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CASSIE STEVENS

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The declaration shattered the remnants of Vic’s jealousy and fears. But it only enhanced the driving need to mate. After grabbing the hem of Damien’s shirt, Vic hauled it over his head. He licked his lips at the sight of the pebbled brown nipples. He cupped Damien’s pecs and traced his thumbs over the peaks.

Long fingers combed through Vic’s hair. Damien cradled the back of Vic’s head and tugged it down. His eyes were half-closed with that “take me now” look that had always driven Vic wild with lust.

“I need you, Vic. I love you.”

The words brought a rush of tears to Vic’s eyes. So much emotion...he’d never grow tired of it or of Damien. He blinked his vision clear and feathered his tongue over Damien’s collarbone. Damien arched his neck and his body leaned with him as he urged Vic’s head closer to his nipples. Vic plucked one between his lips, rolling the tight bead of flesh around and around. Soft sighs begged Vic for more. Damien’s shoes thudded to the floor. He toppled backward to the sofa, taking Vic with him and using the sofa arm to finally wriggle free of his clothing.

Vic groaned and hovered over that beautiful body, all his for the taking. He clutched Damien’s sac and marveled at the

length of cock that reached for his mouth. Thrusting his fingers deep into Damien's anus once more, he thumbed his testicles. Pre-cum glistened on the tip of the penis. Vic suckled the salty dewdrop to his lips, rubbing until it smeared deep into the corners of his mouth. Damien thrust his hips upward. Nails gouged into Vic's shoulder. He relished the pain, knew exactly what he needed...what they both needed...

ALSO BY CASSIE STEVENS

Addicted

Behind Closed Doors

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Legacy

Model Behavior

Secret Lovers

The Things We Do For Love

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BY

CASSIE STEVENS

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CHAPTER 1

Damien Walker stabbed the “spin” button with all the enthusiasm of an automaton. The slot machine’s wheels rolled a flurry of 7s in front of him, then clunked into place one at a time. He punched the button the instant they stopped, not caring whether he won or lost. It was something to do, something to kill time and ease the worry knotting his stomach.

He wished the casino sounds would break through the cacophony of Gail’s voice echoing in his head. He’d listened to her off and on during the four-hour drive to Vegas, that nagging shrew voice drilling deeper and deeper. It had taken every ounce of willpower he possessed not to point his car

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toward San Diego and confront her face-to-face.

He couldn't believe she was playing this game—essentially taking away his right to see his sons. Subtly, of course. She'd given this weekend to her parents to take the boys to Disneyland and decided that gave her the right to take Damien's weekend coming up. And, oh by the way, she and the new love of her life were going to Hawaii over Christmas and taking the boys with them. *So fuck you* was clearly implied.

Damian had responded the only way he could—"No." And so the arguing began and escalated until Damian raised the ultimate threat. "I'll hire a lawyer and take you back to court if I have to. But I *will* see my sons."

He knew he risked alienating the boys by insisting they spend Christmas with him in the desert rather than a cool tropical island, but, damn it, it was the principle of the thing. Right was right, and Gail was dead wrong assuming she could manipulate him.

The beat of silence that followed his declaration should have warned him. Gail's voice had lowered three decibels, laced with venom and ice as she countered his threat with one of her own. "Do you really want to go that route? Really? You who have so very much to lose?"

The threat made him sick to his stomach. That's when he realized how expertly she'd maneuvered him into a corner. He'd fallen right into her little trap. Damien did have a lot to lose; he had everything to lose. But these were his sons!

Gail had hung up immediately afterward, most likely

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smirking over her victory. Damien knew she expected him to call back and beg, give her whatever she decreed. He wouldn't, not this time. Instead, he'd turned off the cell, yanked off the earpiece, and driven, fingers clutched around the steering wheel and wishing it was her neck. Somehow, he'd reached Vegas, but for the life of him, Damien didn't remember the last part of the drive.

He punched the button and scanned the casino for some sign of Vic. "Where the hell are you?" he muttered to himself. They were supposed to have met over an hour ago.

New panic welled up inside his gut. Those old fears of desertion resurrected. He and Vic might have gotten all the misunderstandings out in the open, but old hurts still ran deep and apparently flared back to life at the first niggling of doubt. Old fears ran even deeper. Gail's latest ploy affected them both. Damien had every intention of fighting for his children, but he sure as hell wouldn't take Vic down with him.

Now who's the deserter? his conscience prodded.

Damien rubbed his free hand over his face. Surely Vic would understand. They were together now, committed as best they could be, adults who communicated...lovers spending a final weekend together before all hell broke loose in Damien's personal life. His heart felt cleaved in two.

Sucking in a breath, he jerked his head up and stabbed the button again. Nothing happened. The machine was frozen, lights flashing, bells and whistles eating away what was left of Damien's brain. *What the fuck! Now the damn slot machine ate my twenty!*

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“Come on.” He smacked again to no avail.

Long fingers closed over his. “Hey, man, stop. Look. You hit the jackpot.”

Damien glared at the stranger’s hand over his, then forced his gaze to focus on the display. Sure enough...he’d won. Big time.

