both included her, and they did it with finesse.

* * * *

Colby never loved anyone, only Nate. He'd never known love at all until Nate saved him from unimaginable circumstances in a deserted POW camp. Then, Nate nursed him back to health in a way he never expected. Colby knew from the moment he first met Nate that his life was forever changed. Then, as quickly as he found and loved him, he lost him.

Now, together again in the middle of an open lagoon, tumbling across the sand with the warm waves lapping over them, they made out hard and wild. Even the experience of adding Karen, an additional partner, brought new life back into a romance that never fizzled, certainly never died.

"Ah, Nate," Colby muttered, bracing himself over him and licking his full lips. Nate's strong hands were at his back, his fingers kneading him, working out the kinks and knots days of estrangement brought.

Then Karen's tongue dueled for the right of stealing one kiss. Her mouth landed next to theirs. Colby tilted his head to the side, afraid to abandon his primary lover for the strange kiss of a female.

Karen pissed him off by revealing more than he wanted Nate to know, but Colby owed her this. She revealed his secrets, and her chosen words led them straight into unbridled passion.

When she moaned into the kiss, Colby passed her off to Nate and he came unglued. The controlled soldier slipped into the role of an expedient lover. He fisted her hair, holding her long locks off of her shoulders and then pulling her back in order to stare at her breasts.

A wicked smile curved her lips, and she said, “Don’t tell me. You don’t like these?” She broke free of Nate’s lips and cupped her shape, raising the full mounds enough to draw in the approval sought and quickly gained—Nate’s lingering stare.

“I prefer cocks,” he said, holding Colby’s dick and twisting her right nipple until she moaned in a sweet cry.

“Be nice, Nate,” Colby whispered, but Nate most likely ignored him. He had stars in his eyes and Colby noticed right before he kissed Karen again.

Her mouth opened, and her tongue drew him closer. Between their hot bodies, Colby felt Nate’s hand drop lower, manipulating a woman’s pleasure, drawing out sensual whimpers.

Colby and Nate clasped hands. Colby reached for his lover’s hard penis and remembered. Oh, God, how he remembered how it felt to hold him, stroke him, and, hell yeah, let him take his wild ride while bucking against him stroke for stroke.

Karen shifted, and when she did, Colby turned the tables. He placed his hand at her hip and gave her a quick push under his body. Towering over her, he kissed her again. His tongue inched between her lips, and he explored the sensuality of a woman, the way her kiss was delicate compared to Nate’s harder, rougher one. At the moment, he craved a little of both. The hot heat he only felt from a man, and the gentle contour of a female mouth, smooth and soft, added a nice touch to his reunion with Nate.

A few minutes of groping and Nate stood behind him. Positioned at his ass, Nate’s hands went to his middle back and then lowered a few inches. He pressed the balls of his hands into Colby’s flesh. Karen’s legs opened like she knew what to expect. Colby inhaled her arousal, the spicy, honey rich smell of a ready woman waiting for sex.

Karen's eyes closed, and she caressed between her legs. Toying with him, she dipped her fingers into her cunt, and he watched. Heaven help him, he noted the way she brought about her own pleasure and was turned on by the show.

Nate reached around his waist and gripped his cock. He threaded Colby through his closed palm, up and down, twirling and twisting, pulling and yanking until Colby thought he might explode. Then Nate's pre-cum leaked onto his hip, and he whispered. "Let me have you, Colby. I want what belongs to me."

He was right. He'd always belonged to Nate. From the moment he pulled him from the dilapidated shack in the middle of the hell hot desert, Colby was, without a doubt, one hundred percent Nate Francisco's merchandise.

Colby pushed Karen's hand aside and plunged into her wet walls, arching his back at precisely the right time. Nate held onto Colby's hips and inched into his bottom, pressing a little harder once a secure fit locked him in place.

"Oh, God!" Karen cried out as they all rocked together. Colby's strokes were uneven when Nate first pounded into his ass, but soon he found a stimulating rhythm. He hammered wildly into her vagina, never changing his pace, and matching the one Nate set for all of them.

"That's it," Colby said, dropping his mouth to Karen's chest. "Let him have us."

Nate shifted his weight and used his knees to spread Colby's thighs. Colby, in turn, moved a little deeper, stretching Karen all the more.

She moaned then, and her breathing changed. Her short, clipped nails scraped across Colby's hairy chest. She dug deep in an apparent attempt to temporarily scar him with her claws.

Nate pumped harder and faster until he gained the momentum he sought. Colby plunged deeper and deeper into Karen's pussy, marveling in the way Nate took him from behind.

Everything was perfect until another man entered his mind, one sexy and fantastic male, the kind of fellow who could take a good fucking and still want more. Donovan Collier was the missing link he and Nate needed. Grinning at the woman beneath him, he imagined Karen might have agreed too.

Biting back the excitement in discovery, Colby watched the twisted expression on Karen's face as her climax drew closer. "Harder," he snapped over his shoulder, tightening his ass and trying to hold onto the cock grinding in between his globes.

"Ah, shit, Colby, hold still," Nate complained, but Colby understood. Nate would lose his release faster than ever before, and Colby would later tell him why. Nate missed him. He could deny his feelings all he wanted, but the truth drizzled from his tip, and the words of endearment should have spilled from his lips.

Resting his forehead on Colby's back for a minute, Nate's orgasm was thick and hot upon arrival. The jet of semen propelled into Colby's ass, and Colby closed eyes, savoring the fluid filling his body. What Colby had reason to fear became his accepted reality. Nate once again snatched a place in his heart.

Nate placed his palm on Colby's back and shouted, "Come now. Damn it, Colby. Give me what I need."

Colby's strokes changed, too. Nate stayed in charge, and the way he pushed higher and deeper guaranteed he found his fulfillment. Karen whimpered when another orgasm took her, and her shapely hips rolled forward.

"Don't move," Colby ordered.

Then he ripped right into her with a thrashing fuck she'd probably never forget. The reuniting of lovers turned into a celebration and in a sense, Colby owed Karen his gratitude.

Karen Whitaker's days were numbered. She didn't have many remaining if Admiral Thomas Shoemaker marked her as his enemy. Why not give her the fuck of a lifetime? It might be her last one. Then again, they could offer her their protection. He'd leave the details to

Nate. Ah yes, Nate knew how to take care of the more important matters.

Chapter Eight

“What the hell is she doing here?” Donovan snapped when he saw them return with Karen.

Nate and Colby glanced at one another and then studied him. Donovan reached behind his back and tapped the butt of his semi-automatic secured in his belt.

The reassurance wasn't enough. Yes, the gun protruded there, but the weapon was the only one he had on his person. A confrontation with the three individuals in front of him guaranteed one thing. He'd lose, and making the first move could cost him his life.

“Any word from Shoemaker?” Nate's expression changed. He was summing him up, and Donovan didn't like it.

“No.”

“You sure?” Colby asked, staring into the bedroom.

“Positive.”

Colby glared behind him. “How come you're packing?”

“I'm not,” Donovan said, dropping his arms to his sides with the sudden realization. A large oblong mirror located in the bedroom gave the operatives in front of him a great advantage. They could see his weapon.

“Really?” Nate asked. “Let's start over. Want to?” His dark voice changed.

Donovan felt the short hairs standing straight up on his neck. If he didn't know fear then, without a doubt, he'd never been afraid of anyone or anything.

A trained operative, Donovan rarely felt the sudden sun at his back while a last line of sweat formed across his brow. He was always as cool as a cold winter wind.

Right now, he felt vulnerable. He damn sure didn't like the experience, the new sensation.

"Don't go for that piece again," Colby advised, still looking over Donovan's shoulder.

"I'm not."

"Sit down," Nate ordered, pointing at a nearby chair. His gaze didn't leave him, but from the corner of his mouth he said to the woman, "You, too. Take a seat."

The woman Donovan met at the airport backed against the wall right inside the door and squatted down. Maybe she had something against furniture, or perhaps she was a little like all the other ISOs Donovan knew. The woman trusted no one, and she wanted to move close enough to the door so she could bolt when the sudden rain of bullets peppered across the room.

"What's this about?" Donovan asked, steadily moving to the kitchen area of the cabana. At least he could keep his back against the mini-fridge.

"You tell us," Colby encouraged.

Karen shifted her weight. Her knees parted, and he noticed a wet spot right in her crotch. Immediately, Donovan looked at Colby and then Nate. He resisted an outright laugh, an outburst. Had one or both of them fucked her? For some reason, he found the possibilities outrageous, and after another second or two, he laughed.

"Something funny?" Nate asked.

Donovan stared at Karen's tan shorts again. "Ya'll go swimming while you were in Mangaia today?"

Colby's lips twitched, and then he smiled, staring directly at the evidence between Karen's open legs. Winking at Karen and then Donovan, he said, "You missed one hell of a day trip."

“I guess so,” Donovan said, satisfied his observation broke the ice, sliced the tension.

“So we all fucked,” Nate said. “Does that bother you?”

Yeah, it did. For some damned ass reason, Nate’s revelation annoyed the hell out of him. He placed his hands on the bar behind him.

“Don’t go for that gun, Collier,” Colby warned for the umpteenth time.

Donovan searched the eyes of the three seasoned operatives. He bet they all packed two to three weapons each. Oh no, he wasn’t going for his.

Colby walked over and took a seat on the coffee table. “I’m going to ask you one more time, and your life depends on the honest answer you give us.”

Nate didn’t wait. “Did you, or did you not, hear from Shoemaker either directly or indirectly?”

Colby stuck his hand up in the air. “Take your time, soldier. Don’t give a sudden reply. Your life ends with an incorrect answer.”

Donovan took a deep breath and tilted his chin in the woman’s direction. “What does she have to do with any of this?”

“My name is Karen Whitaker, and I’m—”

“Shut up,” Nate snapped. “Collier, give us what ‘cha got.”

Donovan studied Colby. Something seemed different about him. He wasn’t as guarded as he had been when Donovan first met him. Nate was still all business, hard and cold, calculated and deadly.

“I spoke to Shoemaker,” he finally said.

“Thank God,” Karen said, sighing. She wasted little time in reminding him of all the reasons he preferred men over women. They were often a little too melodramatic for his tastes.

“Go on,” Colby urged, crossing his left leg over his outstretched right.

“There’s nothing to tell,” he said.

“Bullshit,” Nate said, darting forward. Before Donovan had a chance to respond, Nate’s hand slid down his back, and he tossed the gun to the sofa. Nate then pinned Donovan to the floor.

“You like it on top, don’t you?” Donovan growled, aggravated he let his guard down.

“You know it. And I always come out there, too. Ask Colby.”

“He does,” Colby agreed.

Struggling against Nate’s weight, Donovan felt something he didn’t feel before. Nate had an erection. The bulge between his thighs was long and stiff. Donovan felt the unexplainable and sudden lust.

“Get off of me,” Donovan said.

“I may get off on ya,” Nate warned. “How would you like that, Collier? Huh? How did you like it when you were with Darby Winslow? Did he turn you on like this?” Nate reached between their bodies, and his hand squeezed Donovan’s cock.

“Sweet hell!” Donovan gritted his teeth, and his neck snapped upward.

“I think he did,” Colby teased.

Karen moved. Damn bitch probably wanted to watch one ISO arouse another.

“I don’t know what Winslow has to do with any of this,” Donovan admitted.

“He’s telling the truth,” Colby said. “Winslow seldom talked about his father. Who could blame him?”

Nate licked his lips. Donovan stared. God help him, he had the kind of tongue that could set a man right.

Swallowing, he said, “Get off me, Nate.”

With a wicked grin, Nate moved. In a flash, Donovan jumped to his feet, drawing his fist back. Nate ducked and caught Donovan’s arm as he took his swing all the way through.

“Damn it to fucking hell!” Nate yelled, twisting around and pulling Donovan’s fingers back with him. “I’ll break your arm in half and still demand answers. If you think I’ve made it ten years in this

profession by being turned on by a random dick slapper, you're wrong, soldier."

Donovan didn't recognize his own agonizing groan. "All right!" he finally screamed while Nate bent his fingers almost to the back of his hand.

Nate's expression remained tense. Colby never moved. The bitch just watched.

"Sit down, Donovan," Colby bit out. "We need to have a little chat."

Chapter Nine

Colby took a deep breath and closed his eyes. The turquoise sea was mesmerizing, but the calm waters did nothing to console him.

His stomach churned a mile a minute, and his mind, heaven help him, was clouded with every second he once spent with Nate. The past wouldn't leave him alone.

Nate and memories of their time together provided clearer images than what he remembered before. For months, he relived each moment they shared. Then, in the blink of an eye, they found one another again.

Only to discover it was all pre-arranged.

He heard Nate approach and turned around. Shifting in the sand, he twisted from the waist and stared into the depths of lust filled knowledge.

"Don't get up," Nate said, kneeling down before sitting behind him.

"Oh, God, Nate," Colby said softly once Nate latched his arms around his waist and pulled him against his chest.

"Yeah," he whispered, nipping at his ear.

Colby relaxed once he felt Nate's thick arms lock around him. "I never feel anything, nothing at all. Except when—"

"Shh," Nate mumbled, pulling him closer.

Colby relaxed. The time they had was a gift, a moment he wouldn't take for granted.

Nate felt rock hard. Colby enjoyed the full bulge under his shorts, but he didn't move into him. He only held him tighter, close enough to assure him of Nate's full arousal. Then again, Colby remembered

that about Nate. He always had a hard-on in the early days. The first seventy-two hours they spent together as lovers, Nate kept an erection.

“I don’t trust Donovan,” Nate said suddenly.

“I didn’t think you did,” Colby replied.

“Or Whitaker.”

“Shoemaker will take care of her.”

“Yeah, but she’s going to keep him closer than I’d like. If we can get her out of the islands, Shoemaker will assume we’re all going to kill one another.”

“And you think Donovan is still on the mission assigned?”

“Absolutely,” Nate replied without skipping a beat. “Why wouldn’t he complete the job?”

“I think he’s—”

“He’s what?” Nate snapped. “Falling for one of us? No, I don’t think so. I checked him out, little soldier boy. He’s a solid ISO with more kills than anyone in their first year. He’s an assassin who enjoys the job, gets off on the rush.”

“He didn’t have to tell us about Shoemaker’s orders.”

“Sure, he did,” Nate said. “He wasn’t sure what Karen told us, and he’s sharp. He probably assumed we had each already received the same orders.”

“We will, you know.”

“I’m not so sure now,” Nate said. “I think Shoemaker may have miscalculated all the way around.”

“How?” Colby asked, turning around. He draped his legs over Nate’s thicker ones and braced himself with his arms behind his back, his fingers burrowing in the sand.

Nate smiled. Colby could probably count on two hands how many times he’d seen a sincere grin wash across Nate’s face.

Licking his lips, he said, “I have all this figured out. Trust me on *this*.”

"I do trust you," Colby said without thinking about the consequences.

"I know you do, but Colby, trusting me right now could also make you weak and place you in a vulnerable position with Donovan. He's sharing the same roof with us, so he'll have to form an alliance with Karen. He won't trust us anymore than we do him. Karen may be as deadly as the rest of us."

"You think Shoemaker sent her and she didn't turncoat on him?"

"Oh, no, Shoemaker pissed off the wrong woman, but I also think she has her own agenda, maybe even another ISO trainer or commander pulling her strings."

"Then you think too much," Karen said, approaching fast. She tossed a hearing device on their laps.

Both men looked up, and Nate said, "I'd typically kill someone who eavesdropped on a private conversation."

"I think we need to get a few things straight," Karen said. "And it's going to start with the most obvious. I'm not leaving this island. If I do, I'll go in a body bag. I have nowhere to go, no place to hide, and no protection if I run for cover."

Nate pushed away from Colby and stood fast. He rubbed his sandy hands together and then swiped at his bottom, too. "You'll go because you place us in more danger if you stay."

"I'm not leaving, Nate. And if you'd put aside the perverse need you have to spend time alone with Colby, then you might see what's already in front of you. I'm an asset. I know how Shoemaker thinks."

Nate released a dry chuckle, and Colby joined in by saying, "You think you're the only one who has a good read on Shoemaker?"

"I know him better than most ISOs in the field," she claimed.

"That's doubtful," Donovan said, approaching from the cabana and practically upon them before anyone saw him.

Karen shot him a quick glance and continued. "I know where he lives, where he goes for lunch on Fridays, and the regular habits he's

created over the years that could very well cost someone in our business his or her life.”

“And you honestly think I don’t?” Nate countered. “You’re leaving here, Miss Whitaker. To stay puts all of us in danger. Shoemaker will send in more ISOs, perhaps even those with a few personal vendettas.”

“Ah, now, come on, Nate,” she drawled. “After all of us were in a compromising position earlier, don’t you think we can remain on a first-name basis?”

Nate laughed. “I wasn’t the one tapping that sweet little pussy, hon. You put yourself out there, and Colby here didn’t deny you. That doesn’t mean he won’t stand with me and encourage you to leave.”

Karen studied Colby and probably realized she wouldn’t find his support. She turned her focus to Donovan. “You’re the outsider here. You need me more than you realize.”

“I can manage. These two are right. You’re going to draw a crowd if you don’t leave.”

“I need your protection!”

“You don’t have anything to offer us in return,” Nate said.

“The hell I don’t,” she said.

Colby narrowed his gaze. He focused on Karen, the operative, not the woman deliberately getting in their way. That’s when it occurred to him—she was right. She had something to offer, one way to guarantee they all kept their lives.

Karen Whitaker knew where they could find Darby Winslow.

“I can take you to Shoemaker’s son.”

Bingo. She wasn’t going anywhere.

Chapter Ten

The dark night fell on the heavenly skies like a thick thermal blanket. The lust was heavy, so thick, they could've sliced straight through it with carnal activities.

Nate chose his spot first, stretching out on the bed. Soon, Karen lay beside him. Perhaps she thought he was the one most capable of protecting her or pegged him as a light sleeper. Even with desire spinning as fast as the cabana ceiling fans, they each slipped into their dreams, somehow avoiding any personal contact.

When the morning sun trespassed into Nate's sleep, he woke up with a rise in his shorts. Karen, at some point during the night, curled into the nook of his arm. Her palm was flat against his belly, and he almost moved her hand down his shorts.

Deciding he needed to avoid—not entice—her, Nate left the bed, but he watched her from across the room, intrigued by her feminine qualities, even more so because he took the time to notice. Unsure of why he observed the female agent at all, he quickly showered and dressed. Packing several weapons, knives and grenades, he left for a walk on the beach.

Nate didn't like his current personal position. He didn't enjoy swapping information. He took what he wanted, occasionally paid for tips he needed, but he didn't owe anyone anything.

Damn that bitch! Whitaker had him over a barrel. He knew they might need Darby Winslow in order to bring Shoemaker down. Shoemaker had more power than anyone associated with the ISOs. If they didn't resolve their problems with Shoemaker, it wouldn't matter if they completed their mission or not. Sooner or later, someone

would finish the job. Shoemaker would keep sending operatives until he picked them off one by one.

“He wants me dead, too, doesn’t he?”

Nate stopped in his tracks and turned around. “I thought Colby filled you in.”

Donovan walked toward Nate with a sexy swagger. “I must’ve had my mind somewhere else.”

After they’d returned from Mangaia, Donovan responded to Nate, and Nate found it impossible to ignore the rise in his own damn pants once they touched one another. After he straddled him in the heat of their rough housing, Colby tried to talk to Donovan, but if the bulge in his slacks gave away any further indication, Donovan pondered better things at the time.

If Nate wanted Donovan dead, he would’ve at least died with an erection. Maybe then he could’ve entered the next life raring to go.

“I know where your head was,” Nate growled, returning to his walk on the beach.

Donovan quickly caught up and strolled beside him. For several minutes, the men sauntered across the small stretch of beach in silence.