“Holy shit,” he muttered. Where was Vic? He had to see this.

The man slid his hand away. “I’m no math whiz, but it looks like ten grand.”

Damien’s grin cut through his agony. “That ought to help pay for a damn fine lawyer.”

“Doesn’t the Marine Corps provide you with legal counsel?”

Damien jerked his gaze toward the man, looking at him for the first time. Deep blue eyes stared back. Confusion tugged his eyebrows closer together.

“Reid Hansen,” he said, offering his hand in greeting.

Damien slipped his hand into Reid’s grip. “Damien Walker...what made you think I’m a Marine?”

Reid smiled as they ended the handshake. “The haircut sort of gives you away.”

“Ah...” If he’d been thinking straight, Damien would have realized that. The short haircut never failed to tell on those in the Marine Corps. He motioned toward the machine. “I’m used to putting money into the thing, not having it spit money my way.”

Reid leaned his forearms on the edge of his slot machine.

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“Tell me about it. Someone will be along shortly to handle the paperwork and pay you.”

Even as he said the words, casino personnel descended upon Damien—a burly tech whose ring of keys attached to wide work belt at his waist rivaled Santa’s sleigh bells and a petite brunette with a pixy cut who could have easily passed for an elf. Obviously, the possibility of not seeing his boys at Christmas weighed Damien’s perceptions.

Heads craned Damien’s way to see what was going on, except the one Damien most wanted to see—Vic’s. He slid onto the stool at the slot machine beside him while the tech and cashier validated the win and cleared the machine. Then he watched, dumbstruck, as the cashier counted money into his palm. This weekend was on him now. Vic might balk, but Damien would insist.

He signed the necessary forms and made a mental note to tuck some of the cash away to pay the taxes on the win, then gave healthy tips as protocol decreed to the tech and cashier.

“Give it another spin,” the cashier said with a smile. “For luck.”

Damien shrugged, punched the button...and lost. “Now that’s more like it.”

The comment earned laughter and helped lift his mood a little more. *Wait ’til Vic sees.*

“How about comped meals to make up for it?” The cashier handed him dark blue vouchers with the Galaxy’s distinctive splash of gold stars emblazoned over the back. “Enjoy your stay at the Galaxy.”

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“Thank you.” He’d be enjoying it much more if Vic would get here.

Come on. Where are you?

“Buy you a drink?” Reid waved his hand toward the keno bar.

Damien glanced in that direction. It was well lit and located against the far wall, most likely safe. “I’m actually waiting for someone.”

“Good view from over there. Higher up and you’ll be able to see better.”

True, but Damien had ten grand in his pocket, and everyone in gawking distance and beyond knew it. That made him a prime target for robbery. There’d be a safe in Vic’s room as there were in most of the Vegas hotels. All he had to do was sit tight until Vic arrived.

“Why?” he asked.

Reid shrugged. “Why not? We might find we have a mutual interest.”

Alarm bells went off in Damien’s head. Was the guy hitting on him, trying to trap him, working for Gail? He forced his panic down. As far as he knew, no one but Vic knew he was in Vegas for the weekend. They’d planned it down to the smallest detail to cover their tracks.

“And what might that be?” he asked.

“You need a lawyer, and I happen to be one,” Reid replied.

Uh-huh. “And how convenient is that, considering I just won ten grand?”

Reid laughed. “What if I offered to take the case *pro*

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bono?”

This was getting freakier by the second. “You’d take a case you know nothing about for free? What the hell kind of attorney are you?”

His smile didn’t dim. “Some would say the best there is, while others would say I was merely crazy or a pain in the ass. Let’s just say I have a soft spot for Marines.”

Damien narrowed his eyes. “I could be charged with murder.”

“If that were true, you’d be confined to base or quarters or something similar, not in Vegas...unless you were making a run for it. But then I’d doubt you’d take the time to play the slots. Plus you’d be in a lower profile motel.” He leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest. “I’d bet it’s a domestic dispute, most likely a custody battle.”

Well, he wasn’t a stupid person. “Very astute.”

“That’s me in a nutshell. I didn’t get where I am today by not being observant. So...buy you that drink now?”

“Hey...”

Damien jumped when Vic dropped his hand over his shoulder. He glanced up. It had to be a sin to look so great. Vic had a Raiders ball cap on, a black T-shirt, and jeans. Simple, perfect. He might blend in well with a hundred other guys, but not another soul in the world filled them out better. Damien’s muscles melted under the hand on his shoulder. He wanted to cling to Vic and never let go. It broke his heart a thousand times over to have to tell him they might have to be over before they’d really gotten a good chance at being

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together again. But they knew going into this relationship the risks they faced. Damien always imagined the threat would have come from the Marine Corps, not the mother of his children.

“Sorry I’m late. Traffic was a bitch.” Vic maneuvered himself a little between Damien and Reid. That show of dominance rippled through Damien’s muscles, making him crave to be at Vic’s sweet mercy. “I tried to call your cell, but the line was busy, then no answer. Problem?” He narrowed his gaze Reid’s way, the brown in his eyes darkening with suspicion.

Reid stretched tall, matching Vic’s six feet in height. Vic’s nostrils flared. Sniffing out the other man as a threat? If Damien had felt better, he might have laughed. God, he wanted to throw his arms around Vic. He cursed the rules that prevented him from doing so.

“No problem.” Damien stood as well.

Reid handed him a business card. “Call me. My office is in Los Angeles. I wasn’t joking when I said I had a soft spot for Marines. I had a friend who died in Iraq.” He glanced at Vic. “I understand all too well.” His gaze shifted back to Damien. “*Pro bono*. I meant it.”

“Thanks.” Damien shook the hand he offered.

“What the hell was that all about?” Vic braced his hands on his hips and watched the other man weave his way through the casino.

“I’ll buy you a steak dinner and tell you all about it.”

Vic glanced at him from the corner of his eye. “This

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weekend was supposed to be on me.” How could one little sentence manage to scream out, *I love you and can’t wait to fuck you?*

Damien clapped him on the shoulder. “I just won ten grand. This weekend is definitely my treat.” Now all he needed was the strength to tell the love of *his* life it would have to be their last weekend. “On second thought, see if you can upgrade us to a spa suite and we’ll order room service.”

Vic grinned. “I like your thinking.”

CHAPTER 2

What Vic should have said was, “This was supposed to be a low-key weekend.” A spa suite and room service was anything but low-key.

The worry sagging Damien’s features kept him quiet. He looked like he owed ten grand rather than just having won it. Something was seriously wrong. So, when Damien thrust the bulk of his winnings into Vic’s hands, Vic did the only thing he could do—he took it.

“It shouldn’t take long.” He stuffed the money into his front pockets, making him look like he had a humongous erection—which he’d had before Vic had seen the look on Damien’s face, just not this damn big and obvious.

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"I'll wait here." Damien sank to the stool.

Vic walked back to registration, studiously ignoring the pointed glances toward his crotch. Worry ate a hole in his stomach. Was Damien afraid they'd be caught? Had he seen someone they knew from the Marine Corps base?

Vic discounted that idea. Damien wouldn't have suggested a room upgrade and would have stuck with the dinner idea. Much easier to pass off two guys having a meal than two guys in the same room. Their ranks alone forbid socialization, but because they'd been friends long before they'd joined the Marine Corps the fraternization rule wasn't so heavily enforced...as long as they were discreet about it. Rooming together? Nothing discreet about that. They'd get their knuckles rapped for sure about stepping over the line. From that point, it was only a hop, skip, and a jump to being outted as gay.

No, something else was wrong. As Vic smiled at the registration clerk while she happily processed the upgrade request—the Galaxy Hotel and Casino was thrilled to recoup some of their money—he wracked his brain trying to figure out what in the world had happened. Why would Damien need a lawyer?

The answer hit Vic halfway back to the slot machine—Gail pulling crap. She'd probably called Damien while he was on the road to Vegas.

Bitch.

Vic felt for Damien's sons, constantly used in Gail's ongoing and escalating battle. He didn't understand it. Damien

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was a good father, loved his boys, never spoke ill of their mother or tried to play tug-of-war with their emotions. He paid alimony and child support, gave the woman everything she demanded and more. And she still put Damien through hell, punishing him for the demise of a marriage that hadn't worked from the outset.

He watched Damien punch the spin reel on the slot machine as he approached. Vic doubted Damien saw a thing. He fingered the lawyer's business card in his other hand. All Vic wanted was to protect him from the world. The willpower it took not to wrap his arms around his lover right then ate at what was left of Vic's stomach.

Pulling in a breath shored up his resolve and pushed him the rest of the way. With a flick of his wrist, Vic tossed the keycard and its holder into the coin receptacle and kept walking. Their room number was on the holder. They'd take separate elevators and meet there, just as planned.

As Vic made the circuit back toward the elevators, he spied Reid Hansen at the keno bar. The man glanced his way, gave a quick nod Vic swore had a smirk attached to it, then returned his attention to the keno board.

Acid churned Vic's gut. The man *knew*. The how and why didn't matter. One part of him wanted to run the other way; the other part of him wanted to snatch Hansen up by his pretty blue shirt and tell him he better think twice before hitting on another man's guy.

Was that it? Was that why Damien was upset? Some good-looking guy hit on him, a man much more in Damien's league

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than Vic, and Damien wasn't technically free to go for it? Vic could see the lure. A lawyer trumped a gunnery sergeant for an-almost major. Was that why Damien wanted the suite upgrade and offered to pay for the weekend? Guilt made him do it?

Vic punched the elevator button and counted the milliseconds until the doors opened on a couple going at it big time. Lost in orgasmic bliss, the two didn't realize they'd been caught. The man plowed the woman against the elevator wall. The woman's eyes were scrunched tight, fingers wadding his T-shirt for a handhold.

He briefly considered clearing his throat and charging in. Instead, he reached around and punched the number for the top floor, then ducked out. The doors closed once more, taking the horny twosome skyward, in more ways than one. Vic would have loved to have Damien wedged against the wall like that, fucking him for all the world to see. It'd never happened...at least not in their lifetimes. Even without military regulations, society dictates lambasted open displays of affection between same-sex lovers. Well...they lambasted these types of displays from all lovers.