“I requested a move,” Nate said, stopping in front of a larger cabana and eyeing the swing on the porch. He took the steps two at a time and sat down.

Donovan met his gaze with a challenge. “I thought you didn’t like to go against orders or change plans.”

Nate placed his palms on the wooden bench seat. “I don’t take orders from those who place unnecessary hits on my life. We’re sitting targets in that bungalow.”

“We’re open season if we remain in this resort.”

“I’m not running,” Nate said.

“If not, why not stay down the beach in our hut?”

“I don’t like cramped spaces.”

“You didn’t seem to mind before,” Donovan said.

"I'm not sleeping in a bed with a woman."

"Again, it apparently didn't bother you yesterday."

Nate shifted, smiled and grated out all at once. "I'm not a woman's man, Collier."

"You think I don't know that?"

Nate narrowed his gaze and studied Donovan's groin. God, yeah, the man sported a thick dick. He didn't require a reminder. He remembered the swell of his erection under the weight of his body when he immobilized him the day before.

Donovan tilted his head toward the front door. "Open it."

Nate leaned back in the swing and crossed his arms. "And if I do, what are you going to do? Kill me or fuck me?"

"Maybe both," Donovan said, working his game.

Pushing himself up, Nate walked toward the entrance. He turned the knob. "It's unlocked. Go ahead. Go inside."

"You first," Donovan said, extending his arm.

"Ah, no, sweetheart," Nate said. "Trust is everything. You have to trust me if you're in my bed."

"Why? So I can look at you like Colby does?"

Nate arched his brow. "How's that?"

"Anyone can see he has strong feelings for you. Anyone except, well, maybe you."

"Colby and I have a past," he stated flatly. "Colby has nothing to do with me and you."

"And I'm supposed to trust a man who received a shoot to kill order specifically for me?"

"We both picked up the same assignment," Nate reminded him. "You could kill me as easily as I could dispose of you. We're evenly matched."

"Hmm..." Donovan said. "I imagine you had a tough time accepting the truth?"

“The truth is, we’re equals in physical strength,” Nate corrected him. “But I have a lot of experience, and I doubt you’ll find many ISOs with my level of expertise.”

“In the field or in the bedroom?”

“Both,” Nate said, walking inside first.

Donovan followed. From there, Nate quickly took the lead.

* * * *

Donovan fell for Nate about as quickly as he imagined Colby might have. No two ways about it. The man eating him alive knew how to work his fellows.

Nate’s mouth opened but didn’t close over his. He nipped at his lips and then sucked his bottom lip between sharp teeth. Eagerly, he pulled him into a covetous kiss, and Donovan’s hand went to Nate’s cock.

Stroking through the soft material, Donovan moved his palm up and down the growing length Nate kept tucked away in his pants. He should’ve been licensed to use a cock like the one he possessed between those muscular legs.

“That’s it,” Nate said. “Get me going. Stroke me right.”

Hell yeah, Donovan understood what Nate wanted. He would give him every drip and drop of satisfaction he could muster.

Fiddling with Nate’s zipper, Donovan freed his length. God help him, he wanted to kneel down and let Nate’s thick dick part his lips, but Nate was full of surprises. An exceptional kisser, Nate delivered the kind of attention Donovan longed for, and a smart soldier never left his assigned post in the midst of an outright assault, especially one triggering so much heat and pleasure.

Nate cupped his neck and made him want more, everything, and yet nothing else but this. Nate’s tongue scraped over his own, and Donovan moaned, allowing Nate’s erection to tap against his denim covered cock.

Holding his head between his palms, Nate said, “Unzip. Let me feel your cock against my leg.” Then, he kissed him deeper.

A few seconds later, Donovan stepped out of the confinement of his clothing. He moved closer, allowing the shape of his penis to press against the shaft of Nate’s dick.

Donovan reached between their bodies with his left hand. He wrapped his fingers around Nate’s size, stroking him quickly and enjoying the way his flesh rolled into his working, aggressive hand. His thumb smoothed over Nate’s swollen mushroom head, and Nate practically growled into their kiss.

“Are you gonna be the death of me, big man?” Nate asked, grinning.

“I may just give you new life,” Donovan promised. Then he dropped to his knees.

* * * *

Nate grabbed the base of his dick and tried to move away from Donovan’s sucking. Good Lord, the man used a suction like no other.

Licking the top of Nate’s dick, Donovan looked up and winked. “Don’t go anywhere. I want you to come.”

Nate didn’t care about anything else after Donovan urged him forward. He took one step toward Donovan, moving back into the blowjob of a lifetime.

Donovan reached under Nate’s scrotum and tapped his balls. Like a rocket, only faster, his ejaculation pressed through his veins and spilled onto a willing tongue. Hammering closer to his goals, Nate tapped Donovan’s tonsils, and Donovan swallowed and swallowed.

Gripping his ears, Nate pounded Donovan’s throat. The head of his penis swelled again and again, over and over, as his cum sprayed hot.

“God, yeah,” Nate said, changing his stance and wiggling his ass to free every sensation found through oral pleasure.

When he finished, he dropped to his knees, and Donovan embraced him. Donovan didn't act like he expected something in return but as if Nate were a frightened soldier afraid to see what the future held, he closed his eyes and remembered. He reflected on a different time when another strong man cradled him.

Colby Carrington never let go.

Donovan might.

No, Nate thought. Donovan would.

Chapter Eleven

Donovan was a goner from the initial how-do-you-do. From the moment he joined Nate in the taxi, he understood his destiny. Nate Francisco had him at the airport. He held on from their initial introductions, no matter how lame they were, and Nate now owned him—heaven help him—completely.

Nate released him and started to stand.

“Don’t,” Donovan said, almost pleading.

Nate’s lips curved in a smile. “You want some more of me?”

Donovan stroked himself. Yes, he wanted more. He longed for more than he ever expected to want from another ISO. He needed more than he ever desired in the past.

“Let me fuck you,” Donovan said, astonished he made the request and feeling the heat lick at his skin while he waited for Nate’s reaction.

“A cock won’t fit in this tight ass, lover.”

Like hell. Donovan highly doubted that one. Nate was all but fucked now.

Pressing his lips to the inside of Nate’s thigh, he sucked the skin. Trailing up and down his leg, his tongue swiped at Nate’s clammy flesh. Higher and lower, his mouth remained committed to contact.

He teased until he couldn’t torment anymore. Then he pulled Nate forward, bracing himself for all a man could stand.

Nate pushed him to the floor. With his back against the ground, Donovan closed his eyes and wondered what bottoming for a man like the one leaning over him now would feel like. He’d always been the one who fucked. A man’s dick never stroked the inside of his ass, and

only one other man knew what it felt like to have his mouth around him—Darby Winslow.

The tip of Nate's cock pressed against his ass cheek, and Donovan cursed, moaned, and rolled over, reaching for his pants.

"I want to fuck *you*," Donovan told him again.

Expecting a man like Nate to either put up a fight or deny him altogether, he was surprised when Nate pulled two condoms from his wallet. The foil wrappers from both went to his lips, and he tore open the packets.

Catching the tossed rubber, Donovan did not sheath himself but watched while Nate rolled the added protection over his cock.

Beautiful and sexy, Nate proudly stood on display. A wicked smile, a devilish expression Donovan realized he'd never tire of seeing, washed over Nate's chiseled cheeks.

Suited up and ready to play, Nate towered over him and pushed Donovan's legs apart. Keeping one hand against the floor next to his head, he stroked Donovan's penis. Up and down, leisurely, he maneuvered his closed fist around his cock until Donovan wanted to come, needed to get off worse than he craved his next breath of air.

"Let me," Donovan said gruffly. "Let me take you."

* * * *

Nate reared back and looked at him. Perhaps he saw him for the very first time, as a lover of genuine interest. Donovan's good looks made him stand out in a crowd, but of equal interest, something hard to ignore, was his intelligence. The man intrigued him, and the buried mysteries wouldn't easily unfold.

Colby would never forgive him. In all their time together, Colby never fucked him. Nate had a thing about taking dick up the ass. Sure, he was always curious. Since he had some reservations about Donovan and whether or not he intended to play them, he might give him what he wanted—for the sake of the job, of course.

Donovan wanted a piece of his ass and he wanted it bad. Maybe if Nate let him have what he desired, gave him his way, then he'd seal the deal and make a committed partner out of him.

There was only one way to find out.

* * * *

Donovan kissed him with passion, and he regretted the kiss almost instantly. Nate would see his quick advantage. Was Nate using him? No doubt. Sure, he was. Sex would make him an easier kill regardless of the lust running wild between them.

Nate took his hand and led him through a short hallway. He nudged the door open with his foot.

Donovan sat down, and Nate dropped to the floor. Surprised, Donovan gasped when Nate took his cock in between his hands and gave him quite possibly the most erotic hand job of his lifetime.

Donovan leaned on the bed, arching his back and stretching his neck in order to watch. Nate dropped his lips and covered Donovan's swollen head, licking the tip, the spongy texture of his tongue drawing out the pre-cum in a sticky wash of excitement.

"Let me," Donovan pleaded, leaning his head back and clutching the condom Nate more or less gave him as a cookie, a sweet temptation of things within his reach. "God, please, Nate. Let me."

Nate stood then, using his knees to part Donovan's legs and stand between them. Donovan sat up, and Nate turned around.

Donovan swallowed hard when realization struck. Of course he would let him. Donovan quickly rolled the condom over his heavily veined erection and pulled Nate toward him. His chest pressed to Nate's back allowing body-to-body access, and he nipped at his flesh. The excitement continued building and building.

Nate eased all the way down over Donovan's prick. He did the guiding. He took the easy lead.

Donovan sank into his ass and sighed. “Ah, yeah, buddy. That’s what I’m talking about.”

Nate didn’t move. He seemed lifeless at the first point of entry.

Then Donovan started to thrust. Soon he hammered in between the firm, tight globes of one very masculine, fresh, virgin ass.

* * * *

Nate didn’t mind taking cock like he once feared. In fact, he enjoyed the connection. His bottom felt tight, and with every layer of skin Donovan pressed beyond, Nate felt more and more stimulated. His nerve endings on fire, he blazed hot from the inside out and needed to come worse than he ever remembered.

“Hurry,” he urged. Hell, yeah, he wanted him to hurry. Once he was done, he planned to fuck Donovan’s lights out.

Donovan shifted, rolling over him. Nate’s face soon pressed into a pillow Donovan had thrown down before he pushed him forward.

Dragging Nate’s hips upward, Donovan clobbered him with good loving. “Feels good?”

God, yeah. “Finish,” Nate growled.

In and out, he stroked. Harder and harder, he pounded between Nate’s cheeks until all of a sudden, he screamed out his release. Nate bucked violently against him, determined to help him find his pleasure.

When Donovan collapsed on his back, Nate rolled over. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Nate framed his face and kissed him. Donovan’s tongue tasted like a volatile lifeline, one he feared might snap at any moment.

Nate didn’t waste time analyzing why. Instead, he looked into Donovan’s eyes, fisted his cock, spread his partner’s legs with his own, and pushed his cock deep inside his tight ass. Then, he fucked him rough and wild, refusing to break free of the entrancing gaze they held the entire time.

* * * *

Darby Winslow paced the floor of his small quarters in the psychiatric unit. His father wanted to see him. He planned to stop by the facility around one o'clock, and the timekeeper he kept bedside continued to remind of the hour.

"Darby?" A nurse appeared in his doorway. "Your father is here."

He nodded, and she stepped aside. Admiral Thomas Shoemaker used his clout and appointments to enjoy private visits with his son. Most guests were restricted, and very few family members paid visits to the rooms of resident patients.

"Dad," Darby said, raising his gaze to meet his father's.

"Darby," he began. "How are you today?"

They always started their visits the same way. Darby anticipated his father's arrival with pure dread. Then, he'd come in and quickly assess his room conditions and inquire about how he felt as if he checked on him every other day.

Darby couldn't remember the last time he saw his father. He spoke to him on the phone a few weeks back and had been distraught ever since.

"Dad, I need to see Donovan."

His father winced at the request and refused to acknowledge his son's plea. The visible distress tightened his cheeks, and his jaw tensed in mere tolerance.

Looking around, he said, "I like what they've done to your room. I spoke to your mother last week and told her they recently painted this wing. The pastels brighten the place up, don't you think?"

Darby glared at him. "I don't care about colors."

"Or your mother? You haven't asked about her since you've been here."

No, and he wouldn't. If his mother had remained quiet, then he wouldn't have known the sheer hell of having a father like the great

Admiral Shoemaker. He wouldn't spend his time in a locked down psychiatric facility because of what his father called "his despicable gay orientation." He wouldn't have to take meds at nine, noon, and three. He would be completely free.

"Tell me about Donovan," he urged, grasping his father's forearm.

His father shook him off and then walked over to the dresser. Glaring at the photograph of Donovan and Darby, he said, "I told the nurses you could keep one picture of you and Donovan Collier. I've decided it's not healthy. I'll take this one with me when I leave." He picked the frame up and then set it down again.

Darby glared through the haze of a drug-induced state of confusion. Why did his father hate him so much? He shook his head and then sat on the edge of the only chair in the room.

"I know you think you're going to spend the rest of your life in here, Darby. You have shown signs of improvement. I can't help but feel relief and even some measure of pride."

Darby swallowed. Relief and pride? Darby knew better. Oddly, in the ten years his father had known about him, he never mentioned pride. He never said anything before because the shame overshadowed other emotions he might have allowed himself to experience.

"I love him. If you still believe love is a sickness, then I pity you, Dad."

His father stormed forward and bellowed out, "What the hell do you know about love, son? That," he pointed to the photograph, "is... not... love!"

Darby looked away, the medication stumping his intellectual abilities. His fight soon disappeared. "It's the only love I want," he told him quietly. "The only one I'll ever need."

"And I want more for you. I don't want you to wither away, shunned, because your life is lived under stigmas and pretenses. When I reintroduce you to the world, you won't know what it feels like to see your friends turn their backs while you overhear the cruelty

of snickers and whispers. You'll stand proud and tall, an admiral's son."

"An admiral's son?" Darby said on a sudden thought, though most definitely aloud.

"Yes," he said confidently. "You'll make us both proud when you can stand with me."

"And what about Donovan?" Darby whispered. His eyelids grew heavy, and he stumbled forward, searching for the bed.

The admiral didn't offer a reply. His father's large form towered over him while sleep tugged him into a familiar blackness, one he visited regularly throughout the course of his days. The medication he'd been given hours earlier snuffed out the daylight and any resemblance of the pain he often found in consciousness.

Chapter Twelve

Nate and Donovan walked into the hut together. Colby looked at them and saw an instant replay of their morning scribbled across their foreheads, etched in their faces.

He wasn't jealous like he once feared he might have been. Instead, a strange sensation consumed him, a load off his mind. After all, since Donovan and Nate arrived, the sexual tension existed everywhere.

Nate possessed a secret weapon and needed to take full advantage of his personal arsenal. Nate and Colby needed to know where they stood with Donovan. If discovery meant fucking the truth out of Donovan, then Colby could turn his head and look the other way. Unless, of course, they asked him to join them.

Nate avoided eye contact even after Donovan headed for the shower. Reaching into the mini-fridge for a bottle of water, he said, "Where's Karen?"

"Don't know," Colby said, smiling. "I thought she might have been with the two of you."

Nate quickly looked up and said, "No. We were alone."

Colby finally experienced the first pinch from the green eyed monster. "All alone?"

"Yes," he said. "We're moving to the last bungalow on the beach. It's larger and has more room. Plus, it's not safe for us to play by Shoemaker's rules anymore."

He took a swig of water and studied the sofa. Suddenly, a convertible daybed held a lot of peculiarity and captured his complete interest.

"Nate?"

“Yeah?”

“You fucked him. So what,” Colby said. “We need to know where he stands. At this point, we should use everything we have at our disposal, including ourselves.”

“Yeah, but there may have been a better way,” Nate said. “I wouldn’t want you fucking him without me there.”

Nate wouldn’t want him to risk vulnerability. Colby recognized more than anyone the defenseless position an ISO took when he or she slept with the enemy. Assuming Donovan Collier remained true to his inner assassin, Nate placed himself in the line of fire, too, when he jumped into Donovan’s bed. ISOs were taught how to manipulate any and all situations, including those in the bedroom.

Colby wanted to make things easier for Nate, so he said, “I don’t care what happened with you and Donovan. You knew I wouldn’t. I don’t think you would’ve spent the morning all alone with him if you thought...” When Nate’s lips thinned and he acted uncomfortable with the way the conversation was headed, Colby changed directions and blurted out, “We needed to know—”

“Damn, Colby,” Nate started to walk outside. “There’s more to this mission than what happened this morning.”

“You don’t say? Would you like for me to spell it out so we’re all on the same page? I’ve been right here, Nate. I’ve thought of all the outs we have, but you and I know what happens when a hit is placed. If this one isn’t carried out, other ISOs will come. Eventually someone will pull the trigger. The little red lights on our foreheads will glow until we’re ten feet under.

“Maybe Donovan won’t do the job. Then again, maybe he’s arrogant enough and green enough to believe if he takes us out then it will end this thing. Either way, we’re marked. Either way, we have a world of troubles. I don’t know how we’re going to get out of this. What I do know is the only one I trust on God’s earth right now is you.”

Nate snapped over his shoulder, “You have no idea how dangerous it is for you to have faith in anyone right now...even me.”

Colby reached for him, and Nate allowed contact for a split second. The men locked in a knowing gaze, and Colby said, “If I can’t trust you, then I’ll die without putting up a fight.”

Nate took a deep breath. His nostrils flared and he said, “You trust me, Colby, because I was once sent in to save you. You were a job, and you don’t need to forget how we met. You were only an assignment.”

Colby released him. He saw the lie in Nate’s eyes. He allowed meaningless words to spill from his lips, and Colby wasn’t sure why.

Rage, stark anger churned through his veins. Colby retaliated. “Bullshit! I was more than a job, and you damn well know it! You’re running scared Nate, and damn you, I won’t let you push me away in order to save me. It’s not going to happen this time. My family isn’t here pulling political strings. Your ISO commander turned on you, and by God, you are all I have. I’m all you’ve got, too, soldier. That’s better than what either of us had when we first arrived in these islands.”

Nate flinched. The deafening silence consumed them then, and Nate looked thoughtful. Colby didn’t want them to doubt one another. They had too much to lose if they started to look at each other with skepticism.

Nate gripped Colby’s shoulders and stared into his eyes. “Colby, listen to me. There are too many puzzles to solve, too many elements we need exposed. I’m dizzy trying to keep up. We have so many complications and no clue where to start in order to dig ourselves out of shallow graves.”

Colby lowered his voice and said, “We have to get rid of Karen, Nate. We need her out of here. Her loyalties aren’t with us and—”

“And you think his are?” Nate turned around suddenly and tilted his chin toward the bathroom, chugging another swig of water, then wiping his mouth on his short sleeve.

“Maybe.”

“Why, because he’s gay?”

“No,” Colby said, shaking his head. “Because of the way he looks at you whenever the two of you are in a room together. He’ll do what you tell him to do. Trust me. I believe you have a better hold on him than you think.”

Donovan reappeared in the doorway. “And what if I have the same hold on your man, Colby? What then?”

Colby wheeled around. “You’re going to make this about Darby, aren’t you?”

“I don’t see any reason why we can’t,” Donovan said arrogantly. The white towel he draped around his waist hugged his hips and allowed the outline of his dick to show through the thin material.

“There are plenty of reasons,” Colby began.

“Like?” Donovan asked.

Colby watched Nate as he seemingly studied them both, his gaze working much like a ping pong ball, darting between men. “This is starting to make perfect sense. Of course I didn’t put any of it together until now.” Nate rubbed his chin and finished. “Shoemaker knew the two of you were at odds?”