He waited for the next elevator, now hard as a rock. Sex turned him on—he wouldn't lie about that. He didn't care who was doing what to whom. Okay, he did care. He didn't want anyone doing anything to Damien but him. Jealousy poured into him at the thought of Damien with Hansen, their bodies twined, gasps of pleasure filling the room. No way. Not on his watch. Damien was his. And if Damien even thought he'd get

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better somewhere else, Vic was about to show him different.

The same elevator dinged open. The couple stood there, cheeks flushed; the woman's long, dark hair tumbled around her shoulders. The car reeked of sex. Neither looked his way. Vic stepped in and punched the button for his floor, then adjusted his cock to a more comfortable position. He didn't give a damn if the lascivious couple noticed or not.

He shoved his hands in his jeans pockets. One wrapped around the wad of bills, the other clutched the keycard until it threatened to slice his palm. He'd left his suitcase in the car, damn it. All their clothes, everything they needed for the weekend was in there. He sure as hell wasn't going down to the parking garage with all this money in his pocket. Besides, he wanted to wait for Damien. Wanted to see the look on his face when Vic...

The elevator doors opened to a crush of giggling women. Vic tried to maneuver to one side. None of them would have it. Instead, they boldly crowded in, pushing him into the randy couple.

"Sorry," he muttered over his shoulder.

"No problem," the woman replied.

"No problem at all." The man groped Vic's erection, the woman his ass.

Vic cut the man a glare. "Be careful what you wish for."

The man grinned while his wife rubbed her breasts against Vic's back. "I can wish for a lot."

"Trust me, buddy. This is more than you can handle."

He heard the elevator ding and shoved his way to the

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doors, not caring it wasn't his floor. He'd get the next empty elevator. Freedom and fresh air greeted him. Vic raked his fingers through his short hair. The stairs looked mighty tempting. What were ten floors when he was used to running five miles a day?

Fists at his sides, Vic strode toward the nearest staircase. His muscles were rigid, like one giant hard-on. The come-play-with-us tone in the man's voice, the way he'd stroked Vic's cock while the woman toyed with his ass... Reid Hansen leaning close to Damien, his eyes wanting him...

Vic growled and yanked open the fire escape door. He took the stairs two at a time and never even broke a sweat. The blood pumping through his veins settled in his groin, doubling his agony. He'd show Damien who was his equal, give him a fucking he'd remember when he was old and gray. Then Vic would take a fucking of his own, riding Damien until they both collapsed in a pool of jism.

He slammed open the door on his floor, realizing too late he could have easily hurt anyone standing behind it. Fortunately, no one was there. He scanned the room numbers, looking for his as he continued his march down the hall.

There.

Vic stabbed his hand in his pocket for the keycard. Before he could pull it out, the door to his suite opened. He didn't hesitate.

Blue eyes wild with confusion, Damien backed up to make way for Vic. Vic let the door close behind him with a soft click. One hand snapped out, fisting Damien's tan Izod shirt.

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Vic yanked Damien to him and crushed his mouth over Damien's, swallowing any hint of a question before the man could utter it.

Vic lashed his tongue over Damien's. Damien sagged into him, lips melting under the assault. Groaning, he jerked Vic's black T-shirt from his jeans and raked his fingers over Vic's stomach. The muscles rippled under his touch and sensation crawled to his testicles. Vic nailed his hand into Damien's ass and anchored his abdomen to Vic's, then ground their erections into one another. More groans rumbled from Damien's throat. He rolled and thrust into Vic's pelvis, fingers roaming upward until he found Vic's hard nipples. Then he pinched.

Vic jerked his head up on a moan. Damien's lips raked down the column of his throat and suckled at his Adam's apple with that nimble tongue that felt so damn good around the head of his dick.

Vic wedged his fingers into the waistband of Damien's trousers. A flick of his thumb released the fly button. Damien's gasp kissed the well of Vic's throat. Vic jerked at the zipper, slicing it open. Heat from Damien's groin bathed his fingers.

"I've waited all day long for your cock," he said between clenched teeth. "I'm not waiting a second longer."

He pushed Damien until he was wedged against the arm of the one long sofa in the living area, the only comfort seating in the suite. Damien grappled for a handhold to brace himself. His other hand fumbled to release his erection to Vic. Vic

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wasn't so patient. Grabbing trousers and boxers, he jerked them down and shoved his hands between Damien's legs.

"God, your balls feel like boulders," he said, kneading them hard.

Damien spread his legs as far as the clothing around his ankles would allow. "They are," he gasped. "They really are."

"I'm going to suck you dry, lover. Milk you until your balls turn inside out." He jabbed his fingers up Damien's ass. "Or maybe I'll just jerk you off and use your cum so I can fuck your ass. Which do you want, sweetheart?"

"You." It sounded more a whimper than another gasp. "I just want you."

The declaration shattered the remnants of Vic's jealousy and fears. But it only enhanced the driving need to mate. After grabbing the hem of Damien's shirt, Vic hauled it over his head. He licked his lips at the sight of the pebbled brown nipples. He cupped Damien's pecs and traced his thumbs over the peaks.

Damien snatched the bill of Vic's ball cap and whipped the hat aside. It landed on the black marble bar across the room, tinkling the glassware together. They held their breaths, waiting for the telltale sound of breakage, then released them with slow smiles when they realized they were safe.

Long fingers combed through Vic's hair. Damien cradled the back of Vic's head and tugged it down. His eyes were half-closed with that "take me now" look that had always driven Vic wild with lust.

"I need you, Vic. I love you."

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The words brought a rush of tears to Vic's eyes. So much emotion...he'd never grow tired of it or of Damien. He blinked his vision clear and feathered his tongue over Damien's collarbone. Damien arched his neck and his body leaned with him as he urged Vic's head closer to his nipples. Vic plucked one between his lips, rolling the tight bead of flesh around and around. Soft sighs begged Vic for more. Damien's shoes thudded to the floor. He toppled backward to the sofa, taking Vic with him and using the sofa arm to finally wriggle free of his clothing.

Vic groaned and hovered over that beautiful body, all his for the taking. He clutched Damien's sac and marveled at the length of cock that reached for his mouth. Thrusting his fingers deep into Damien's anus once more, he thumbed his testicles. Pre-cum glistened on the tip of the penis. Vic suckled the salty dewdrop to his lips, rubbing until it smeared deep into the corners of his mouth. Damien thrust his hips upward. Nails gouged into Vic's shoulder. He relished the pain, knew exactly what he needed...what they both needed.

He stood and slowly stripped. Damien's passion-clouded gaze followed every move.

"How in the world can you bring me close to coming with just a look?" Vic asked.

Damien merely grasped his erection and slowly stroked, pulling more moisture to the tip. Yes, they both knew what was going to happen next. The very thought of riding Damien's beautiful penis nearly brought Vic to his knees.

"You should know I don't have a single condom on me,"

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he said. “They’re all in the suitcase in the car.”

Damien groaned and squeezed his erection. Looked like he was close to coming, too. This was a huge commitment to make—riding bareback—but Vic knew words wouldn’t be enough to tell Damien how much he loved him, how devoted he was. The fact Damien didn’t utter a word of protest yanked more emotion to the forefront.

Vic knelt astride his lover’s hips. “I swear if you make me cry I’ll paddle your ass until you’re weeping like a baby.”

Damien grinned. “Oh, I’d like to see you try. I’d like that a lot.”

Vic matched his smile and raked his cock over Damien’s. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he softly replied and held his cock at attention. “It’s wet and ready. Hot and hard.”

“Just the way I like it.” Vic positioned himself and sank onto Damien’s erection.

They groaned with the feeling, gasping for breath. Vic’s sphincter clenched around Damien’s throbbing penis, making it harder and hotter with every beat of their pulses. His muscles trembled from the effort not to come, to wait for Damien.

Damien reached for Vic’s cock. Vic groaned and snatched his hands away. He locked his fingers around Damien’s wrists and nailed them to the sofa cushion over his head. Damien moaned and pumped into Vic’s ass.

“That’s it, sweetheart,” Vic growled. “Fuck me hard. Just the way we both like it.”

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Pleasure rippled through Vic with every thrust. The waves rolled over his balls and cock. One touch and he knew he'd spew. He wished for the millionth time there was some way for them to fuck each other at the same time. Now that would have been a ball-clencher.

He pivoted into the fucking, loving the feel of his testicles nestled in Damien's coarse pubic hair and the cushion of Damien's balls against his ass. Damien curled his fingers into fists. Vic peeled them open and laced his fingers through them. Damien gripped him tight, breath held, body frozen. Vic writhed over him, urging his climax free. Damien whipped his head from side to side, then pounded into Vic's ass. Vic jerked his hand free and choked his own climax away. Pleasure-pain shot backward, tightening his anal muscles. Damien shoved deep. Hot jism exploded into Vic. He held on as long as he could, letting Damien shoot it all out. Then, with the last spasm, he pulled free and stabbed his cock into Damien's gaping mouth.

Damien's groan rumbled through him. Vic braced one hand on the sofa arm; the other cradled Damien's head. Damien pierced his fingernails into Vic's ass and sucked him deep. His tongue dug into the under-ridge of Vic's cock, then feathered at the base and up again. Vic tossed his head back and let go. Damien pressed his lips tighter, stroking up and down while he licked fire over the crown. Then he deep-throated him. Vic thought he'd never stop coming, never come back to solid ground. Damien just kept sucking and sucking until Vic swore there wasn't an ounce of liquid left in any part

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of his body.

Soft caresses over his buttocks cleared his head. Damien didn't release Vic's dick until it was finally flaccid and at rest. He kissed the length and nestled his nose against Vic's groin, adding more kisses there.

Vic sighed and stretched on top of him, tracing his handsome face, marveling in the glow of Damien's sky blue eyes. Kissing. Touching. Their heartbeats racing in tandem, then slowing after the rush.

"I thought Hansen was hitting on you," Vic confessed.