Donovan said, “I wanted to kill him. Until a few days ago, I didn’t know who the ‘he’ was. I only knew Darby had an infatuation with another ISO, a man who kept him from committing. Your man, as a matter of fact.”

Colby paced the floor.

“I’m still waiting,” Donovan said. “Give me those reasons, Colby.”

“You can wait, damn it,” Colby snapped. “I wasn’t in love with Darby Winslow. You were his life. He was just as important to you as you were to him. Don’t try to deny your feelings.”

“I never said one way or the other. I spent a lot of time with Darby. We were inseparable because of the jobs we took and the skill sets we each brought to the table.”

“Guerilla warfare in the worst conditions?” Nate asked.

“They were two of the best,” Colby quickly confirmed. “A perfect team.”

“Yes,” Donovan said. “We were.”

“Then you’re a liability if you work better with partners,” Colby said.

Nate arched a brow.

“This isn’t about Darby,” Donovan said, smiling. “It’s about Nate.” Taunting Colby, he added. “I can see where you would have some insecurities.”

“I’m not insecure,” Colby snapped. “But don’t think you’ll take what belongs to me in retaliation for the time I spent with Darby.”

“Oh, you should have some serious doubts about Nate,” Donovan said, shooting Nate a warning glare and then going for the punch. “As hard as I fucked him, you’d better believe you have cause to worry.”

Colby didn’t shake down as easily as Donovan might have thought. He tried to keep his emotions in check and regrouped. Taking a few short breaths, he finally said, “Darby Winslow was a job, Donovan. They sent me in to take him out, and he would’ve been dead the first day we met, but someone called off the hit.”

“Yeah?” Donovan drawled. “I guess Daddy didn’t like it when he found out his little bastard was a moving target, huh?”

Colby grinned. “Oh, he moved all right. I made damn sure I kept him humping.”

Donovan jumped forward, and Nate stood in his path, blocking him from taking a full swing. “You sorry son of a bitch, he fell for you!”

“I did my fucking job. You and even Nate here would have done the same thing in my place. It’s how we’re paid. It’s in our job description. It’s who we are. We take our assignments, one by one. We don’t ask questions. We don’t have the fucking time!”

“And you would’ve killed him?” Donovan asked, clarifying.

“You’re damn right I would have.”

A death wish washed over Donovan, stamping the proof of rage across his red face. Colby saw through the eyes of a cold blooded killer. Donovan Collier once loved Darby Winslow. Maybe he still did. If so, then Colby pushed too hard and said far too much. Everything Nate shared with Donovan went out the window in a weak moment of flared tempers.

Nate's lips thinned, and he set his jaw. Storming past them, he walked in the bedroom and yanked his luggage from the closet. Packing quickly, he didn't say a word. Colby exchanged icy glares with Donovan before he followed suit.

As they packed, Colby couldn't help but revisit the past few minutes. Discovering the connection Nate formed with Donovan ate at him.

Nate fucked Donovan, and then he allowed him the same pleasure, so what? Who cared? Maybe he'd regret it when he moved past the lust between men. Maybe then he'd remember something far more important than his dick and manly pleasures.

They were the hunted, and they were there with a job to do. They were assassins, hunters, and yes, they were natural born killers. Jealousy and stirred rage would make a completed mission very possible. In fact, a deadly outcome seemed probable.

Chapter Thirteen

Karen walked into the larger cabana with her head held high. “Anyone here want to explain why no one informed me of this move?”

“It’s time to go our separate ways,” Nate stated flatly.

Karen arched her brow. If Nate Francisco was any other man, she would’ve blown him to kingdom come and the heavens above and back again, just for kicks. Then she would’ve shot him for taking advantage of her in Mangaia even though, technically, he barely touched her. Maybe there was the problem. She longed for his caress, every stroke and thrust he wanted to give.

Attracted to Nate and fighting her lust at every turn, Karen strolled by him adding a little sway to her hips in hopes he’d notice. He didn’t.

“So where’s my room?” she asked, looking around.

Colby stood in the doorway of one bedroom. Donovan blocked the archway leading to his space. They both looked at her like she had balls of steel. Well, at least they possessed some level of intelligence, though she banked on theirs being lower than Nate’s.

“You aren’t staying here, Karen,” Nate said.

The other two looked like they stood with Nate in support of a unified decision. Too bad they didn’t remember her ace in the hole. She reminded them. “Are you forgetting where I hold the most value?”

“It sure ain’t in the sack, sweetheart,” Nate stated dryly.

“She wasn’t that bad,” Colby said, giving her a heated once-over and enough to go on. He had enjoyed her plenty.

Donovan smirked. "I imagine you found more pleasure in her pussy than you get out of your hot, sweaty palm."

"Fuck you, Collier."

"I might let you," he replied. "That is after I take another turn fucking Nate's pretty little ass."

Colby glared at Donovan. Ah, she thought, a little too much animosity existed among the toy soldiers.

Hmm, she wondered what Nate had done to cause such a stir among his boys.

She studied Donovan for an additional moment and then quickly turned on Nate. The two men looked at one another with fresh lust in their eyes.

So it was true. Nate fucked Donovan? Interesting, she decided. She wondered if Colby walked in on them. She also wondered why Nate bothered. Did he make a point to take all of his enemies to bed? God, she hoped so.

Right then, she was, in fact, considered by all of them as the adversary. They didn't need or want her at their makeshift island compound.

"Boys," she began, dropping her bag to the floor. "I'm not leaving. I have nowhere to go and no desire to find a place. You're stuck with me until this mission is over."

"We've heard about all the babble from you we can stand," Nate said, moving toward the kitchenette.

"And I've been neglected by you for the last time."

Nate quickly faced her. "Neglected?"

She popped her hip and placed her palm in the curve of her waist. "Yes, Nate. I didn't stutter." She stood taller, tilted her chin upright and cursed herself for challenging him. Her mouth dried when she saw the heated expression wash over his face, the lust filled danger settling in his eyes.

"I see," he said. "So, honey, what is it that I can do for you? Huh?"

She quietly tried to gain some sense of control, but the woman in her trumped the agent. She wanted Nate Francisco, and she longed to have him right between her legs, thrusting inside her with rage and lust, anger and desire. Yes, she'd take him any way she could get him.

Her gaze wandered, and she damn well took her time gawking. She started at his loafers and worked her way up his muscular legs until she stopped at the bulge in between his thighs. Lord help her, she wanted some of what he had.

Nate's tongue held at his upper lip, and he moved toward her. His entire demeanor changed, and his eyes darkened. Somewhere in the background, she heard Colby when he said, "Nate, don't."

Too bad, she thought.

She wasn't allowing him to stop now. She called out the wicked nature of a killer, the kind of man who did fuck his targets and got off on the idea of snapping a neck right after he came. She wanted that man to show his face. She wanted to see the male behind the ego.

"Nate," Colby warned again. "Damn it. Don't do this."

They were beyond putting on the brakes. Colby tried and failed.

Nate's hands gripped her forearms so roughly she thought she lost her limbs in combat upon entry of a war zone. When Nate squeezed her arms, he was all soldier. He wanted to manhandle her.

Diabolically, he shifted his weight into hers. Slow and easy, he rocked. His dick pounced at her pussy. Pressing, pressing, he pushed the weight of his heavy cock against her center and smiled as he thrust.

Watching her, he said, "You aren't going to be happy until you have me."

Damn right. She wasn't leaving the islands without the knowledge. She wanted what Admiral Shoemaker desired. She longed to take everything the admiral had and then some, including the man—or men—he'd never have the joy of claiming for himself.

Karen wanted Nate Francisco, the soldier dubbed as the best man for any job the ISO force ever assigned. She wanted to fuck the best,

hold the wild, ride the beast and then live to tell about her experiences. She'd give anything to document the whole episode unfolding, tape it live and send in the footage. Only, she didn't have time. She decided to savor the moment and truly come alive in Nate's arms.

* * * *

Nate worked her over like he wanted her more than he'd ever wanted a man. In truth, the reason he gave her what she desired had little to do with her and everything to do with the way Colby and Donovan looked on, observing quietly with heavy lust in their eyes.

Both men knew him intimately as a lover. They each enjoyed him explicitly, and now their gazes made him erect and ready, anxious even, to take a woman he would soon make just as crazy about him.

Colby and Donovan didn't follow them into the bedroom when Nate pulled Karen into his arms and carried her there. They stayed in the hallway, waiting and watching.

Spreading her legs out as far as they easily parted, he shifted his weight and lay between them. His fingertips went to the band of her shorts, and he stripped them off like he meant to ravage her body, take her sex, and own her soul.

The vixen scraped at his chest. Her apparent hunger obvious, the woman wanted his flesh and he would give her what she evidently yearned for most—skin on skin. "Wait," he said. "Everything in due time, wench."

He wanted her begging, yelping like a whore in need of his cock. He would make her cry out his name until he knew he had her loyalty. He would leave her sated but craving him like a new drug.

Nate used women. If Karen wanted to stay on with them, he'd make her into a willing submissive who protected them all by doing what she was told and submitting to each of them. Otherwise he'd

throw her out, and she'd lose the protection she desired when he waved goodbye.

Yeah, Karen was easy, and thanks to her, he could use sex to get his way. Even if it meant taking her the way he only wanted to take Donovan and Colby.

Donovan.

Thinking about his early morning romp with the other man made his dick gain new life. Like a man suddenly ready for his first fuck, he knew a delayed start wasn't possible now.

He shoved her shirt high above her head and worked with his belt, zipper, and buttons. Karen's loose blouse fell to the bed. He yanked her up with one hand and shoved his pants past his hips, tugging a condom from his front pocket in the process.

Unhooking her bra, he curved his arm around her back and pinched her nipple while stripping his own T-shirt over his head. He ripped the foil packet open and sheathed himself, holding her so close she probably felt the friction, the way his hand worked the protection over his penis.

"I know what I'm doing," she assured him.

Of course she did. Otherwise, he wouldn't take her.

When he released her, his cock hung at her entrance. He glanced into the mirror behind the bed and locked gazes with Colby. God yeah, this was right. This was the only way to take a woman.

He plunged inside her slick, wet walls and she cried out his name. The point of penetration was all the sweeter when she watched him move between her legs.

"That's my little whore," he whispered.

Her hips rolled forward, and her hands slapped against his shoulders. He pounded into her like he'd never enjoyed sex so much in his life, but the men watching them probably knew better.

She came, too fast for his liking if he'd wanted to stay in between her legs. He didn't care either way. He knew where he'd find his.

Donovan. Colby.

Thrusting into her walls, he let her take all she wanted. Faster and faster, he fucked her. The sweat ran off his chest and dripped from thick curls. Her hands smoothed over his pecs, and she smiled when her mouth fell open in a request for more.

“Nate! No, don’t leave me yet! I want more...need...all of you.”

Oh, he had more all right. He wanted her good and hooked. He pushed her legs apart and moved slower, taking his time. She tried. God love her heart, she wanted him to come, but he couldn’t. He didn’t want to give her the satisfaction.

“I own you now,” he assured her, licking at her ear and gazing into Colby’s eyes. “This pussy belongs to me for as long as we allow you to stay,” he said.

Colby nodded and turned away. He probably expected Nate to finish. And he would. Only, Colby’s sweet ass would provide the pleasure. Right after he convinced Donovan to join them.

Chapter Fourteen

Admiral Shoemaker walked into a classroom setting of eight newly trained ISOs. He took to the podium with complete authority. He moved the microphone to the side. He didn't need the added assistance when his voice carried well enough all on its own.

"You are the only group of newly selected ISOs. Together, you will go on an unusual mission, one we've never attempted before with a group of ISOs because, as most of you know, our operatives work on independent assignments. However, this job is full of obstacles, and we have limited time to complete our mission."

He strolled through the classroom like a college professor might walk the floor during a lecture. He studied each man looking back at him. He evaluated them on an individual basis. He had four killers and four with the potential to become all they needed to be in order to serve their country. Little did they know they weren't fighting for a good cause but rather a personal vendetta, one the admiral planned to resolve as soon as possible.

He stalked forward all at once and continued. "We have three ISOs in place in the Cook Islands. Due to some suspicious activity, these ISOs will be relieved from their duties. Your job is to take them out. Pick them off one by one, otherwise you will fail."

Pausing, he studied the operatives for a reaction. He wondered if they felt as he might if he were in their shoes. Did they wonder if they would soon face a similar fate? Did they want more specifics since they were assigned the task of taking out their own kind? Or were they too green, too new in the field, to care?

Admiral Shoemaker continued, flipping on an overhead and moving to the light switch. Nate Francisco's picture came up on the white wall. "Gentleman, this is your first target. ISO Francisco is an operative with unique skill sets. Physically and mentally, there has never been an ISO to match him. A former SEAL, if he leads you to the water, you will lose him or lose to him. He is trained in underwater delivery and ninety-five percent of his independent assassinations have occurred in the sea.

"An excellent swimmer, Francisco is an unmatched marksman and has outperformed any sniper the SEALs ever had in place, independently or on a team. He's also a loose cannon. You'll want to take him out first, because if you fail to do so, then the scent of death will inspire him, and all eight of you will die in the South Pacific."

The hard expressions scattered around the room never changed. The men paid close attention, and they undoubtedly tasted the kill. Several of the ISOs seemed eager to begin their first mission.

Only one operative acted concerned over the assignment. For a second, Shoemaker thought about reassigning him.

He really needed an eight man team in place since he planned to send in the choppers rather than have the men travel by commercial flights. Besides, it might very well take an army to bring Nate Francisco down. Maybe he should seriously consider training a classroom of ISOs rather than a handful.

* * * *

The clickety-click of high heels sounded out in the hallway. A cute little blonde with bouncy boobs and ringlet curls made her way toward him.

"Hey, good looking," Darby Winslow flirted with the new nurse when she passed by his door. He'd been working her for days. Talking to her about her life and family, Darby thought the newcomer was warming up to him, and he hoped his tireless effort paid off.

He needed an ally on first shift, and she was his target. Already, he formed an alliance with the nurse in charge of late afternoon meds. If he could do away with the morning medication, he would keep a clear mind. He needed a good head on his shoulders because he believed his father had something big in the works. Fearing the worst, he stepped up his game.

He made the right friends and started counting down the hours. Soon, he'd walk right out of the facility and straight into Donovan's waiting arms. If he could find him.

"How are you this morning, Darby?" the sweet little nurse drawled. Her pink cheeks were highlighted with red rouge she didn't need. If Darby found women attractive, he would've likely thought of her as beautiful. Instead, he only wanted to use her, and if she kept showing him profound interest, he'd do whatever required in order to get his way.

"I'm good, sweetheart," he said. "How are you?"

"Ah, you know, Darby. Trouble at home again. There's never enough time to set things right with me and my husband."

Darby hoped things would remain rocky for her until she walked him straight out of the hospital. Then, he'd wish her and her husband all the luck and love in the world.

"I know what you're going through," he said, patting her shoulder.

"Darby, do you?" she asked, batting her eyelashes.

"Why sure, hon," he said, draping his arm over her shoulder.

She looked up at him like she saw her saving grace. Nurse Sharon had a hell of a marriage. Her husband drank, and her kids, from the way she described them, were brats. She wanted some attention, and he showered her with plenty.

"I'll be back in a minute," she promised.

"I'll be right here," he said, smiling.

"Darby?"

"What darlin'?"

“I know this is uh...inappropriate...but would you mind having lunch with me today?”

Ah, bless her little heart, she made things easier than he ever imagined. “Why, sure, Sharon, I can’t think of anyone I’d rather eat with today.” Except Donovan, and, love her soul, she was making his dreams more and more attainable. Soon, he’d find his way back to Donovan’s bed, and once he found him again, he was never letting go.

Chapter Fifteen

Donovan sat on the front porch, swinging back and forth. Nate walked out and inhaled the salty night air until his nostrils burned. Staring at the moon, he quickly snapped, “Where’s Colby?”

“Did you enjoy yourself?” Donovan asked.

“Where is Colby?”

“Don’t worry. I haven’t knocked him off.”

“I’m not concerned about you,” Nate said, but even as he spoke the words, he doubted them. Donovan wasn’t entirely loyal to them yet. He had a long way to go in order to establish some level of unity.

“You should be.”

He nailed that one. “We’re all going to work together here, Donovan. Either you’re a team player, or you aren’t. No games. We don’t have time for them.”

“Why’s that?” he asked, raising a brow.

“Are you really that naive?” he asked, searching the empty beach, hoping to spot Colby. “Where the hell is he?”

Donovan stood. “I guess he went to grab something to eat because he offered to bring me something back. I didn’t take him up on it for fear he’d poison me, but I think he’s bringing back something for you and Karen.”

Karen walked out then. “I’ll go to the restaurant, thank you very much.”

Donovan shrugged and then smiled. “Looks like I’m not the only one with a trust issue.”

Colby rounded the cabana then and stepped out of his sandy sandals at the bottom of the porch. Carrying a large tray of covered food, he pretended not to notice Karen at all.

Damn, Nate thought. He was going to have to stop this jealousy thing.

Donovan peered at the food. "Looks good," he said, eyeing the grilled pineapple chicken. "I guess I'll run over and check out the buffet. Karen, would you like to join me?"

Nate shot Colby a heated glance. He probably didn't like the idea of Donovan and Karen alone any more than Nate did, but there were some things he didn't want to postpone. Colby topped his to-do list. After rolling around with Karen, Nate needed Colby's undivided attention, and he wanted it fast.

"I'm famished," she drawled, smiling at Nate like they'd just formed the most intimate of all connections.

"Good," Donovan said. "You can eat with me." He didn't wait for her reply. Instead, he started toward the restaurant, and she trailed right behind him.

By the time they were out of sight, Nate's penis responded with plans of its own. Hell, he wasn't sure his hard-on had diminished since he had sex with Karen. Even in the shower, he wasn't able to do anything about his erection and since Colby didn't join him there, he took his fisted hand to the cause.

Colby smiled. "You hungry?"

"You know it."

"Chicken?" he asked, walking inside with the tray.

"Sausage sounds better," he said, reaching around his waist and unhooking his belt while he pushed aside the clutter on the kitchenette counter.

Nate's lips went to Colby's nape, and Colby didn't turn around after he set the food next to the sink. Rolling his head to the side, Nate kissed and licked, nipped and sucked.

“Ah, Nate,” Colby said grinding his hips backwards and rubbing his ass all over Nate’s stout erection.

Nate released his cock and sheathed himself as his pants dropped. He retrieved a travel-size bottle of lube from his pants pocket right before they fell to the floor. Colby pushed his own jeans down and saved Nate the trouble. Stepping out of his slacks, Nate grabbed Colby’s hips.

“Bend over,” he instructed, rubbing his penis up and down the crack of Colby’s ass. He lubricated his cock and Colby’s bottom. Then, he slid right between his globes.

“Nate,” Colby whimpered.

“That’s right,” he said, giving him what he needed. “I’m right here where you like me.”

“Always,” he said, bucking against him. “God, you feel good.”

“Always,” he assured him. “There’s no one who’ll ever take this ass like I can.”

With the promise, Nate fucked him right. He worked in and out of his body in a timed beat, finding his pleasure with every single stroke.

“Give me what I want,” he said, pumping Colby’s cock with his hand while thrusting forward and deeper into his ass.

Colby’s cum drenched his knuckles. “Nate! Fuck yeah.”

“You got that right,” he growled. “Fuck yeah.” Finding his release and pounding the hell out of one fine looking ass, he realized then why he’d grown so bitter over the last couple of years. He’d missed Colby. He missed him because he’d never known a man like him and never experienced a love like the one they shared.

* * * *

Their arms were wrapped around one another. The dinner tray had long since been set on the floor, and Colby longed to ask for special favors.

He didn't know why he never pushed Nate for more than he gave him in Afghanistan. Perhaps he was young and so smitten by Nate, or maybe he feared losing him if he required something Nate didn't want to willingly give.

Now he had everything to gain and everything to lose. Still, he wanted to know if Nate would deny him.

Tightening his arms around Colby's waist, Nate kissed the top of his head.

"I love you," Colby said. "I love you a thousand times and then some. I love you."

Nate froze. Colby expected him to react, and the reaction he received was pretty much what he anticipated. Love probably never crossed Nate's mind.

When Colby shifted, he braced himself over Nate. With his palms flat on either side of his head, Colby leaned down and kissed him.

Nate shuddered. Colby went with the surprising gesture and made love to his open mouth much the same way he wanted to fuck him. His tongue darted in and out of Nate's mouth, and he felt Nate move under him, his knees bending in a relaxed position.

Colby swirled his tongue between Nate's teeth and looped his tongue around Nate's over and over again. French kissing him until the need hung lower, Colby pressed the tip of his dick against Nate's ass.

Swallowing hard, he backed away from Nate's hungry mouth and said, "I want you to let me."

"I'm yours," he said, a wicked grin shaping his full lips.

"Really?"

Nate pulled him closer. "Yeah, you know it. Now fuck me. I dare ya."

"Oh God," Colby said.

When Nate's lips covered his ear, he felt every nerve ending in his body come alive with a new fuse, a wash of heat rushing up and down his spine.

“Fuck me, sweetheart. Fuck me until you collapse from exhaustion.”

Colby sank into his ass, and the first penetration drew a weighted sigh from Nate. “Ah, yeah. Feels nice, doesn’t it babe?”

Nate’s bottom tightened around his cock, and he milked Colby’s dick. Working him as Colby jabbed forward, Nate drew his legs up and rolled those broad shoulders forward, stretching his neck in an effort to watch their bodies meet.

Pressing on Nate’s knees, Colby withdrew and entered, withdrew and reentered. He tapped Nate’s balls with his fingertips and continued to fuck. Beads of sweat careened off their foreheads, and Nate held him in a lover’s trance.

“Love me, Nate. Love me back,” he said, plunging inside his ass again and again. Right then, he wanted Nate to say the words. He needed to hear the words of endearment.

Nate wrapped his hand around his own cock, and his thick fingers tugged at his heavily veined skin. “That’s it,” he whispered. “Let me feel you, Colby.”

Colby pushed Nate’s muscular thighs farther apart and moved closer and closer, fighting for release. In and out, he fucked. Harder and harder, he moved in a way designed for a man’s pleasure.

Nate looked like a god as he worked for the climax. He pulled his shaft in and out of his hand.

Locked in a timeless spell, Colby licked Nate’s moistened lips when Nate’s hot spray jetted across his belly, a smidgen of his release dotting his bottom lip.

“God, that’s sexy,” Colby said.

“Come,” Nate ordered.

And he did. Heaven help him, he got off the very second Nate asked, and why wouldn’t he? He had never denied him anything, and he wasn’t about to start now.

Chapter Sixteen

“I want you and Donovan to sleep together.”

“What?” Colby felt a slight sting with Nate’s request.

Nate sat up and pulled Colby with him. He ran a lone finger up and down his leg. “Don’t act so surprised.”

Colby looked across the room. At any moment, Karen and Donovan would return from dinner. They really didn’t have time to start a discussion about why he didn’t want to sleep with Donovan Collier.

“I really don’t think you want me in Collier’s bed.”

“Why not?”

“We might kill each other, for starters.”

“What if I’m there to mediate?”

Colby laughed. “Excuse me, but I thought sex was supposed to be enjoyed by the participants, not forced.”

“No one will force you or Donovan. In fact, I’m willing to bet you’ll enjoy yourselves.”

“You think he’ll willingly go to bed with me?” Colby wasn’t asking but, rather, processing.

“Undoubtedly, the two of you were attracted to one another from the moment you first met.”

“I can think someone is sexy without fucking him.”

“You’ll have chemistry.”

Colby stared at Nate in disbelief. “And how the hell would you know?”

“I know you.”

Shaking his head, Colby said, “Nate, we haven’t been together in a long time. You know the person I used to be, but you have no idea who I’ve become.”

“You haven’t changed,” he assured Colby. “I understand what makes you tick, and Donovan will get you going. Trust me.”

“The way he got you going?” Colby fired back.

Nate was thoughtful. He waited and then responded. “Yeah,” he said. “Precisely the way he got me going.”

Sighing, Colby said, “I admit I found him attractive. That is, before I connected the dots.”

“You mean with Darby?” Nate probed.

“Yeah,” he said. “Nate, I gotta tell ya, I don’t think Donovan and I can be in the same room for long periods of time, let alone the same bed.”

“Why not?”

Colby shook his head. “Did you miss the fact I was hired to take out Darby? Did you?” The anger boiled with each word he spoke.

“Hell no,” Nate said, standing. “We’re killers, damn it. He’s not going to hold an assignment against you. You had a job to do, one you obviously didn’t complete if Winslow is, indeed, still alive.”

“Oh, I left him alive, all right, and he lived to tell Donovan everything we did together.”

“And you think that’s where Donovan has a problem.”

“I don’t think,” Colby said. “I know.”

“So fuck out your differences,” Nate encouraged him. “We need him, Colby. If we’re going to have him on our side, we must become a basic need for him. We could, you know.”

“You’ve got a better chance at becoming a must-have for Karen than you do with him. He’s not going to fall for you or me as quickly as you’d like to think.”

“Wanna bet?” Nate asked, grabbing a towel from a nearby shelf.

Colby watched Nate disappear behind the bathroom door. He stared at the ceiling until he had tight balls and a hard dick all over

again. Damn it to hell, he was acting like Nate now. All he wanted to do was fuck.

A few minutes later, he joined Nate in the shower. Nate acted uninterested when he first saw him. He turned around and popped a kiss on his cheek but then lathered the soap in between his hands and continued to bathe himself.

Pressing his erection to Nate's hip, Colby said, "Let's not talk about Donovan right now. We still have a few minutes. Let's enjoy each other. We can discuss this later."

Colby shuddered when Nate snaked his arm around his waist. Nate pressed his erection against his side and gave him light feathery kisses. Back and forth he ground, but Colby wasn't easily fooled. Nate worked him over and made him horny as all hell, for one purpose.

He wanted him good and ready to fuck. By the time Donovan joined them, Colby was as hard as any man could get.

* * * *

Donovan and Karen entered Nate's bedroom. Hell, they listened to the slurping sound of oral pleasure until Karen's panties were wet and Donovan sported an obvious bulge.

Dropped in front of Nate on bended knees, Colby sucked Nate's cock. He fisted the shaft and ran his tongue up and down his boner one minute, and then allowed Nate to pound away at his throat the next.

When Colby pulled Nate into his mouth again, Karen couldn't help but eye the swollen tip of Nate's cock before the damn thing disappeared down Colby's throat. If a dick could be pretty, Nate's ranked among the loveliest in matters of size and shape.

Winking her way, Nate said, "Don't just stand there. Get Donovan undressed."

"He can undress himself," she snapped walking toward them.

“Dinner didn’t go well?” Nate asked, a break in his voice when his cock disappeared between Colby’s jaws.

“Sure it did,” she said, breathless. “God, that’s sexy.”

Colby released Nate with a sudden pop and said, “Wanna take my place?”

Donovan quickly dropped to the floor and took the lead away from Colby. “No, I got him,” Donovan said softly.

He lowered his head, and Karen watched, somewhat amused, when Colby scooted over and Donovan’s mouth opened for Nate. Smacking his lips over the head, Donovan made Karen’s heart race. She saw his tongue sliver across the slit at the top of Nate’s penis.

Colby watched with interest, too, like Donovan’s performance warranted an audience. “Good, huh?”

Karen was surprised when Donovan released Nate and said to Colby, “Want one, too?”

Sitting down next to them, Karen’s fingers worked at tiny pearl buttons. She shrugged off her soft, silk blouse and unhooked her bra. Sitting topless on the bed with three gay men, she felt fully exposed and completely ignored. Yet she didn’t mind.

Donovan, Nate, and Colby were probably the most handsome men she’d ever met, and to make matters worse, she was falling for Nate. Thanks to Admiral Shoemaker, she always had a dark fascination with him. Now, after he held her in his arms, stroked her sex, and made her feel more like a woman than she ever felt in her life, she was hooked.

She eased in behind him and massaged his shoulders. Her thumbs worked up and down his nape, and she nipped at his ear, rubbing her breasts over his back.

“That’s nice,” Nate said.

Unsure of whether or not he meant the blowjob or the sensual massage, she dropped around his waist. When she did, her hair draped over his cock, making a full oral excursion damn near impossible for Donovan to complete.

“Wench,” Nate said, pulling her to him.

“Fuck me?” she asked.

Nate shot Colby a glance. God, she wished she could get inside their heads. She’d love to know what Nate and Colby were thinking when they gave one another those silent little glances.

Nate patted his cock. “I don’t have a condom, sweetheart, but if you want to take a ride, I’ll provide the perfect seat.”

Swallowing, she asked, “Do you have a spare, Donovan?”

He shrugged. “I can probably come up with a couple if I get to have some fun, too.”

She didn’t fail to notice where Donovan directed his statement. Donovan Collier was coming on to Colby. He wasn’t showing signs of giving in, or at least she didn’t think so. Then again, Colby sported an erection. He’d been sucking cock and then Donovan generously offered to give him a taste of what he offered Nate.

“Come on, Colby,” she purred. “Let’s all play nice today.”

Colby and Nate had the eye thing going on again. Nate’s were hazed with thick lust, and Colby acted as if he searched and waited for answers only Nate could provide.

Nate nodded once. Colby addressed Donovan then. “Don’t just stand there with your dick in your hand. Go get those tight fitting jumpsuits. We’re waiting on you.”

* * * *

When Donovan returned, Karen and Colby were kissing. She must’ve liked the way Colby kissed, or else Nate didn’t offer her the affection she wanted. He was somewhat surprised because he saw the set-up a mile away.

Nate wanted him to fuck Colby.

Donovan didn’t have a problem with taking Colby straight up the ass. He was one hell of a looker, the kind of guy he would’ve gladly picked up if he didn’t know his past. If he didn’t understand Colby

once positioned himself in Darby's bed with the full intention of killing him.

Donovan joined them with a box of rubbers. He threw them on the bed and said, "Help yourself."

Nate smirked. "Gonna watch or play, too?"

"I may watch, Nate. Do you mind?"

Nate studied him. He probably read him like an open magazine, realizing there were a lot of topics they needed to cover and only short briefings allowed due to constraints already in place.

Colby broke away from Karen's lips and seemingly passed her off to Nate, who steadily rolled the condom over his long, shapely dick until she crawled his way.

Donovan sat next to Colby. He eyed the man, not the soldier, and he tried to forget the animosity hidden under the layers of fresh hunger, new lust.

Nate's lips met Karen's long enough to assure her he'd soon return to take care of her lust, sate her desires, and pound away at a few blazing fires. He stood in between Donovan's legs. Framing his face, he said, "We don't make promises here, and we don't have battles to win tonight. We're all on the same playing field. No one is dying after the lights go out, and no one will walk out of this room a winner, outside of personal gain and intimate rewards."

Colby shot Donovan a heated look. Donovan enjoyed being on the receiving end of a horny man's stare. Nate moved away from Donovan. He kissed Colby, and their tongues dueled on the outside of their lips.

Nate reached for Donovan and pulled him closer. Soon, three tongues danced and tapped. Donovan wasn't sure who he kissed, only that he was touching tongues with Nate and Colby. As if perfectly orchestrated, Nate soon backed away, and the sounds of sex filled the room.

* * * *

Nate deserted his lovers for a woman he was beginning to respect as a seasoned operative. When he'd fallen between her thighs before, he thought of the act as a chore, one he was certain he'd never enjoy. Only, to his surprise, he did.

Now, for some reason—maybe two, in fact—he enjoyed the taste of her lips, the curve of her body and the heat from her sex. Awareness and curiosity encouraged him to look to his right as he thrust into her body. There, he saw the beginnings of lechery.

Colby and Donovan kissed one another hard. Fondling with deliberate intentions, Colby worked a condom through his hand, rolling it over Donovan as fast as his dick accepted the invasion.

Nate withdrew. "We're all taking you."

She shook her head. "I don't think I can."

Nate narrowed his gaze and then motioned for them to move closer. Rolling on his back, he brought her over him and spread her legs parallel to his. Reaching for the lube, he dipped his fingers into a jar Donovan must've brought into the room when he tossed the condoms onto the mattress.

Nate rubbed the wet substance in between her cheeks and then covered his cock in lube, too. He spread and entered her while Donovan watched with true lust seeping from his bedroom eyes.

"I won't last long," Nate growled, nipping at her shoulder. No, he wouldn't go all night with Donovan's gaze watching their bodies join together.

Colby wrapped his cock and soon rubbed lubricant everywhere. Dipping his fingers into the gel, he patted Karen's pussy with a gob of lubricant, and she whimpered when he touched her.

Donovan acted like the mere suggestion of triple penetration was more erotic than any other act he'd considered in his life. Together, they fisted their cocks. Nate withdrew a little, and Colby said, "Give us more room."

Karen gasped, and Nate kissed her ear. “You’ll love it once they get inside. Spread your legs. Relax. Enjoy us. This is what you’ve always wanted. I know it is. I can feel the difference in your body, the way you’re moist and ready, eager to feel. Just feel, Karen. That’s all you have to do, baby.”

Donovan moved to the side, arched over her hips. Colby aimed from above. Together they sank into her pussy, and she yelled out her pleasure and her pain.

“Holy fucking shit,” Donovan said, his head dropping back and his eyes wide.

Colby steadied himself by gripping Donovan’s shoulder, and when they were tightly in place, Nate sank all the way in once again.

“You okay?” he asked, breathless.

To his surprise, she replied, “God, yeah. This is every girl’s fantasy.”

“I got your fantasies, sweetheart,” he promised, nodding to Colby.

Nate sank into the pillow behind him, closed his eyes, and listened to the slapping sounds of perfect sex. Three men tapping a woman’s ass and pussy sounded musical, damn near magical.

The weight of cocks pressing together made for the most erotic of pleasures. Oh yeah, now Karen had a place. She earned hers like everyone else there. She had a profound purpose. He could see her staying right like this for a good long time.

Her cries filled the room, and the fucking continued. She grunted and groaned when each of them came. Then, she reached behind her and cupped Nate’s neck.

“Oh, Nate,” she purred.

“Yeah,” he said. “That’s right, Karen. Show us why we need you around.”

As if his words further inspired her, she bucked forward and arched back. Soon, they were pounding away at her. Colby and Donovan pumped their cocks into her pussy, and Nate claimed her ass.

Donovan stroked her breasts like he'd never seen tits before, and Nate wondered. Perhaps he'd never taken a woman, and if not, with Colby's dick next to his, rubbing away, gaining the most intense pleasure with the added friction, Donovan might end up hooked. Maybe they all would.

Chapter Seventeen

A loud bang and then an earth shattering boom went off around two in the morning. Nate quickly stood, stepped into his pants, and was staring at the disturbed beach when the others joined him.

“What the fuck?” Donovan glared at the smoldering earth and the hole in the ground less than fifty feet away.

Nate eyed Colby. Better prepared than Nate, Colby exited the cabana with his weapons and Nate’s bag, loaded down with his personal gear. Donovan’s weapon of choice imprinted his pants. Dumb fucker was still horny.

Then again, Nate walked out into the open completely unarmed. He wasn’t in any position to judge.

Colby stared down the beach. “Get inside,” he snapped over his shoulder, pointing at the tourists who also stepped onto their porches and soon rushed onto the beach.

“He’s right,” Nate said, pushing the door open. “And get ready.”

“We need to move,” Karen stated flatly.

“Switching positions now isn’t an option,” Nate told her.

Donovan further explained. “We’ve got company, and those visiting must’ve been unsure of which cabana offered the most hospitality.”

“Get cover, now!” Nate barked.

They rushed inside, and Nate started unloading his duffle. Donovan went to the room he planned to occupy and quickly retrieved more guns and knives while Colby stood guard and Karen, for some reason, took the time to fully dress. Then, she loaded and

locked her gun of choice, a sniper rifle Nate didn't know she even possessed.

Nate stood to the side of one window in the front room. Colby took his position at the other.

Karen said, "Maybe it's a freak thing."

"Like what, beautiful?" Nate snarled. "Think a meteor fell from the sky and landed a few feet from where we're staying?"

"I searched the faces of those who were on the beach. No one looked familiar," she said.

"You think you know all of Shoemaker's trainees?" Nate asked.

"I hand selected some of them," she said proudly.

Donovan raised a brow, and Nate said, "There were others chosen you didn't know about. I'll promise you. And those are the fellows Shoemaker sent here."

"For all you know, there could be a few women among them, too," Karen pointed out.

Colby shook his head. "Don't count on female operatives. They are few and far between."

"Shoemaker didn't send women in here for us," Nate said.

"Oh, I forgot," she teased, rolling her eyes. "The three of you are such bullies, even the toughest ISOs fear you."

"Damn right," Donovan said, inching toward the back room.

Colby glared at Nate. He still didn't trust Donovan, and what if Colby's instincts were right? What if they were fighting the enemy from the inside out, and one of those standing beside them delivered the final death call?

"Donovan," Nate yelled, glancing at Colby. "Come here and cover me."

Karen intently studied him as Nate loaded and locked three weapons, shoved a few knives in his combat boots, and grabbed a couple of grenades. The concern in her eyes showed he earned more than the woman's devotion. Oh yeah, he had her dick-whipped all right.

Nate winked and stepped back outside. The soot from the burning object blowing his way choked him. He felt like a giant when he finally stepped onto the beach and walked toward the folks gathering near the debris.

Immediately, eyes flashed toward him. Heads turned, and while many of them acknowledged him with a wearisome hello or a question or two—since he apparently looked the part of a man-in-the-know—he kept his gaze moving.

The enemy was upon them. He wanted to know where to aim, where to fire, and which man wanted his first delivered shot.

* * * *

“I don’t like it,” Donovan blurted out suddenly.

“You don’t like what?” Colby asked, peering around the flimsy blinds again, trying to see through the crowd surrounding the small fire.

Karen moved closer. If Colby cared to guess, if he needed her, she’d back him up and take his side over Donovan’s. Of course he couldn’t imagine her as a true asset and hated to rely on a woman in the first place.

“Think about this, Colby,” Donovan began. “Nate is the strongest ISO in the field.”

Colby glared at Donovan. He studied him and hoped to see his motives revealed, if he had any. He believed he possessed a few.

“Well, I mean, outside of me, that is.”

“You think you’re that good, darlin’?” Colby drawled, sarcastically.

“Damn, you’re almost as good as Nate when it comes to being an asshole,” Donovan said.

Colby spotted a few men, larger than the rest at the far end of the beach. “Nate has company,” he said, aiming his gun. “Karen, get that sniper rifle ready. Go to Donovan’s room. You’ll have your shot.

Three targets are in khaki shorts, light blue polo shirts. Damn, they look sweet, almost like triplets.”

Donovan positioned himself at the other front window. He looked out and then quickly backed away. “This is bullshit! They’re gonna take him out first!”

Storming the door, Donovan hurriedly drew two knives. By the time he hit the beach, Nate most likely saw the men approaching him.

Colby called out over his shoulder. “Take the one in the middle, Karen!”

He didn’t have a clear shot. God in heaven, help him. He was going to watch Nate die if he didn’t move.

“I can take him,” she called back.

“Wait for confirmation. If you see a weapon, take the shot.”

Donovan approached Nate. Donovan hooked his arm around his waist and embraced him.

Colby lowered his gun and rushed the door. “What the fuck is he doing?”

“Three weapons!” Karen called.

“Take out the middle man!” Colby called out, hurrying down the steps and out to the beach. Damn, he made an error in judgment. He gave the order for the inside shot when he credited Donovan far too much.