"I know." Damien brushed his fingers over Vic's shoulders. "That blast of possessive jealousy was enough of an aphrodisiac to last me a long time. Don't worry. You're all the man I'll ever need."

Vic smiled, then dropped a kiss to his lips. "So..." He rasped his thumb over Damien's five o'clock shadow. Looked like they both could do with a shave. "Why do you need a lawyer?"

Vic felt the catch in Damien's heartbeat. Tears shimmered in his blue eyes and he blinked them away. His Adam's apple bobbed under a hard swallow.

"Gail called while I was on the road. She's trying to keep me from the boys next weekend and all of Christmas. I told her I'd take her back to court. She..." He pulled in a breath. "She threatened me back. Said I had too much to lose and wouldn't dare. Then she hung up. I turned off the cell and left the damn thing off."

Vic's mind went crazy with the words. But one of them

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needed to stay calm here.

“I’m going down to the car to get our suitcase. You order room service for us. Then we’ll talk and get this all figured out while we relax. I don’t want us to have any interruptions.”

Damien drew breath...then nodded. “Me either.”

CHAPTER 3

Damien knew drinking wasn't going to solve anything, but the merlot went down as smooth as velvet and helped ease his tension, although sex with Vic had gone a long way to helping with that problem. But then it always had made everything better. He'd busied himself in Vic's absence by arranging his winnings in neat piles, leaving the twenties out for tips and such, then locked the rest in the safe. He'd leave it with Vic to pay the bill when he left and they could sort the rest out when they got back home. Vic's suitcase was a much safer and less obvious place to store the money when traveling than in Damien's wallet.

"Got any left for me?" Vic's smile bathed Damien in

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warmth and love. Together they could very well weather any storm, even Hurricane Gail.

“All poured and ready for you.” He waved his hand toward the bar. “I raided the mini-fridge and found two small bottles. Over-priced, but very much needed right now. Dinner’s ordered...along with a grown-up bottle of merlot.”

Vic parked the rolling suitcase near the entrance to the separate bedroom, then strode toward the bar to retrieve the wineglass. “Nice suite. I didn’t pay much attention earlier.”

Damien managed a laugh he didn’t really feel. “Don’t go all sappy on me and say you only had eyes for me.”

“I’ll leave it implied then.”

The suite was way beyond their normal budgets. A hot tub steamed in a sunken niche by floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Las Vegas basin. Shades of midnight blue and gold made the room feel like a starlit desert night. Dimmer switches throughout helped add ambiance, bringing out tiny sparkles on the ceiling that resembled stars. The bar tucked against the wall in the corner faced the big screen TV as did the sofa. An equally large bedroom lay beyond the arched doorway—no door...this was a room for lovers. So was the shower for two in the adjoining bathroom.

Vic kicked off his shoes and sank into the sofa, taking the other side to stretch his legs out next to Damien’s. It was one of their favorite positions, bonding without clutching at each other. Although they did their share of clutching, too. They’d sit with legs draped over each other’s talking about everything, making up for lost time. So much lost time.

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“What happened? Tell me everything.”

Damien filled in as many details as he could remember. His heart broke a little more with each word. Vic said nothing, merely nodded and sipped his wine. They both knew what Gail’s threat did to their relationship.

Room service arrived with Damien’s last words. Vic picked up the remote and found the first sporting event he could—a college basketball game. Much better to have two guys in a swanky hotel room watching sports than to find them drinking wine and doing nothing else. He and Vic had become experts at hiding the truth.

He watched Vic’s ass as he walked to the door. When another part of his anatomy cranked up at the sight, Damien opted to hide in the bedroom until the bellman was gone. Hidden from view, he inhaled the smell of porterhouse steak and clutched his fist in his stomach to quell the growl. He monitored the rattle of dishes, the mutter of voices, the door closing...and finally silence when Vic turned the TV off.

“We’re clear,” Vic called out.

Damien darted around the wall. “Good. I didn’t realize how hungry I was until I smelled dinner.”

“Tell me about it.”

Vic filled their wineglasses from the fresh bottle of merlot. Their dinner was laid out on the coffee table—fine china, crystal stemware, white linen napkins.

“What? No candles?”

Vic snickered. “Want me to run to the store?”

“Honestly, I don’t want you out of my sight until we have

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to check out.” Damien snagged the two big pillows from the sofa and tossed them onto the floor in front of the table. They sat cross-legged and snapped out their napkins at the same time, then lifted the sterling silver domes from the plates.

Heat wafted off the porterhouse steak, baked potatoes with all the fixings, and steamed broccoli. The staff hadn’t wasted any time getting the food from the kitchen to the door. A basket of hot rolls and a dish of butter topped off the meal. It might all be a heart attack waiting to happen, but Damien knew they’d enjoy every bite.

“I’d wanted this to be the best weekend ever and the first of many,” Damien said as he carved into his steak.

“It will be,” Vic said around a mouthful of food. “Personally, I think she’s bluffing. She doesn’t know shit.”

“We have a lot to lose to try to call her out, Vic.” Damien eyed the crisp fat edging his steak and decided he couldn’t pass it up.