Damn. Damn. Damn.

He ran toward the lower sandy shores, his heart in his throat. “Nate!”

Nate turned, his face drawn in agony. Colby drew his weapon, certain he would use it to eliminate Donovan, a turncoat like he suspected from the beginning.

Then, he saw Donovan’s arms raise high above his head. The man in the middle drew his weapon and pointed, aimed, and fired.

Colby turned toward the cabana. “Take your fucking shot!” he screamed.

The ISO fell as soon as he fired his piece, but he was able to release the first round before he met his fate.

Donovan whirled the knives, fell to the ground, rolled over Nate and fully covered him. Under Donovan's large form lay a much larger body.

"Nate!" Colby screamed again. Kneeling beside them, Donovan looked up. "He's all right, but he was stabbed when I approached. Get him back to the hut and stay there."

"Nate?" Colby didn't know who to trust. Even though he watched Donovan take out two men for the sake of saving Nate. Who drew on him? Who was close enough to stab Nate in the gut?

Only Donovan, he convinced himself. No one else was close enough.

Colby pulled Donovan off of him and glared into his eyes. "You think I'm stupid? You son of a bitch!"

Nate shook his head and swiped at his eyes, pushing himself up. "It's a scrape," he told them, standing. "And..." he knelt down and picked up a hunting knife covered in blood and sand. Instantly, he held his palm to his stomach. "I know who threw this one." Looking around, he said. "You were wrong, Colby. They've sent in a woman, and she's mingling with the tourists."

Chapter Eighteen

“Tell me I have dead ISOs,” Admiral Shoemaker barked when he answered the phone the following evening.

He instantly heard the reply he waited all night to receive. “Three.”

Shoemaker smiled. “Excellent! Remind me to increase your salary next month. You completed the mission long before expectations.”

A long silence separated the distance, and Shoemaker’s mood quickly soured. “You don’t mean three targets, do you?”

“No, sir.”

“Three of ours?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What the fuck happened out there?”

The female ISO in charge said, “Sir, we had a few complications with the plan we put in place. There were too many tourists on the beach after the explosion, and we didn’t see Donovan Collier after Francisco moved into plain sight.”

“What do you mean you didn’t see him?”

“He appeared out of nowhere and yanked Francisco under his body to shield him or maybe to use him as one. Then, he took out two of our guys with combat knives.

Shoemaker rubbed his chin. Donovan Collier delivered more kills by deadly knife throws than most ISOs claimed with their guns. “You said we have three dead?”

“Yes, sir. A sniper’s rifle took out the third.”

Shoemaker swallowed hard. “You’re sure it was a sniper?” He knew who favored those more than anyone in the field.

“Yes, and Admiral Shoemaker?”

“What is it?” he snapped.

“I don’t think the shooter was Carrington. Colby was on the beach rushing for the other two when the shot fired.”

Damn it! “I see.”

“So we may, in fact, have four targets?”

Shoemaker thoughtfully considered the ISO’s question. Then, he said, “No, I don’t think so. If you have another shooter, she’s going to get in the way, maybe even in the line of fire.”

“She?” the operative questioned.

Shoemaker hung up the phone. He didn’t want to explain. He cursed himself for allowing Karen Whitaker to leave his office armed with contempt. He wouldn’t grant her the satisfaction of having a professional hit out for her. Oh no, he’d deal with her all by himself.

* * * *

Sharon looked at Darby. Her pale face flashed a hint of her confusion and her eyes burned bright with betrayal. For the last few days, they dined in the lunch hall together and enjoyed long conversations. Now, Darby had the young nurse tied and bound to a chair in a hallway closet while he quickly changed into her nurse's uniform.

Under most circumstances, he might have felt guilty.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he said, ripping the back out of the scrubs she typically wore. “I won’t make it past security.”

She shook her head and tried to mumble something. The gag he placed in her mouth prevented her words from forming. She continually shivered.

Darby pulled a white blanket from one of the linen shelves and tossed the cotton material over her trembling body. “Sharon,” he said coolly, “I want to thank you for all of this. You’ll never know how much I appreciate you.”

Her eyes widened, and the tears fell. He swiped them away and framed her face.

“I’m not crazy,” he began. “I’m gay. I’m a gay man with a father who is in a high-ranking position in the military. He arranged all of this.”

She closed her eyes. Poor thing probably thought he was indeed psychotic and very delusional.

“Listen to me,” he said, dropping to his knees and placing his palms on hers. “I’m really not sick. I’m in love with a man. That’s all. If love makes a person crazy, then I can only hope I remain forever insane.”

She blinked a few times.

He rose and continued to try and work her scrubs over him. They were far too short, and if anyone moved his long coat out of the way, they would instantly realize another problem, too. He wasn’t the appropriate owner of nurse’s scrubs.

Taking a deep breath, he started to turn the doorknob, but then paused and said, “I know I don’t have the right to ask you this, but if you happen to see or hear from my father, do me a favor?”

She glared at him, and he waited only a second for a grunt or mumble. When he didn’t receive either, he said, “Tell him I’ve gone to find Donovan. And tell him when I do, I plan to love him for a lifetime.”

* * * *

Darby was in touch with one of the ISO commanders within the hour. He asked to meet him privately and fully anticipated the arrival of his father. Commander Lucas showed up all alone, as he originally promised.

Meeting in a warehouse, Darby watched him for about ten minutes before he swung from the rafters and landed in front of him.

“Darby,” Commander Lucas greeted him. “I see you’re up to your usual tactics.”

“Thank you for meeting me,” he said, shaking the commander’s hand when he offered an open palm.

Commander Lucas narrowed his gaze. “What’s this about, Darby?”

“I’m not sick,” he said, quickly moving past any possible judgments.

“I never thought you were, and if I had, you would’ve met an army here today, or at least your father.”

“All right,” Darby said. “So you came here alone?”

“You already know I did, or else you wouldn’t have shown your face. What can I do for you, Darby?”

“I want to find Donovan Collier.”

“I can’t help you.”

“Commander, you know where he is.”

He shook his head. “Even if I did, Darby, I wouldn’t tell you.”

Darby flinched. Hell yeah, he knew where he was. He could lead him there. “Do I have anything I can trade you for the information?”

“I never took you for one to swap tales and favors.”

“I need to find Collier.”

“Why not call him by his first name, even with me? I know the two of you were lovers.”

Darby nodded. “Okay, so you know. I don’t care. I need to find him, and you’re my only hope.”

“What if he doesn’t want to be found?”

“I think my father has something planned for him,” he quickly stated.

“Like what?”

Darby paced, scratching his head. “I don’t know. It’s just a feeling.”

“I need something to go on more than your gut.”

“Why? The best ISOs out there today are those with a sixth sense no one can match.”

“You expect me to give up another ISO’s location based on your gut instinct?”

“Yes,” Darby said.

“No, Darby. I’m sorry, but your request isn’t related to business. It’s personal, and I can’t get involved.”

“My father is going to kill him,” he blurted out.

Commander Lucas tugged at his long suit sleeves. He still wore his military uniform even though he had been an independent special operative and later a commanding officer within the group for over fifteen years.

“You’re making foul accusations,” he said.

“It’s true.”

“On what basis?” Commander Lucas demanded clarification.

“I know this sounds—”

“Insane?” he asked. “You’re damn right.”

“No, listen to me,” Darby pleaded. “Dad has a hatred for Donovan. He also has equal disgust for Colby Carrington.”

Raising a brow, he asked, “Carrington? What does Casey Carrington’s boy have to do with this?”

The son of one of the most affluent senators in the nation gained the attention Darby desired. “Colby is with Donovan isn’t he?”

Commander Lucas changed his stance. He stared at Darby and said, “I can’t help you.”

“Do you know why they’re together?”

“They’re on a mission, Darby. That’s all. They’re on a mission with—” Commander Lucas stopped. “Oh. My. God.”

“If you don’t tell me where I can find them, then you’re allowing my father to take out ISOs who’ve had millions of dollars invested in their training and salaries, never mind their weapons and equipment.”

“Darby, what do you know about Nate Francisco?”

Darby stared at him in disbelief. No one mentioned Francisco to him. “Only rumors.”

“Are the rumors true?”

“Are you kidding me? My father, queer? Commander, that’s far-fetched and a rumor without substance. Remember why my dad sent me away.”

“Nate Francisco and Colby Carrington are two seasoned operatives working on a secret mission only four commanding officers have recently uncovered. The mission lacked merit. Francisco and Carrington are with Donovan.”

Darby’s mouth fell open with his plea. “You gotta tell me where they are. My father is going to kill them.”

“And you’re basing this on what?” he demanded again.

The truth hit him square in the face. “He’s removing the obstacles in my life while doing away with the one distraction he has in his. Now, Commander Lucas, where will I find these three operatives, and what are you going to do to help save our organization from losing three of its best men?”

Chapter Nineteen

Three Days Later

“Nate,” Donovan said, joining him on the beach, “Colby’s been sitting on the porch for the last hour with his sights on you. Don’t you think you could come back to the hut and give the poor guy a break?”

“I didn’t ask him to cover me,” Nate bit out, staring at the water.

“He’s got your back anyway.”

Nate stared at the calm waters. “And what about you, Donovan? Do you have my back?” Slowly, he turned and faced the man he wanted to trust.

Raising a brow, he said, “What are you asking me?”

Nate took a deep breath. “They say a killer knows when his time is up. There’s something about death and the way it whispers for a man. I’ve heard an assassin who spills blood for a living is unable to smell the stench spilling from his victims when their own blood boils hot. Their own death scent fills their nostrils and consumes them. Some killers claim when it’s an assassin’s turn to die, death chases him straight into his grave. Assassins wait for death with honor, but because they wait, they become careless and easy targets.”

“Have you been drinking?” Donovan asked.

“No,” he said cupping Donovan’s neck. Gazing into his eyes, he said, “I want to know where you stand.”

“You know.”

Nate allowed a smile to shape his lips. “If I did, I wouldn’t ask.”

Donovan caressed his knee. God help him, the feel of Donovan’s hand squeezing his leg left him longing for more.

“I’m fighting *with you*, Nate.”

“And by taking my side, you stand with Colby, too,” he stated flatly.

“Yes,” he said. “And even that damnable Karen.”

Nate chuckled. “She’s growing on me.”

Donovan reached over and patted Nate's erection. “I’m growing on you.”

Nate licked his lips. “Yeah, maybe,” he said, standing.

Donovan pressed his palm to Nate’s cock. “Want me to remind you of why we make a good team?”

Nate noticed the deserted beach then. Unusual for the time of day, it made him quickly turn and look toward their island accommodations. “Where did you say Colby is?”

“On the porch,” Donovan muttered, kneeling in front of him and using his teeth to tease by taking the band of his shorts between them.

“Donovan, get up,” Nate spat before taking off in a sprint, drawing his gun in the process. The butt of the gun snagged at the back of his belt, causing the fear to spin with more certainty. Colby was in danger. They left themselves open for target practice, and Colby became the bull's-eye.

“Nate, wait!”

Nate heard Colby’s voice right as panic struck. He turned around, and spotted Donovan who pointed toward a nearby hut. There, hunched low, he saw Colby pointing toward their cabana. “They have Karen.”

“Shit!” Nate bit out, joining him with Donovan on his heels. “How’d they get inside?”

“Came through the back,” Colby said. “I didn’t have time to get in there. She yelled out something about two visitors, and then I heard a yelp.”

“Is she still alive?” Donovan asked.

“I don’t know,” Colby said. “I couldn’t get close enough to peek in the windows.”

“Hell no, you couldn’t,” Nate snapped.

Donovan shook his head. “Of course not, we have to protect the inexperienced team members.”

Colby clenched his fists. “Shut the fuck up, Collier.”

Nate quickly analyzed their current position. He looked to the left and then the right. A sniper could take all three of them out from Donovan’s bedroom window. “We have to move. Split up, now!”

Hurriedly, he rolled under the porch, kicking out the latticework around the structure. He never saw where Donovan disappeared to, but Colby soon showed up on the other side of the porch, crawling under the interlace grid and sliding under the house too.

“I said, split up.”

“Shit, Nate. We both know you’re going for the water. I can cover you better from here.”

“I’m not moving toward the sea until nightfall.”

“She’ll be dead by then.”

Nate pursed his lips. Yes, more than likely, the lovely Karen Whitaker would meet her death before they had the chance to save her. Unless, of course, the sneaking suspicion he had from the beginning held some measure of truth and accuracy.

“She’s on the inside,” he said.

Colby glared at him. “There’s no way.”

“Yes,” he whispered. “She is.”

“She took out one of Shoemaker’s guys,” Colby reminded him.

“For show,” he said. “She’s looking to make a name for herself.”

“Bullshit, Nate. You’re paranoid.”

“No,” he balked. “I think she wants to establish herself as a natural born killer, maybe even move into the position of a training commander once Shoemaker is removed.”

“Removed?”

“Hell yes,” Nate said. “And see, that’s where we come in. Karen needs us to draw out Shoemaker. When we dispose of the ISOs he’s

sent in here, he'll come to Rarotonga himself. She needs us to take him out."

"When did you come up with such a theory?"

"About the time you said someone came through the back door. Karen had the damn thing locked and wired. The back of the hut would've blown to hell and back if someone triggered the door by walking inside."

"Who rigged the device?" Colby asked cautiously.

"Karen," Nate said. "And she didn't know I saw her run the wire."

"So you're saying she had to disable it?"

"Exactly. Donovan didn't know about the door. An outside invasion guaranteed a small explosion. I looked. No one was at risk if they opened the door from the inside, but an outsider turning the knob would've had less than five seconds."

"So they're not going to hurt her?"

They heard someone step out onto the porch, and Nate pressed his finger to his lips and held his palm to Colby's mouth. When the front screen slammed and the intruder walked back inside, Nate said, "She took a damn gamble when she turned on us, but I'm willing to bet she forms an alliance with the guys upstairs."

"What if she's testing us? What if she wants to know where our loyalty lies as much as we've wanted to know whether or not we could trust her?"

"Too damn bad," Nate growled. "She fucked up if she put us on trial. I won't risk our necks to save hers. Not now, not ever."

* * * *

Karen made a serious error in judgment when she released the wire on the back door. She wanted to open up the back of the house and allow the breeze to blow through the cabana. She never counted on company in the middle of the afternoon.

The ISOs holding her had cold eyes. They were young and green, and both men had something to prove. She understood the young guns and the way they thought. They wanted to take their shots, have their first assignments complete and tidy so they could earn their first paycheck and receive their well earned praise.

The two operatives secured her in a fetal position, bound by her hands and feet. Then, they left her on the floor. She looked around for anything she could later use, a hidden knife or even a razor blade. If she found anything to cut the ropes confining her, she'd run like hell and find Nate.

Oh, God, where was Nate? Why wasn't he there to save her?

She swallowed hard. What if he still didn't trust her? What if they were going to let her take the first fall for them simply because of a grave error, a mistake she shouldn't have made?

She heard an operative say something about Shoemaker. Then, the other one left the room. She heard some low babbling, a conversation in progress a few rooms down the hall. Unable to make out the words, she tried to remain calm and think of a plan to put into motion, but strategies were hard to devise given her current predicament.

Blinking, she looked up at the window and saw Donovan peer in and then duck again. Her heart raced. Thank God, she thought. Donovan would help her. He waited for his chance, the perfect opportunity to strike.

Kneeling, one of the operatives said, "Miss Whitaker is it?"

Glaring, she said, "Who wants to know?"

"Dumb bitch," the ISO said, drawing back to strike.

The other ISO blocked the punch. "Wait a second. We don't want to mess up her face. The admiral wants her all pretty when he pays her a visit. Admiral Shoemaker seems to have a particular fondness for you, little lady."

"I bet," she groaned. "The only fondness he has is for men who can suck cock and women who pretend to think of him as a man with heterosexual desires."

“I beg your pardon,” the operative who almost struck her choked back his amusement.

Laughing, she said, “Ah, don’t tell me. You boys didn’t know about Admiral Thomas F. Shoemaker’s fetish for guys in uniform?”

She glanced over their shoulders and saw Donovan again. He pointed toward the door and then mouthed something. She assumed he wanted to know how many ISOs guarded her. She blinked twice, tilting her head toward the men crouched over her. They immediately turned to look behind them. He ducked.

Distracting them, she said, “The two of you are crazy if you think you won’t soon have the same mark on your heads. Why don’t you take a peek in a mirror when you get a chance?”

“Strong, tough, military men like you two, with good bodies and handsome looks to match?” She made a throaty sound and added, “Oh yeah, Shoemaker will use you to take out Nate, Donovan, and Colby. Then, he’ll put someone on you because you look good enough to suck and swallow. Shoemaker doesn’t like the men who refuse to let him dine.”

The ISO closest to her said, “I see why the admiral wants to handle you by himself. You have a smart mouth, don’t you?”

“I get by,” she said, smiling, truly happy to see Donovan sneaking up on them then.

Whirling his knife, he took the two operatives out before they knew what hit them and then turned to her and said, “Come on, let’s get you out of here.”

Cutting the ropes and helping her to her feet, Nate and Colby entered with their weapons drawn.

Nate immediately stormed forward. He gripped her forearms and shook her. “What the fuck were you thinking?” he screamed, never noticing the blood pooling at the necks of Donovan’s victims.

“I made a mistake!”

“You’re damn right you did,” Nate said, anger boiling hotter and hotter. “You could’ve gotten yourself killed.” He drew his gun and held it to her head. “I should finish you here.”

Karen’s eyes watered. She felt the moisture pooling at the corners, and she couldn’t see any of them through the tears welling over her pupils. “Then go ahead! Pull the fucking trigger!”

He cocked the gun, and Donovan said, “Put it down, Nate.”

“She’s trying to set us up,” he spat from the corner of his mouth.

“The hell I am,” she fired back.

“She would’ve turned on all of us,” Nate said.

“Fuck, Nate,” Donovan said. “I heard the whole conversation.”

His lips thinned, and she saw his brow crinkle. He wanted to pull the trigger. God help her, he wanted to take the shot and watch her lifeless form fall to the floor.

“I’m not your enemy here, Nate,” she said quietly.

“The hell you aren’t.”

“Nate,” Colby said. “She’s not. You were wrong. We’re running on adrenaline and without enough sleep to process information. Drop the gun, please.”

Nate shook his head once, swallowing over and over again. “I’m not going out because you can’t decide which side you want to stand on when we start firing these guns.” He pressed the revolver against her head one last time. Then, he reluctantly lowered his firearm.

Pain-stricken, her head throbbed as badly as it might have if he had used the weapon to deliver a close-range blow.

“Damn it!” he screamed, stalking away. “I saw you set the bomb at the back door.”

“She did what?” Donovan asked, turning to Karen.

“I armed it, but I knew you saw me, Nate. I only disarmed the damn thing because I wanted to let the breeze blow through the hut while we were covering you.”

“I don’t need you covering me, Karen. In case you haven’t noticed, I’m pretty capable of taking care of myself.”

She rubbed her head, and Colby studied her. Trying to please Nate, the son of a bitch wasn't going to side with her now when Nate was clearly wrong and out of hand.

"You," Nate said, pointing, "need to take the first flight out of here. You're trying to get us all killed."

"Oh sure, you know what? You're right. That's exactly what I'm doing." Karen slammed her hands against his rock hard chest. "The only thing I'm doing here is trying to save your mother fucking ass!"

With too much passion released in the way she screamed, never mind the tears streaming across her face, she realized then that Nate saw everything he needed to see. Through blurred vision, she backed away from him and she cried. Damn it all, she bawled like a baby.

Embarrassed, she ran into one of the bedrooms—the one they planned to let her have for herself—and she leapt onto the bed face down. Sobbing like a sentimental, never mind fragile, woman, she buried her sorrow in the mattress.

Yes, undoubtedly, Nate and the others now knew where she stood. A woman stood by her man. A lover fought beside her greatest loves. Karen realized then she had to face the truth.

She was one hundred percent committed to Nate Francisco. She also loved the hell out of him.

Chapter Twenty

“Does he know?” Karen was on the bed with her hands folded under her chin when Donovan walked inside the bedroom. She had long since cried her last tear, and now anger consumed her.

Donovan snickered, sat down next to her and said, “That you’re in love with him?”

“Funny.”

“No, Karen, it’s not. And, yes, I think he has a pretty good idea of how you feel.”

“I hope not.”

Donovan grinned. “Why? You don’t want him to have the pleasure of knowing he makes your heart beat a little faster?”

“He makes it stop altogether,” she said, rolling over and staring at Donovan.

“Yeah, well, welcome to my world.”

Gazing into his eyes, Karen said, “We could all stick together. You know we could. We’re going to have to run anyway, Donovan. There’s no way we’ll beat Shoemaker.”

“He’s going down, hon. Nate won’t leave here until Shoemaker comes for him.”

“He’ll come. He’s already on his way according to those two you killed.”

“Did you tell Nate?”

“I heard,” Nate said, walking inside the bedroom. “I was with Colby under the porch, and we could hear bits and pieces of the conversation.”

Karen swallowed. “Get out of my room.”

“That’s real mature,” Nate said, leaning inside the doorframe. “Bet you get off on telling big, bad guys what to do.”

Donovan patted her hip and rose to his feet. “I’ll let you two talk this all out.”

“Don’t go,” she pleaded, grasping his forearm.

Searching her eyes, he said, “Karen, why don’t you tell him what you told me.”

“I didn’t tell you anything. You assumed.”

“I spoke the truth. Now he needs to hear it.”

Without waiting for her reply, Donovan moved by Nate. They exchanged a heated glance, and then Nate said, “I’ll be out there in a minute.”

“No hurry,” he said.

Nate stepped inside and closed the door.

“You need to turn right back around and march your sorry ass out of my room.”

“I do?” he asked, unbuttoning his shirt.

Oh, God, why did he have to look at her like he wanted to fuck her in order to make things better?

Dropping his shirt on the bed, he unhooked his belt. “Get out of your clothes, or I’m going to rip them off of you.”

She shivered. Why the hell was she so cold?

“Are you scared?”

“Fuck no!” she blurted, jumping from the bed. She hurried for the door, and he blocked her.

“Have it your way,” he said, warning her only a second before ripping her shirt away from her body. “Want the shorts in shreds, too?”

“Why are you doing this?”

He placed his palms on either side of her head. “Because you started this, and I’m going to finish it.”

Her heart pounded, pounded, pounded. God help her, Nate Francisco was the man she loved. He made her heart beat faster one

minute and stole her breath away the very next. “What are you going to do, Nate? Fuck me or kill me?”

He laughed outright.

“Something funny?”

“Yeah,” he said, dropping his mouth to hers and claiming her lips. “God, yeah, there’s something comical about all of this...especially this.”

Opening wider, his tongue swept into her mouth and swirled around her tongue until she didn’t resist him, couldn’t push him away when her hands defied her and continued to draw him near. He framed her face with his hands—God, she loved that—and made love to her mouth like he enjoyed kissing her more than anything in the world.

Blindsided, she stepped back, losing her balance. Breaking free of his kiss, she regained her composure and said, “You didn’t answer me.”

Nate backed up, stumbled to the bed and fell against it. Motioning for her, he crooked his finger back and forth. “I don’t want to kill you.” He tugged his cock from his shorts and then pushed them away from his buttocks and hips.

Threading his penis in between large fingers, he looked down at his self-inflicted hand job, slowly licked his full mouth and said, “I can do this or you can. Take your pick.”

Smirking, she reached for the doorknob and said, “Since you seem to have everything under control, go for it.”

She opened the door, shook her head, and stepped into the hall. There, Donovan stood with his arms crossed.

“Great,” she mumbled.

He shrugged. “You wanted Nate. You got him. And you can keep him all night long.”

She whipped around and glared. “You set this whole thing up.”

“No, sweetheart, you did,” Nate said. “From the moment you came here, you knew what you wanted. I need to find out if you think the effort was a wasted one.”

“I’m—”

Donovan moved forward and whispered in her ear, “You’re wet. I’d put money on it.” With his hand at her waist, he pushed her back inside the room and sealed off the door once more.

Nate pumped his cock up and down. “Come here, Karen.”

“I—”

“You’re in love with me, I know.”

Damn him. Damn him.

He winked. “What’s not to love?”

“Plenty,” she promised.

He sat up then and reached for her. “Then fuck me. Prove me wrong.”

She considered her options. Trying to get Donovan to move, which wasn’t possible given her smaller form, or taking the ride of a lifetime, one where she could enjoy Nate all by herself.

Stepping to the bed, she finished undressing. Her bra fell to the mattress, and she removed her shorts and thong, completely saturated with her wet heat.

With her first attempt to join him on the bed, he yanked her forward. Her knees immediately parted over his head, and he assaulted her pussy lips, his tongue stroking deep inside her walls until she wasn’t just drenched with lust but overcome with a desire so thick she felt certain of her own death...by drowning.

* * * *

Nate never sipped on a woman’s pussy. He wasn’t attracted to women. He only fucked them when necessary, when the job required such an impossible situation.

“I don’t enjoy women,” he said, licking her labia and tossing her off of him so he could only come back and attack her pussy again. His tongue waggled at her entrance. Stretching out between her legs, he ran his fingers through her pussy lips and sipped at her vagina.

“Uh-huh,” she said, “I know.”

He cupped her bottom and raised her higher. His chin was moist, covered with her fragrance, her sweet honey smell driving him to the brink of madness.

Slowly, he rose over her. Her beaded nipples drew slow swipes, and he sucked on one breast, then the other. “God, help me.”

“Nate,” she said, arching to him. “Love me. Please Nate, love me.”

He looked down at the woman begging for something he didn’t know how to give. A beautiful woman, strong in the field and yet so gentle with him, and he couldn’t offer a response.

She looped her arms around his neck and pulled him into another long, delicious kiss. The taste of her filled his senses, and she didn’t seem to notice or mind when their lips collided. He was tired of bracing himself for the worst, tired of running from the gunfire at his back. He wanted a woman, he wanted two men, and he wanted to take care of them. Not out of duty, but because he longed to belong to them.

“Nate,” she hummed, spreading her legs. “Please.”

Hurting for relief, he slid inside her, and she locked her ankles behind his back. He studied her as he pumped inside of her, filling her with his size and stroking her with every inch he could stuff inside her tight walls.

“Love me,” she whispered again.

God help him! He didn’t know how! In and out, he moved. Her hips rolled forward, and he pulled her to him, never breaking their sealed connection. Bringing her over him, she sat erect, riding his cock.

“Nate,” she moaned, her hair framing her face. “Give me what I need.”

Semen burned at the base of his shaft, and he remembered the condom, the one he didn’t have, the one he wasn’t taking the time to find. He wanted this, right here, right now. The wild and free fucking and the woman on top of him, grinding.

“I’m coming!” she screamed.

“You’re mine,” he said, raising up to bite at her nipple playfully and then collapsing against the bed.

“Nate,” she said, shaking as the orgasm washed over her. “Nate, please come.”

Burying her hands in his chest hairs, she scraped her nails down his stomach. She rose and fell over his cock, pushing down on her fingertips as she worked to help him find his release.

When he felt the burn rise in his cock, he shifted his position, rolled her sated body under him and fucked her with deliberate strokes. In and out, he drove into her pussy. Taking his climax and then making sure she rode out another, he fell against her and kissed her as crazy madness flooded his better judgment.

When the kiss broke, he said, “You belong to me now, to us. You wanted me to take care of you, Karen, and so help me, I’ll keep you safe. It’s all I can offer you right now, but it’s a start.”

His words were a sincere promise, one he planned to move heaven and earth to keep.

Chapter Twenty-One

Darby Winslow sat on the beach with binoculars. He watched the cabana for signs of movement but didn't expect to see much. It was four o'clock in the morning, and he spent half the night locating Donovan and his friends.

His friends.

Damn it to hell, Darby thought. His friends were probably letting him fuck them morning, noon, and night.

Darby came there to profess his love, but he also flew to the islands to save him. His father wanted Donovan dead, and he had to warn him. The mission was a deadly one, an assignment where they could all lose their lives.

Spotting a dark shadow next to the large cabana, Darby saw someone move toward the water. Immediately, he refocused the field glasses and studied the hut. Did someone leave the cabana and he didn't see them?

No, he thought, he couldn't start doubting himself now. He never moved from his spot, and with an unobstructed view, he saw now that the form wasn't one of the registered guests of the large beach cabana. Instead, he watched a stalker, a killer looming, anticipating the right time to move in for the kill.

* * * *

Nate stroked her hair. Karen was what he needed, he thought. A soft and fragile woman with tough as nails attitude, she brought

something into his life he'd missed and never realized before meeting her.

He wanted both. He wasn't a gay man, but rather a bisexual individual. Who would've thought? Snickering, he toyed with her nipple. His fingers ran over the contour of her breast, and he pinched the little gem tight, trying to wake her.

Sound asleep, she moaned once and rolled over.

Amused, he spooned her, his chest firmly against her back. "Wake up a minute," he urged, fisting his dick and rubbing the head against her bottom.

"Nate!" Colby rushed inside and tossed him a gun. "Company on the beach, let's go."

Karen sat straight up. "Nate?" She rubbed her eyes as he told her to wait there.

"What? Are you crazy?" Donovan asked, joining them. "She's a sitting duck here."

Karen stood up and slid into her shorts, grabbing a T-shirt from the top of her luggage, along with a few grenades, a knife, and of course, her sniper rifle.

"You really need to consider packing lighter," Nate said, patting her bottom.

Colby and Donovan looked at one another in shock. "Nice," Donovan said, amused.

Nate slapped him on the back. "Hurry up, let's move. Keep an eye on her," he said in parting.

Colby and Nate inched forward, taking one cautious step at a time. When they came to the end of the hallway, they saw two shooters straight ahead, waiting for them on the porch.

"Get down!" Colby screamed.

Donovan shifted behind them, and Nate heard him yell out, "Karen! Down! Now!"

The guns blared as bullets ricocheted here and there. Two men brought down as much hell as perhaps they would have found in front of a firing squad. And they didn't miss all of their targets.

* * * *

"Stay down," Nate bellowed after the smoke cleared.

"Shit!" Colby shouted, walking through the debris and across shards of broken glass. His heart skipped a few too many beats and gasping, he called out, "Nate, are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said, his heavy footsteps moving closer and closer.

Colby tried to see through the foggy mist. "How about you, Donovan?"

"They got out," Nate said.

"Thank God," Colby said, trying to find a light switch.

Nothing worked in the front room thanks to the aftermath of the battle they never expected right at daybreak.

"We were ready, Nate. They were just better prepared," Colby explained.

Nate's eyes were glassy when he approached. Colby had seen that look before. His adrenaline pumped harder and harder, and Nate turned into the deadly killer the ISO had trained him to become.

"Nate!" Donovan shouted from the back of the house. "Colby!" Rushing down the hall, he hit a light switch and amazingly, the damn thing worked. He tripped then, and Colby gasped.

"Oh my God," Donovan said, looking down.

Nate froze. Colby rushed down the hallway and fell to Karen's lifeless form. "Karen!" He shook her over and over again. "Karen! Damn it to hell!"

Donovan crouched over her, too. "She's gone, man."

"No," he said, feeling for a pulse. Turning fast, he glared at Nate. "Damn you! Do something!"

Nate's eyes set. He couldn't move. Knowing Nate, he didn't want to see the proof death provided, and he damn sure didn't want to feel anything more than what he needed to feel right then. Stark madness, fighting fury, and pure rage filled the area when Nate screamed out his anger, mad at the entire universe and ready to fight a war against anyone who wanted one.

* * * *

Two hours passed. Donovan helped Colby clean up the mess of glass and splintered wood chips. Then he said, "We have to bag her body, Colby."

"No," he snapped. "Not until Nate deals with her death."

Donovan stared down at her. "You can't expect me to leave her like this until he comes back. What if someone from guest services comes down here?"

"They won't."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because Shoemaker has placed a call by now, and he's informed them of a mission in progress. He's smoothed it over and explained how we are almost ready to tidy up loose ends. He'll reassure them about damages he'll pay and promise to have us out by the day after tomorrow, if not tomorrow."

Donovan walked into his room, grabbed the appropriate death kit and pulled out the body bag and solution to saturate her body. Sorrow consumed him. "We should have protected her."

"We didn't," Nate said, glaring from the backdoor.

"Nate, I told him to wait," Colby began. "I thought—"

"I need a minute," he said.

"Sure," Donovan said, dropping the bag.

Colby studied Karen one last time. "Women have no reason to align themselves with the organization. This is what happens."

Nate knelt beside her. He picked up her small hand, and he cupped his larger ones around her fingers. “No,” he muttered. “This is what happens when you fall in love with the wrong man. This is what happens when you allow yourself to feel.”

“That’s not right, Nate,” Colby said.

“Isn’t it?”

“No,” Donovan took Colby’s position. “She was careless, anyway, Nate. She needed protection, and we failed to protect her. End of story.”

Nate closed his eyes. He thought of the recent promise he made. He couldn’t tell her he loved her because he didn’t believe in lying to someone in matters of the heart. What he promised, he fully intended to deliver. He swore to keep her safe.

He failed.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Is the woman dead?”

“Yes,” the operative told Admiral Shoemaker.

“Good,” he replied. “I suppose she’s the only one?”

“Yes.”

“Any further complications?”

“No, sir,” the female operative said. “At least, I don’t think so.”

“What do you mean? You should know whether or not you face other obstacles.”

“Sir, we think there’s another operative here. Do you have another ISO in place outside of those we’re watching and those who arrived with my team?”

“No,” he said, brooding. “Your ISOs are the only operatives approved for this mission. Outside of Francisco, Carrington, and Collier, you shouldn’t encounter other operatives.”

The agent said, “We’re not sure whether or not the guy is with the organization, but there is definitely someone else watching the bungalow.”

“Who is he?”

“We don’t know.”

Shoemaker’s blood ran dry. He felt every ounce of it drain. “Find out and report back to me. I’ll be there tomorrow, and when I land, I want to know what the guy looks like, what his name is, who he works for and what he had for breakfast last year on the first Sunday of every month. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And with any luck, by the time I get there, you’ll show me three dead operatives. Four, if the other fellow is working with them.”

“Yes, sir. I understand.”

* * * *

Darby watched Nate load a body in the back of a speed boat. He pressed the field glasses tighter against his forehead and squinted.

Who the hell died in their cabana? Why was he or she important enough for Francisco to dismiss protocol, never mind exposure, and take the body out to sea?

When Francisco first appeared on the cabana porch, he cradled the form in his arms and held on tight. For a second, Darby’s heart beat faster and faster, fearing the worst. Then he saw the way Francisco carried the body. Undoubtedly, he held a tiny form. With his mind at ease, he continued to watch out of mere curiosity.

Who did Francisco care enough about to bury in the deep waters of the South Pacific?

The motor roared to a start, and Darby heard someone call out to Nate. He pointed the glasses toward the row of huts and specifically, the beachfront bungalow.

There, he saw the man he remembered.

He looked larger than Darby recalled. A tall man anyway, Donovan had a certain presence about him. When he walked into a room, he commanded attention. When the ladies saw him, he won their approval and then watched them swoon, unaffected by their approving stares.

Darby lowered the binoculars. He wiped the lenses free of residue and mist, then gasped when he raised them again. God, yeah, Donovan still looked like he remembered, maybe even more handsome than ever before thanks to the growth of a circle beard.

Donovan stepped beside Colby Carrington then. Colby still looked good enough to suck into a blissful afternoon, too, but Darby couldn’t

forgive himself or Colby for coming in between what he enjoyed with Donovan.

The hairs stood up on the back of his neck when he thought about Donovan and Colby. Were they intimate now? Had they given into carnal desires while working together on the island?

No way, he thought. If anything, Donovan was more Nate's type. He knew the kind of men Colby preferred. Donovan certainly didn't fall into Carrington's category. If so, then Donovan was temporarily playing him for professional gain.

He lowered his spying device once more. If Donovan made a personal contact sport out of Colby Carrington, then for the sake of revenge, Darby hoped he understood the rules well. When playing on Carrington's field, one learned the games always changed. Any ISO going against him needed preparation, skill, and intelligence, or he simply needed to accept the possibility of losing to a man who always came out a frontrunner, if not a clear winner.

Darby turned toward the sea. The calm tide rolled in and then drifted out, like the tug of the undercurrent refused to let the waves of salt water disintegrate into the sand.

Adjusting the focus on his glasses, he watched. Nate stood, knelt, retrieved the body, and held the form closer to his face. That's when Darby saw the long hair and dainty features of a woman.

Zooming in on the scene, Nate lowered his lips to her forehead, and as if the final kiss goodbye snapped him into a different mode, he tossed the body overboard and never watched to ensure she safely sank. Instead, he returned to the wheel and fled for shore.

Back on land within a few minutes, Nate walked away from the vessel like he never used the boat at all. He stormed up the front steps without acknowledging Colby or Donovan and disappeared into the hut.

Donovan and Colby exchanged a long stare, what looked like several words, and then Donovan hit the sandy beach while Colby went inside.

Darby felt his heart race as Donovan walked closer. He kept zooming in and out, taking the time to capture all the things he loved about him. The way his shoulders squared when he realized he was facing the unknown particularly held Darby's attention.

Donovan relied on his gut and seldom, if ever, did his sixth sense steer him wrong. Donovan stared right at him then. Darby knew he saw him, but before Donovan spotted him, he sensed him.

Darby tossed his visual aids aside and watched the man he'd always loved, approach. Then, he saw him sprint.

* * * *

Donovan couldn't believe his eyes. Darby Winslow was there with them, spying on them. What the hell? Had he decided to become the son his father always wanted him to be?

Donovan ran. He couldn't remember a time when he ever ran harder or faster. He sprinted up the beach and watched Darby toss his field glasses to the ground.

Darby stepped away from a row of beach chairs and took one or two steps in his direction. Then, he backed away, like he suddenly had a change of heart, a different goal in mind that changed his immediate plans.

"Darby!" Donovan shouted.

Darby turned, grabbed his duffle, slung the gear over his shoulder, and started to flee.

In a final attempt to stop him, Donovan made a sudden leap, jumping over an older woman sunbathing in the process, and the two men rolled to the ground.

"Let me go!" Darby yelled.

"Like hell," Donovan sneered. "What the fuck are you doing here? Why would you run from me?"

Pinning him under the weight of his body, Donovan stared down at Darby. Their hands were locked above Darby's head, and he squirmed under Donovan's weight.

"You aren't going anywhere. Give it up."

Donovan stared into the eyes of knowledge. Darby always relied on facts and information.

"Why are you here?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Darby fired back.

"I'm here to die, apparently," Donovan said.

Darby's eyes looked hollow. He had dark circles under them, and he looked a little frail, even for a muscular fellow.

"Are you sick?" Donovan asked suddenly.

"No, hell no," he stated flatly. "Get off me."

"Can't do it," he said, taking the time to remember other moments like these. They used to love wrestling around on the ground. Donovan growled, "If anything, I may get off inside of you. Would you like that, Darby? God, I've missed you."

Darby turned his cheek to the sand. "I said get off of me, and I mean it."

"You want me off, get me off," he said, taunting. He should've fucked him there, teach him some manners. What the hell did he hope to accomplish by spying on them?

Darby tried to knee him in the cock, and Donovan replied with a "tsk, tsk" sound before squeezing Darby's ribcage with his knees. "You gonna run if I let you up?"