“Think about it...” Vic tapped the air with his knife. “The kids are with her parents. She’s presumably there alone since she’d never want this latest boyfriend to hear her talking to you and discovering what a bitch she really is. If she *knew* you were gay, she wouldn’t hesitate one second to rub it in your face.”

He had a valid point.

“And who would have told her?” Vic went on. “Your family barely speaks to her. Didn’t you tell me they blame her for the divorce?”

“They do.” His parents had been thrilled when Damien got

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married, certain his interest in men had been a youthful acting-out indiscretion. Hearing Damien and Gail were divorcing had re-ignited all their “fears.” They’d all tolerated Gail for the sake of the boys, but nothing more as far as Damien was aware.

“So what does Gail really know?” Vic fluffed sour cream into his baked potato. “She knows you like a little something extra in the bedroom.”

Damien looked up at him from under an arched eyebrow.

Vic shrugged. “Okay...a *lot* extra in the bedroom. How can she possibly think to bring you to task over the fact you like BDSM?”

“She could try to make the court think I hurt the boys.” It’d be like her, too.

“That’s ridiculous. You’ve never laid a hand on either of them.” Vic stabbed his fork into his steak. “Besides, you’re the sub. You’re the one getting the deed done to you, not the other way around.”

“Yes, something every Marine Corps officer craves his command knows—that he’s a submissive who like to be bound and disciplined. Only thing to top that tidbit of information will be the news I like to be dominated and fucked by a man.” The sarcasm fell heavy between them and settled hard in Damien’s stomach. Dinner didn’t look so great anymore.

“And not just any man...Victor Williams, Gunnery Sergeant, United States Marine Corps, sir! Standing partially at attention and always proud to serve!” he proclaimed, and

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snapped a salute out.

Damien couldn't help it. He burst out laughing.

Laughed so hard he toppled backward and tears came to his eyes. "Oh, my God! This is so not funny!" But it was. It was hilarious.

He righted himself and used the linen napkin to wipe the tears from his eyes. "How is it that you always know exactly what I need?"

Vic slipped his hand over Damien's and squeezed. "Because I love you. I always have. I always will."

Damien turned his hand and grasped Vic's fingers. Now the other kind of tears threatened. Words choked in his throat.

"We're going to enjoy our weekend." Vic rubbed his thumb over Damien's knuckles. "And we're gonna face together whatever that bitch has to throw at us. Even if we have to hire the good-looking lawyer who has the hots for you."

"A soft spot for Marines," he amended.

Vic grinned. "Somehow I suspect there's not much soft about that guy. I can sniff out a dominant gay man from a mile away."

Damien playfully bent Vic's fingers back. "No sniffing any other man but me."

"Yes, sir! Now standing fully at attention, sir!" Vic added a wink.

"Stop that and eat your meat before it gets cold." He snapped his finger up when Vic drew breath for a snappy comeback. "Leave it alone, babe."

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Vic leaned over the table, closing the distance between them. “Never,” he whispered, and dropped a kiss to Damien’s mouth his soul felt.

* * *

“Now I know how Roman emperors felt.” Vic took the last sip of wine and set his glass on the ledge behind them as far from the hot tub as he could reach.

Damien had to agree with his assessment. Hot jets of water bubbled around them, soothing tension away. Las Vegas’s neon lights spread out below them, giving them a show. Dinner was a sweet memory. Sitting side by side in the hot tub sheer bliss. Decadence at its very best...extravagant, too. True, the money could have been better used for an attorney, but life was short, and who knew when he and Vic would have an opportunity like this again.

“Only thing missing is the vassals to serve us,” Vic added.

“Naked and oiled.” Damien grinned and finished off his wine.

Vic slipped the glass from his fingers and set the glass next to his. “And well-hung in a variety of shapes and sizes so we can indulge each other’s every need.”

“Or watch them indulge and sit back and enjoy the show.” Damien slid into the arm Vic wrapped around him and nestled between Vic’s thighs. He loved the feel of Vic’s erection wedged against his lower back, the arms holding him tight.

Vic thumbed Damien’s nipples and tickled his fingers over his stomach. Deep muscles quivered under the touch. Waves

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rippled outward, swelling his genitals and tingling his fingers and toes. Vic corkscrewed his finger into Damien's navel. He gasped at the stab of pleasure to his testicles.

He grasped Vic's wrist to keep him from moving any lower. "I wanted this weekend to be no-holds-barred. Under the circumstances, not knowing exactly what Gail's planned..."

"Don't worry." Vic licked his earlobe. "I can do things to you that will feel so damn good and never leave a single mark. Things so intense just thinking about them will give you a raging hard-on a gorilla would envy."

Damien arched his neck into Vic's lips. "That happens now whenever I think of you. You don't know how many times during the day I look up from my desk and see you...want you."

Vic groaned and bit his earlobe, then swirled his tongue around the shell of his ear. "Is that why you keep your door shut? Oh, please tell me you're in there beating off."

More heat flushed the erection wedged against Damien's back. He smiled, and they both knew he was about to lie, but the image of doing just that, of building a new fantasy, was too great to pass up.