Hard and erect with the sweetest of memories, Donovan pressed his groin against Darby's stomach. "Answer me."

Darby flinched.

Prior to their Cook Island assignment, Donovan learned about Darby's so called "condition." He was concerned, but he also wasn't sure if he believed rumors. Sure, he knew Darby had a few loose screws, but he also believed anyone killing for a living had certain issues the average person didn't understand.

“Let me up,” Darby said, glancing over his shoulder.

Donovan turned and saw Nate walking up the beach. He moved faster and faster when he saw Donovan sitting erect on a man. Drawing his weapon, Donovan held up his hand. “Don’t, Nate.”

Nate hurried over and tossed a chair out of his way. “What the fuck?”

“Darby Winslow, meet Nate Francisco.”

Darby stared up at Nate and held his breath. He probably knew all about the man on paper. He was cold, calculating, a definite killer. A man who trusted no one, he’d seize every advantage, and with Darby in Rarotonga, Nate most likely recognized the added benefits of meeting the admiral’s only son.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Donovan paced the open porch. "This is insane, Nate!"

"Maybe so, but if we can't go to Shoemaker, we'll make damn sure he comes to us."

"He's not going to show," Colby said. "If he hasn't been here yet, he's not coming to Rarotonga. All you're doing is agitating the situation. More ISOs will arrive here. Is that what you want?"

Nate tilted Darby's chin upward. He studied him well. Donovan wondered if he saw Darby the way he did. A handsome man with perfect features, Darby possessed a flawless complexion, but he also had his share of scars. One scar ran straight across his middle. Embedded in his skin, the jagged pattern left behind solid reminders of a past battle.

Nate licked his lips and dropped between Darby's legs. With his hands on his knees, he said, "Oh, you can count on one thing." He eyed Darby's cock and continued, "Shoemaker will show. And when he does, we'll be ready." His focus returned to Darby's own hazy gaze. "Won't we, Darby?"

Patting Darby's cock, Nate left his hand over the man's groin, and Darby didn't resist. Instead, when Nate moved his hand, Donovan saw the hard point of a thick mushroom head pushing against thin material.

Donovan's own dick twitched when he saw the rise in Nate's pants, too. Hell, the bastard was getting off on the ideas he had in store for an admiral's son.

Colby grabbed Nate's arm. "If you're going to do what I think you want to do, you'll die here, Nate."

“Then I’ll die. I’m tired of waiting on death like the afterlife has something better to offer a guy like me.” He turned his face toward the sea and shouted, “Here I am, Admiral Shoemaker! I have your bastard son! Come and get me, you sorry son of a bitch! Better still, come and watch!”

“Nate, no,” Donovan said.

“It’s the only way,” Darby stated flatly.

Nate cupped Darby’s neck and kissed him hard on the mouth. “Don’t worry, Darby. I’ll make sure you enjoy every moment, on the chance it’s the last one you have.”

* * * *

They weren’t entirely cruel. In the hottest hours of the day, Nate moved Darby inside and allowed him to stretch out on the sofa in the cool breeze of the air conditioner. Then, when the sun started to go down again, they all returned to the porch.

Darby and Donovan continued to swap glances. Nate hoped he wasn’t wrong about Donovan. He chose to believe in him, and thanks to Karen, he placed the appropriate faith in his team.

Karen.

God in heaven help him, he felt the loss. He felt her absence like he had fought beside her for years and years.

Wrapping his arms around his waist, he glared down the beach. Shaking off too many recent memories and the unexplainable reason he felt so alone all of a sudden, he said, “Any idea how many of your father’s men are here?”

Darby shook his head.

“He’s been in a mental facility for crying out loud,” Donovan snapped.

“You don’t say?” Nate drawled sarcastically. “Are you crazy?”

Darby grinned. “As crazy as you need me to act when the time is right.”

“Insanity may have instant appeal if your father shows up in time to witness the madness.”

“You want me to act crazy?”

Nate sneered, glanced at Colby, and then said, “About me.”

Colby shook his head. “Nate, this is going way too far.”

Donovan chimed in, too. “You’re going to get him killed.”

“Not if he can act. If he can convince his father he is a little loco, then daddy dearest will march right up those steps and try his best to save him.”

Darby suddenly understood. As if the natural light burned out of his eyes at the same time the sun sank behind the sea, he said, “You’re going to kill him.”

Nate said, “I’m damn sure not going to ask him in for a drink.”

“You’re using me to lure him, and then you’re going to kill him right in front of me.”

“If that’s the only place I can, then yeah.”

“I won’t do it, then,” Darby said.

“Uh,” Nate said, scratching his chin. “Yeah, I’m thinking you will.”

“No, Nate,” Donovan said. “You can’t make him stand against his own father.”

“I don’t think I’m going to have to make the choice for him. He will willingly make it because if he doesn’t, the first shot fired will likely be the one into your skull, not mine.”

Donovan flinched. “I’m a puppet, too?”

Darby grunted. “Hell, we’re all his pawns. That’s how he works.”

Nate crossed his arms and stood over Darby. “Damn if you aren’t a pretty thing.”

“Flirting won’t get you anywhere, Nate,” Darby said. “I know all about you. I’ve read case files and personality assessments. I know what makes you tick and where your weaknesses are. I didn’t fly all the way down here without interesting reading.”

Nate stared down the bridge of his nose until his eyes nearly crossed. “Then you have the advantage here, don’t you?”

“I take it you don’t know as much as you’d like to know about me.”

Nate shot Colby a sideways glance. “I know all I want to know.”

“From him?” Darby tilted his head toward Colby.

“You didn’t answer me earlier. How many ISOs are left here?” Nate asked.

“I told you I don’t know.”

Donovan spoke up again. “How the fuck would he know?”

“He knows.”

“I can guess,” Darby said. “I imagine three to five. Otherwise, my father wouldn’t fly down here. He’s too vulnerable here.”

“Will he show with more ISOs?” Nate asked.

“No,” Darby said with assurance. “He’s too arrogant. You’ve most likely taken out half his team. He considers their defeat his personal failure.”

Nate understood, too. When he couldn’t protect Karen, he failed. The life she lost was a personal loss to him, and since Colby hadn’t said very much since she died, Nate imagined he felt the same.

Darby cleared his throat. “He’s already risked a lot by placing a bounty on your heads. He’ll come here to finish the job his operatives were unable to successfully start, much less finish.”

A bright red dot suddenly shone on Donovan’s head. “Get down!” Darby hollered.

Nate kicked Darby’s chair over, dove into Donovan and hurriedly looked back at the blaze of gunfire. Colby rolled onto the ground and crawled up on his knees, shooting off more rounds than Nate realized he possessed. The deafening noise of the machine gun filled the air.

“Clear,” Colby said. “Damn, I hate this. I’m sick and tired of being a fucking target.”

With a hard push, he set Darby’s chair upright again. “Apparently, Daddy doesn’t know who we have here on our front porch yet.”

“We’ll call it a night,” Nate said. “Let’s go inside and relax. Whoever is in charge here will get word back to Shoemaker soon enough. We’ll try again tomorrow. By tomorrow night, Shoemaker will surface.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Admiral Shoemaker?”

“Yes?”

“It’s confirmed. The fourth man on the island is a fellow by the name of Darby Winslow.”

The admiral gulped. “Darby?” He feared as much. He only just hung up the phone from the mental facility. Darby was AWOL and had been for several days. He had the resources and the connections to find out Donovan’s precise whereabouts.

“Yes, sir. Do you know him?”

“Yes, he’s my...” he stopped mid-sentence. How could he admit to another ISO that Darby was his son when he wasn’t sure what he witnessed or what their surveillance uncovered?

“He’s your what, sir?”

“He trained under me,” he snapped.

“Do we leave him alive?”

The admiral felt his jaw tighten. If the ISOs remaining there witnessed the kind of crude behavior he suspected, then how could he order the deaths of three and protect one?

“Sir?”

“Yes, leave him alone,” the admiral said. “There’s more to this than meets the eye, and Winslow doesn’t need involvement.”

“He’s involved all right,” the ISO continued. “He’s staying with the other three.”

Bellowing, the admiral said, “Leave him be! Do you hear me? His family has political clout, and the last thing I need is Darby Winslow dead.”

Slamming the phone down, he squeezed his eyes shut. Yes, the last thing he needed was his only son dead because of the frantic mess his new team was making out of a mission impossible to complete.

* * * *

After Nate decided they would stick together until the mission was over, everyone ate the island buffet dinner. They each packed their bodies with more ammunition and weapons than they probably ever carried in their lives.

Colby considered the trip to the restaurant a wasted one. No one ate more than a few bites, and the sexual tension growing between all of them, especially Darby and Donovan, reminded him of another recent reunion, the one he enjoyed with Nate in Mangaia.

They each took the steps two at a time when they returned to their accommodations. Colby noticed the awkward silence when they waited in the front room while Nate checked the bedrooms. When he finished, he came back, took Colby by the hand and simply said, "Goodnight. We'll see you two in the morning."

The activities found in the depths of darkness were set to unfold. The pairings definite, there wasn't a reason to second guess what each man had on his mind or what he wanted to share with whom.

Following Nate into the bedroom, Colby said, "You do trust him now, don't you?"

"I trust you," Nate said, kicking off his shoes and stripping.

Colby stepped out of his shoes and removed his button-down shirt. He didn't take off his pants but instead sat behind Nate. Colby's hands went to his shoulders, and he massaged Nate's back, running his palms in a circular motion over his shoulder blades and then squeezing and releasing his neck.

"You're gonna have to let go of the guilt sooner or later, Nate," he whispered.

"Hell, she just died, Colby."

“I know,” he said. “But I’m not just talking about Karen. I’m talking about me and you. I’m talking about your parents.”

“Shut up about my parents. What happened to them was a long time ago. I don’t even remember what they looked like now.”

Colby sighed. Right after Nate rescued him in Afghanistan, he fell sick with fever. He talked about his parents, why he never discussed them. They met their demise in a horrific house fire said to have been started by an experienced arsonist.

Only ten then, Nate fled the house and never thought to try and save his parents. He survived only because of his need for self-preservation. Colby later researched that house fire and knew beyond reasonable doubt if Nate returned to the blaze in hopes of finding his parents and saving them, he would’ve been unsuccessful. His discovery was one he chose not to share with Nate, until now.

Taking a deep breath, he dropped his arms over his back and pulled him against him. With his back against the headboard, he said, “There’s something I need to tell you.”

“What is it?” Nate asked, glancing up.

“I..it...” he stuttered out of fear. He knew Nate wouldn’t want him prying into his past. “After Afghanistan...after we went our separate ways, I...had a hard time with it. I...”

Nate faced him. “Colby, we’re together now. That’s what matters.”

“No, Nate. What matters is that you know how important you are to me. I need you to know I only snooped into your business because I love you.”

Nate’s eyes held a peculiar gaze, the hazy stare of a madman ready to explode into a fit of rage. “What do you mean you snooped?”

Colby framed his face, and Nate gripped his wrists. Colby refused to let Nate push him away. He held him tighter. “I did some research on the fire. I talked to older officers who worked the case in Philly. The fire wasn’t one you would have survived if you had gone back inside and tried to save your parents.”

Nate continued to stare at him without expression.

“Nate, someone with experience set the fire, an assassin perhaps. It was started in their bedroom, on their bed. By the time the fumes set off the smoke detectors in the hallway, your parents were already gone.”

Nate’s eyes filled with tears then. The little boy still living behind the eyes of a man threatened to resurface, and all of those hidden emotions were on the verge of release.

“Nate, you have to let this go now, for yourself and for us. There wasn’t anything you could do, just like you couldn’t have done anything for Karen. She was closest to Donovan when the gunfire started. You couldn’t have gotten to her without risking yourself or me.”

“I could’ve taken that risk,” he said curtly.

Nate and Colby were so lost in their conversation, they didn’t hear Donovan and Darby when they entered the room. Darby said, “Yes, you could have, Nate. But why would you?”

“Give us a minute here,” Nate hissed. The news Colby just delivered was still settling in his mind, and acceptance was hardly close enough to ensure Colby wouldn’t endure some measure of Nate’s wrath.

Donovan said, “Nate, Darby has something to tell you.”

“Out!” Nate bellowed.

“No,” Darby said, fast approaching the mattress. “Karen would’ve turned on you, Nate, and I’m sure of it. She was working for a new ISO organization out of Canada. She would’ve turned.”

“She cared about me,” Nate said, flashing Donovan a cold stare. “She cared about all of us in the end.”

“She may have, but the group in Canada developed a strong force of women. Some of them are so ruthless they’ve even married their targets and later killed them when their spouses were no longer needed by the organization.”

“That’s a lie!” Nate said, turning on Darby and shooting Donovan an accusatory glare.

Colby shook his head. “Right now isn’t the best time.”

“I don’t give a shit,” Donovan said, touching Nate’s knee when he sat next to him. “You and Colby have something real, Nate. Don’t blow it by harboring guilt for a woman you really didn’t know at all.”

“I’m not,” he growled, staring at Donovan’s mouth. “There’s more to what Colby and I were discussing than Karen.”

Yes, and Colby was just as irritated by the interruption. He was about to press Nate for a commitment. When the mission was over, he wanted them to start building a life together, one sure to include the home Nate once feared he’d never have.

Donovan said, “She was working you. She worked all of us.”

Nate’s eyes flashed with sudden recognition. Oh God, Colby thought. Surely to heaven and back Donovan didn’t kill her.

He didn’t ask. Nate didn’t ask. Donovan never said. Darby acted as if he didn’t care one way or the other. But God help them all if Donovan killed her. Nate would see him straight to the gates of hell if he killed the woman he had started to care for, possibly even loved.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Nate wanted revenge. He craved the taste of death as much as he craved sex with the men sprawled on the bed next to him.

What he longed for most was compassion, and what he felt when he held Karen in his arms was as close to sated need as he'd ever experienced. He watched Donovan take the first kiss, and he wondered, God help him, what secrets Donovan Collier coveted more than his life.

Darby slid closer to Donovan. Their mouths met and retreated. The nipping kisses of two familiar lovers lost in the unfamiliar balance of weighing in the decision to bring in additional partners waiting to join them. Darby reached for Colby's cock, and Nate's gaze drifted down Colby's body.

Slowly, almost diabolically, Darby pumped Colby's cock, kissing Donovan deeper. Nate heard the longing, the guttural growls of a man waiting to come. Excitement loomed, spinning out in the darkness and calling to the wild nature, the explicit side of the men participating.

Nate cupped Colby's neck and pulled him forward. His lips claimed Colby's. Colby accepted his kiss, allowing him to lead and follow, returning the affectionate kiss with an open mouth and greedy tongue.

Donovan shifted, and when he did, Darby lost his grip around Colby's cock, and Nate took Colby's body for his own, dropping his open palm over the rough, swollen ridges and pumping his size through a closed fist with a fervent tug.

Donovan and Darby necked. They groped. God help him, they fondled one another with such enthusiasm, Nate longed to join them.

"I'll come," Colby warned, backing away, and reaching for the condoms Donovan strategically placed bedside when he stripped away his clothes.

"Then come," Darby said, grinning, dropping his mouth over Donovan's cock and sticking his finger into the lubricant found bedside as well.

Donovan's mouth opened wide, and a sigh fell from his lips, heavy and filled with pleasure as he rejoined the lover he so obviously cared about, a man who seemed willing to do everything in his power to please him. Donovan changed positions, standing next to the bed and bracing himself. He placed his palms on Darby's back.

Nate and Colby were on their sides, their heads at opposite ends of the bed. Nate's cock lingered at Colby's lips, and he sucked the tip, the slit luring his tongue. Nate captured Colby's cock and sucked too. He took Colby to his throat, and he gulped when his reflexes damn near failed him, sipping at a stalk he wanted slivering down his throat.

Colby's hips jerked. He pounded into Nate's throat, and Nate released him. "Not yet," he growled, pushing his own dick forward and relishing the spongy texture found in Colby's ready tongue.

Darby ate Donovan with greed and true hunger, months of separation must have left him famished. If Nate wanted inspiration, the delightful sounds of blowjobs, provided enough. Donovan fisted the base of his own cock and eyed Nate. Nodding, as if in understanding, the men locked gazes meant only for the truest of lovers to hold.

Nate reached behind Colby's back and drew him closer, mashing his own mouth against the head of Colby's cock and sucking long and hard, good and deep. Colby groaned, and the sensation threatened Nate's control.

He moved away from Colby then and pulled him up by his thick arms. Donovan followed his lead, backing away from the bed and motioning for Nate.

Nate shook his head once and then moved to the bedside, hungry for a taste of Donovan, but just as excited to shove his cock high in Colby's ass, the one love for whom he felt the most certainty.

"Come here, Colby."

An obedient lover, a precious man, Colby leaned across the mattress, positioned right in front of Nate's dick. Nate cupped his ass, spreading his cheeks with a hard grip, clutching the firm globes of a shapely bottom.

Colby cried out when Nate's fingers and thumbs caressed his crack with a glob of cool, slick gel. "Don't wait," Colby mumbled.

Simultaneously, Donovan prepared Darby. He fisted his cock and slid inside Darby's ass right when Colby raised his hips and accepted Nate's dick like a gift.

"Good God, Colby," Nate sighed, grinning at Donovan.

Their dicks parted the cheeks of willing participants, dutiful lovers. Nate watched as Colby reached for Darby. His hand twisted around Darby's thick shaft, and he pulled for semen, for the release Darby deserved to find as much as anyone.

Darby, in turn, humped forward and back. Donovan stared at Nate and slapped Darby's ass. "Squeeze, baby. Hold on."

Nate placed his palms on Colby's hips and fucked him raw. With unadulterated passion and desire, he plunged into forbidden territory, crossing as many barriers as his body opened up to welcome. "That's it. I'm coming."

Darby stared at Colby's hand and reached for him, too, separating the distance of any broken moments they shared in another time. He squeezed and released, pulled and tugged. The first shot of cum sprayed against the headboard. Colby fell against the bed, and Donovan smirked. "Give it to him," he said.

Nate had plenty to offer. He held fast to Colby's hips and dragged him to the edge of the bed. Donovan followed suit, and they fucked and fucked until their lovers were begging and provoking their release with vocal encouragement.

But neither found their fill in the men bottoming for them. What they desired right then was something Colby and Darby wouldn't understand. They needed one another, and the fulfillment they sought was only attainable in each other's arms.

* * * *

Nate sat with his back against the headboard. With splayed legs, he patted his hard-on, and Donovan rolled the condom over him. Colby and Darby slept next to them. Nate and Donovan waited for them to fall into a deep sleep.

Realizing the noise they'd soon make would shake the dead, Nate kissed Colby's ear and whispered, "I love you."

No one heard his sentiments, not even Colby, but Nate planned to tell him later. Maybe when time was on their side, he would let him know he'd always loved him and had never stopped searching for him even after their parting of ways.

He returned his focus to Donovan who muttered, "Give me everything you've got. Don't hold back."

Fingering his bottom with the clear lubricant, Donovan towered over Nate's cock, and Nate cried out upon first impalement, "Yeah, baby. This is what I need. Your ass is so fucking tight."

Donovan sat erect, and once Nate discovered the snug fit, he plunged forward, placing his hands on Donovan's back and humping his ass like he'd never find relief. If he found the end sooner than he might like, he wasn't sliding out or moving away. Hell no, this kind of sex wasn't one a man deserted in a hurry.

Reaching around his body, Nate ran his thumbs over Donovan's pointed nipples. Rolling, rolling, rolling, he made sure he stimulated the man, assurance found when Donovan's grunts and groans drove him to the brink of an orgasm, a powerful release he didn't want to experience.

Withdrawing two or three inches, Nate bit out, "Get up."

Once on his knees, Nate eyed Donovan's ass. He had a round bottom, a tight hole, and a dick Nate would never get tired of seeing. Donovan's cock lured him. Nate reached for him and pumped, hovering over his back as he thrust in between his cheeks once again.

"Come!" Donovan shouted, covering Nate's hand with his own and taking over, then working for his own hot release.

Beads of sweat poured off of Nate, and he continued fucking. "Hell yeah!" he yelled.

Oh, yes, he was coming. The beginning of the orgasm burned his balls before the river of cum flooded into his shaft and spurted into the rain gear covering his cock. Harder and harder, the jet of his release flowed from his body.

Again, he fell against Donovan's back when Donovan started humping forward. He took Donovan's cock in hand and squeezed tight, releasing the agony of pent-up sexual frustration, continuing to fill the condom with his own orgasm while Donovan found the essence of his.

"Shit, Nate!" he screamed, collapsing onto the mattress.

Nate fell with him. His hand locked tightly around Donovan's sticky penis, the cum gluing his fingers together and the vibrations of the man pulsing under his grip gathering more and more momentum. Nate kept coming.

"God, you feel good," Nate said, taking a ragged breath.

Donovan flipped over on his back. He reached up, and with the pad of his thumb, rubbed the texture of Nate's bottom lip.

Nate tried to kiss him then, and Donovan stared at him, a peculiar longing in his eyes, and Nate found recognition. In those unspoken moments, Nate understood what Donovan wanted to say.

Gasping, Nate roughly cupped his neck and pulled him forward. His spent cock rubbed his groin, and the aggravation of a full condom reminded him of time they could carelessly waste if they didn't take precautions.

Slipping his hand between their bodies, Nate took the kiss he intended to savor. The smell of sex surrounded them, and the sweaty body under him reminded him that yes, in fact, he was and always had been a man's man. Regardless of what he felt for Karen, he craved a man's arms around him, a hard body to stroke. Karen had been an exception, possibly a well manipulated diversion.

His tongue glided across Donovan's, and he deepened the kiss when Donovan responded by moaning into his mouth, sucking on his tongue, and dueling for control. "Get cleaned up and come back to bed," he whispered into his mouth.

Nate smiled. "Haven't had enough?"

"Never enough," he promised.

Nate slid away from him. Darby stirred when he left the king size bed, and Colby continued to snore. What soldiers they all were. Two were sleeping soundly, and the other two were fucking out their feelings, trying to decipher what they meant to one another.

Standing in the bathroom, Nate studied his reflection in the mirror over the porcelain sink. He gripped the cold stone and looked closer. Sure enough, he thought, he saw the changes.

Nate looked into the eyes of a man who never knew how to love, but now loved. He recognized the wrinkles across his forehead, though far too premature, and yet the lines of a rougher time creasing over his brow only made him thankful for what he now enjoyed.

Donovan slipped into the bathroom, and Nate glanced up at the reflection behind him. With his cock in hand, Donovan gripped the base. The hard round tip pressed through the clear condom, and the shape alone lured him.

Nate reached for him. He took Donovan's cock in hand and pulled back and forth, working him almost with as much aggression as he used when he wanted him to come. Heavy lids shielded his eyes then, and Donovan said, "I want to love you, Nate. God help me, I want to love you."

Nate gripped the sink and dropped his head, arching his back and rolling his hips forward and back in preparation. He closed his eyes and said, “Then, love me. Do it now because we have no guarantees of what we face tomorrow.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

“You’re in love with both of us,” Colby said the next morning when Nate joined him at the island fruit and juice bar. Boasting the island’s best breakfast, the resort only offered a continental style buffet, but the fruits and juices were fresh and unmatched when compared to store bought items found back home. The man across the table appealed to him far more than the foods piled high on their small plates.

Nate tossed his cloth napkin in his lap in the nick of time. Colby looked good enough to fuck over coffee, and after a few too many romps with Donovan throughout the night, he still maintained a rise in his pants.

Sipping his juice, Colby said, “I hope you tell me something resembling the truth. I want to hear it from you.”

Nate cleared his throat, looked around the dining room and then pointed toward the men’s room. “I just remembered I didn’t wash my hands. I’ll be right back.”

He stood up, made a scene by pointing to the sizeable bulge in his pants and said, “I hope I don’t have to take care of this by myself.”

A few minutes later, Colby slipped into the bathroom, too, locked the door behind him and dropped to his knees.

“Hell yes,” Nate said, fisting his dick and placing the tip to Colby’s lips.

Licking up and down the shaft, Colby mumbled, “Love me like the devil you are, Nate.”

Nate held Colby's head in between his palms. “You’re the sexiest man alive,” he said.

“But,” Colby said, flinching, “you love Donovan.”

“I love you,” he stated flatly, watching the light return to Colby’s eyes. “I’m in love with you, Colby Carrington.”

“You love me?”

“Yes,” he said, still stiff, turned on even further after revealing the truth and wanting desperately to love the daylights right out of him then.

“But you and Donovan had sex all night long,” he complained. “I mean, I know we always said we could mess around with other guys, but come on. You—”

“You’re right, we fucked like crazy. None of it changes how I feel about you,” he assured Colby, yanking him forward and kissing him hard on the mouth, fighting against tight lips in order to force his way into the heart of a heated kiss.

When Colby accepted the kiss, he whimpered out a sigh, and then he caressed Nate’s cheek with his knuckles. “Don’t die on me today, Nate,” he said. “Please, please, please, don’t die out there today.”

A loud knock came at the door then. Nate stuffed his cock back in his slacks and cursed. “Damn it to hell. What do you want?”

Colby reached for his gun, and Nate slid his hand down his leg and grabbed his hunting knife.

“Someone there?” Colby called out.

“Get out here now, soldiers.”

“Fuck my life,” Nate said, squeezing his eyes shut. “It’s Shoemaker.”

Colby grabbed his arm, pressed his fingers to his lips and then pointed to an open window barely big enough for a man the size of Nate to squeeze through.

After grabbing onto a thin bar across the back of the restroom, they each flipped over the rod and kicked their way through the window, finding the ground beneath them soft enough for a suitable landing. Then, they ran like hell.

* * * *

Darby knew when he saw them approaching. He didn't need the order, but Nate delivered it anyway. "Get to the porch, hands behind your back. Help me out here," he said, grabbing weapons and sticking them everywhere clothing concealed.

"He's here," Colby said, tossing Donovan his bag of weaponry and finding his own in a nearby storage cabinet.

Darby went outside, took his place and stared back inside. "I don't like this," he reminded them.

Donovan grabbed Nate by the forearm, and Darby saw his fingers caress the underside of Nate's arm. "Don't let anything happen to him."

Nate nodded and then stuck a clip in the butt of a gun and joined him on the porch. "Everything in place, little soldier boy?" he asked, winking at Colby.

"I've got your back, but don't do anything stupid."

Nate smiled, dropped in between Darby's legs and patted his cock. Immediately, Darby's senses came alive, and the knowledge slapped him in the face.

"What the fuck are you going to do?" he asked, studying Nate and hoping it wasn't precisely what he assumed.

"I'm going to blow you straight out of the mind they claim you lost a long time ago. You don't care, do you?"

"Yes," he said.

Nate patted his cock, and his fingers pinched what they gripped through material. "I doubt it, sweetheart," he replied, unzipping him.

"He will kill you first," Darby warned.

"Well, at least I'll die with his son's cock down my throat," Nate said, with a diabolical edge in his voice, the restraint there but not quite detectable over his amusement.

"Don't do this, Nate," Darby said. "My father will kill you."

“So you’ve said, and he might, but first he’s going to show his face,” he said, pulling his dick from his pants.

“It’s broad daylight, for crying out loud!”

“Are you modest, Darby?” Colby asked, moving inside and hiding in the shadows, right behind the open door.

Donovan stepped inside, too. Darby wanted to see Donovan, but with him out of sight, he imagined Nate felt more secure. Nate was the type of ISO who thought ahead, leaving nothing to chance, and he might fear Darby couldn’t maintain his focus with Donovan overseeing.

Working his hands around Darby’s cock, Nate kissed the tip. “Ask your fellow if I give good head.”

Darby felt the blood rush to his balls. Nate Francisco gave Donovan head?

“Yeah, he does.” He heard Donovan’s reply from the inside. “He’s about the best at sucking dick.”

Darby’s hand went to his penis. “What don’t you understand? He will kill you!”

“And I’m counting on him trying,” Nate said excitedly. In and out of his hand, Darby’s erection was stout without much stimulation, and Nate seemed pleased. “I didn’t have to work too hard now, did I?”

“No,” he said, twisting his mouth.

“What’s wrong, sugar?” he asked, a louder pitch evident in his voice.

“He’s here,” Donovan hissed. “I can feel him.”

“You can probably smell him,” Darby said, leaning his head back and remembering how his father always smelled of rich aftershave and expensive whiskey.

“Keep your hands behind your back,” Nate advised. “Just let me take you.”

“Nate, I don’t think I—”

Nate’s lips parted, and his head fell to Darby’s lap.

“Oh, dear God!” Darby said, snapping his head forward and eyeing the way Nate sucked his cock straight down his throat with first contact.

Mumbling against the head when he came up again, Nate’s tongue struck out like a snake’s, and he lapped at the shape of Darby’s engorged head, releasing the most animalistic sounds Darby had ever heard in his life. “Good?”

“Shit, yeah,” Nate said, blinking back the sweat falling from his damp hair.

“He gets better,” Darby heard Donovan say.

Nate fingered his balls and dipped his forefinger under his ass, trying to reach his hole and suck his cock at the same time. Resisting, Darby squeezed his ass cheeks together, and when he did, his knees clamped together, catching Nate’s head between his thighs.

“Oh no,” Nate said, spreading him again. “I’m just getting started here, sugar.”

Fisting Darby’s cock, Nate dropped his chin again and opened wide, sucking and slurping. He went at him like a man hungry for a dick between his jaws. Darby feared he’d forget what he was doing and chew, too. Instead, Nate licked, lapping at the veins pressing against Darby’s skin.

Soon, he changed his focus. And when Darby rolled his hips forward, he felt the whipping sensation. “Oh, shit!”

Colby said, “Warning, he’s at three o’clock, Nate.”

Darby squeezed his eyes shut. God help him, he needed to get off. Nate bobbed his head up and down and tapped his sack so hard he could’ve sworn a switch was swatting straight across his balls.

“I’m going to get off,” he cried.

“The fucking hell you are!” The admiral’s voice echoed off the porch.

Rage filled the air, and Nate released Darby with a slurping pop. “What’s wrong, Admiral? Can’t stand to see your son get what it is you truly want?”

Darby gasped. The fury in his father's expression was unmatched, far worse than anything he ever witnessed in combat or at any other time in his life. Pointing his gun at Nate's head, the admiral swatted him with it. Blood stained the side of Nate's head, and he crouched against the plank floor. Darby only hoped he wasn't out like a light but rather pretending.

Without fully acknowledging Darby, his father walked behind him and released the flimsy binds confining him to the chair. "You're a piece of work, Darby," he said. "Get your fucking pants on, son. I can't believe you went along with this."

Darby stood, stuffed his cock back in his pants and said, "Father, you can't win here."

Turning on him then and ignoring Nate, he said, "I can't win?" He laughed, asking, "Really? Is that what you think?"

"You can't," Darby said, eyeing the crack in the door, looking for Colby.

"Oh, son," he said, following his gaze, "don't look for your gay lovers there."

Darby swallowed hard. "I...I...wasn't."

"Don't stutter, boy," he said.

Darby stood taller. He had to distract his father long enough for Nate to regain his composure. Rolling around on the porch floor hardly gave them the advantage Nate originally assured them they'd have.

"I've heard all the rumors. Are they true?"

The admiral glared at Darby. "What are you asking me?"

"Is it true? Have you wanted Nate Francisco for your own?"

"What the fuck are you asking me?"

"Are you attracted to men? Specifically, do you want Nate Francisco? I did not fucking stutter, Father!"

The admiral hesitated. The pause alone gave Darby enough to go on. "So you do?" He shook his head. "This is unbelievable." His arms rose and fell. Then he took a few steps forward and grabbed his father

by the shirt. “You ordered hits on some of the best ISOs in the field because you’re trying to what?” His voice quivered and he added, “So you can take out the very temptations you aren’t man enough to admit you have?”

“Stand down, soldier.”

“I’m not a soldier anymore, Dad,” he said. “I’m your son, but I’m not an ISO. You made sure you removed me from duties, and for what? To cover up a long-standing fascination you yourself have for men in uniform?”

“I said, stand down!”

Darby squinted when he saw Nate stir. Then he released his grip. “You’re not worth the effort.”

* * * *

Nate groaned when he came to. He wasn’t sure he was even out since he heard and understood the conversation exchanged between father and son. He wanted to kill the admiral, take out the very man who ordered the ridiculous hits.

He thought of Colby. Where was he? What about Donovan? Where on God’s earth were they when he needed them most?

Realizing he miscalculated, he clenched his fists when he rose to his feet. The admiral turned, held his pistol high in the air and aimed down, like he had to hold the gun a certain way in order to shoot his target.

“Go ahead,” Nate said, standing taller. “Take your shot, Admiral. The so-called disease you claim warranted your son’s admission to a mental hospital runs rampant in your veins. You can kill me. There will be others like me, men who barely notice their commanding officer is gay, men who don’t care either way if they do.”

“Shut up, Nate,” Admiral Shoemaker barked.

Nate stared at the planks where he stood and saw movement as well as multiple shadows blocking the limited sunlight. Thank God,

he thought, remembering Colby knew where every crevice was found in the deteriorating structure of the porch.

The admiral bellowed, "If you think I'm here on this island alone, soldier, you're wrong. I don't travel solo anymore, not in matters so important to the further development of the ISO program."

"Don't you mean in matters behind closed doors?" Darby asked, moving to stand right next to the admiral's raised gun.

"Back away, son."

"No, sir. I will not."

"I'm ordering you to move out of my way!"

Darby reached for the gun then. Nate stepped to the side when the first shot fired out. Another fired and then another, followed by agonizing yelps for help.

"Hold your fire!" Nate pleaded, watching a disoriented Darby collapse against his father, the man responsible for delivering such a fatal shot.

Two ISOs, men Nate spotted around the island long before the day began, sprinted up the beach. Glancing down, he yelled to his own two-man team. "Twins approaching. Move down the beach!"

He heard rapid movement under the house, the shuffling of feet. Colby and Donovan would handle the intrusion. Admiral Shoemaker was his.

The admiral must have realized his son lay dying. "Darby!" He yanked him onto his lap and fell against the front porch swing with his dying son's body.

While Darby choked out his last few breaths, Nate's gaze returned to Donovan and Colby. They ran up on the two-man team and quickly secured them. Minutes later, Nate waited for the admiral's first move, unable to draw his weapon then, though fully expecting one gun to be swiftly drawn, the firearm of a man who would, indeed, avenge Darby's approaching death.

Colby remained in the sand. His mouth fell open in a wide O while Donovan rushed toward the steps.

“Darby!” he exclaimed, the toll of death’s call obvious and far more costly than anyone there had the potential to imagine.

Donovan sat next to the admiral, shooting Nate a look he recognized all too well. Without explaining, Nate tossed his weapon to the ground, and Admiral Shoemaker rambled on, “I’m so sorry, son. Oh, God, I’m so, so sorry.”

Bewildered, Donovan stood. “You did this?”

“I...I...” the admiral clung to his son. “I just wanted him to stand proud.”

Donovan blinked back tears. He must have processed then, acknowledged death rolling faster and faster Darby’s way with full intent to take him.

“Stand up, Admiral,” Donovan grated out.

“He’s my son. Let my son die in his father’s arms.”

“Stand up, Admiral, and for once in your sorry life, you stand proud.” Donovan’s voice never faltered. This time, Donovan drew his blade from his belt. Nate saw the shiny point glisten in the sun.

One of the ISOs on the ground said, “This won’t solve anything. Let the man comfort his dying son.”

Colby continued to aim his gun toward the two misinformed ISOs. “Shut the fuck up,” he said, his knowing eyes following Nate’s as they watched, waited.

“Don...o...van,” Darby choked out. Blood poured from his nostrils and his mouth. He uttered his last word. His lover’s name forever stained his lips as he left this world and rapidly traveled into the next.

“Darby!” Donovan cried out, placing the knife at the admiral’s throat.

Bracing for death, the admiral said, “You can kill me. It won’t change you or who you are or what you’ve caused.”

“I didn’t cause this,” Donovan said, his anger thicker than the blood found in many killers’ veins. “You and your own perverse need to fix your son while ignoring the hypocrisy in your own life orchestrated his death. For that, you deserve to die right beside him.”

Nate flinched, witnessing the quick slice delivered, the sliver of the knife crossing flesh, the one jagged edge placed against the jugular vein in order to finish the job.

Nate turned and walked away without watching for the signs of bloodshed. He'd seen enough. He caused enough. There was more to life than delivering death. As he walked down the steps into the white sand, he decided then it was time to start living and damn sure time to start loving.

Epilogue

Six Months Later

Nate and Donovan walked inside the cool mansion. The breeze flowing through the open foyer smelled of salt water, and Nate stopped when his nostrils flared.

He remembered the smell of sea water. He often stood and stared at the South Pacific and wished for a brighter day, an opportunity to taste the future. Now, he could sip on freedom and indulge in what the future offered.

Colby appeared at the top of the grand staircase. "If you two aren't a sight to savor all night long."

Nate's tongue went to his upper lip. "Damn, I hope so."

Colby started down the steps. "Have trouble finding the place?"

Donovan shrugged. "I don't know," he said, grinning. "Did we?"

Nate winked. "We managed."

Catching on, Colby embraced Nate and then pulled Donovan in for a sensual kiss. Breaking away, he said, "That's about what I thought. You taste like Nate."

"What?" Donovan said. "You think I wanted to ride all the way from LA to Malibu without anything to do?"

"I'll give you something to do," Colby promised, taking his hand and placing it on his belt.

Nate grinned. "Considering I've been fighting traffic, if anyone deserves a good romp, I think I should reap the rewards."

"You've been serviced," Donovan reminded. "Now it's time to serve."

“Good God, boy,” Nate drawled. “Don’t you think I’ve done enough for my fellow man?”

Colby took his hand and then grabbed Donovan’s forearm, guiding them both into the large open family room. “I think it’s time we earn our just reward for years of servitude.”

“What do you say we make the most of this place, then,” Nate suggested. “I figure for every year all of us combined gave to the ISO, we deserve at least that many years of solace.”

“Solace, hell,” Colby said. “I’m looking for nothing more than erotic pleasure after what we survived.”

Donovan’s expression changed, and Nate noticed. “Come here, sweetheart,” he said, wrapping his arms around Donovan’s waist.

Colby looped his arms around him, too. “We have all the time in the world to make up for lost time.”

“And lost loves?” Donovan asked.

“We’ll remember Darby,” Nate promised. “But we’re also going to hold tight to what we have now.”

“And what do we have?” Donovan asked.

“Colby?” Nate turned, and Colby left the room, retrieved some legal documents and returned with proof of the commitment they already discussed.

Nate said, “Donovan, if you’ll have us, Colby and I want you to move in here with us. We want to take care of you, and...” he reached for him and patted his bottom, “we’d love to have you take care of us, if you’re willing.”

Donovan closed his eyes and sighed. “Damnation, I thought you weren’t going to ask.”

Nate chuckled, and Colby handed Donovan the papers. “You’re part owner in this estate, so you might as well reap the benefits.”

“And what are the benefits?”

Nate released his zipper and grinned. “You really have to ask?”

Donovan shook his head. “No, but I may want you to show me several times a day.”

“That makes two of us,” Colby chimed in.

“Well, then,” Nate said, more relaxed than he’d ever been. “I think we’ve finally found a place we can all call home.”

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Addison Avery is the author of various works of erotic fiction. Readers are invited to join Addison Avery's Author Newsletter by clicking the link below:

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