"You guessed my secret." He pressed his lips against a moan when Vic nibbled down the tendon of his neck. "Sometimes I don't even bother to shut the door. I just watch you sitting there, so efficient and sure of yourself, the one everyone comes to and the only one I come for. I stroke myself until I can't bear another moment..."

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“That’s not the kind of behavior I expect from a man of your caliber.” Vic wrapped his fist around Damien’s cock and squeezed.

“I’m sure you’ll find some way to correct the lapse.” Many delicious ways. He could already feel the burn in his ass from the strap.

Vic cupped his balls, kneading with those oh-so-nimble fingers. “I could bind that randy cock of yours so it couldn’t move all day. Make you wear a butt plug during working hours that’ll remind you of your place.”

“Or come into my office during lunch and give me a well-deserved fucking.” He nuzzled his nose against Vic’s mouth.

Vic chuckled. “Can you imagine?”

“Yes,” Damien whispered. “I can imagine it very well.” He pulled Vic’s bottom lip between his, then his top lip, nibbling each before slicing them open with his tongue.

Vic sucked in a hard breath and deepened the kiss, one hand massaging Damien’s testicles while the other rolled his nipple between his thumb and forefinger. Damien wiggled against Vic’s erection, damning the bubbling water that kept him from making good contact. However, when he tried to shift upward and join them, Vic’s grip on Damien’s balls forced him to remain in place.

“Patience,” he whispered against Damien’s mouth. “Do you really have so little discipline?”

“Only what you give me,” he replied, and sealed their lips once more.

Vic looped thumb and forefinger around Damien’s

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erection and stroked in time with their tongues. Damien twisted until he was astride Vic's lap, cocks resting side by side. Vic clutched his ass, wedging him close, and dove in for a harder kiss. Damien reveled in the feel of their bodies dueling against one another, hot prick to hot prick, tongues lashing harder and harder with every thrust.

The hot tub cycled to a slow swirl. Vic whipped his hand to the controls and smacked them on. Bubbles burst to life once more. Vic shifted until Damien felt the jet at his back, then he broke the kiss. Vic urged him around until they were back to front, Damien tucked between his thighs. Feet braced on the bench seat across from him, Vic lifted his knees beneath Damien's and spread him wide.

"You're going to drown us—" A groan cut off Damien's feeble protest when he felt the hot pulse of water roll over his testicles and up his cock.

"You were saying." Vic's voice rumbled against his ear.

"Nothing," he gasped out.

"I didn't think so." Vic shifted again and rubbed his erection tight against Damien's balls.

"Oh God, Vic! Inside me...please!"

Vic grunted in reply and eased his cock into Damien's ass.

"Oh, yes!" he gasped. "This is exactly what I needed."

"You and me both," Vic replied, grinding deep.

Damien grappled for a handhold, but each time Vic rocked him into the jet, undermining his efforts and maintaining control. He didn't know how Vic kept them upright...and he didn't care. He let the water fuck them both, rolling them into

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a slow, sweet rhythm. Vic tightened his hold, pinching one nipple hard and then the other. Teeth grazed Damien's neck in a threat to bite that took his breath away. Then Vic clamped his lips down, kneading the sensitive tendon. And Damien felt it in his cock, that slow crawl up and down. Balls hugged his body. His sphincter muscle clenched around the hard rod impaling him. Vic thrashed into his grip and Damien couldn't help a little smile.

"Now who's the boss?" He skidded his hands over Vic's thighs.

Vic chuckled. "Me." He clamped his fist around Damien's cock and toppled them forward.

Damien braced his forearms on the padded headrest surrounding the tub. He barely had time to place his knees before Vic drove into his ass. His fist choked off Damien's orgasm, making him wait...making him take the fucking they both wanted...needed. Water jets skimmed over his balls and he knew Vic felt it, too. Knew sweet torture just as Damien did.

Gasps for breath rose above the rushing water... his... Vic's... perfectly timed. His dick felt on fire...so did Vic's wedged inside him. So hot. So hard. So damned perfect.

Vic slapped one hand next to Damien's on the headrest. Fingers curled over the surface, knuckles white from the effort to make the moment last. Then he crawled them over to Damien's and laced their fingers tight.

God, the wealth of emotion in so desperate a clutch!

Damien gasped and reared his head back, seeking Vic's

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lips. Vic's eyes were squeezed tight against his rising climax, jaw clenched. The love—God, the love!—surrounded Damien's heart and annihilated what was left of his control. He snapped his hips forward, in perfect time with Vic, coming so hard he wondered if he wasn't shooting for both of them. With the last spurt, he rested his forehead on the cushion, heaving for breath.

Vic hugged his back, slowly withdrawing, but never moving too far apart. Fingers danced over Damien's, then up his arm and back down his side until Vic cupped his hip. He dotted kisses over Damien's shoulders and down his spine as far as the water allowed. Damien was greedy enough to want more. Much, much more.

* * *

Vic loved the feel of Damien's muscles under his fingers, the strength and glide of the carved angles and planes, the way they melted with his touch. Like he was the sculptor and Damien the work of art.

Vic smiled. He sure as hell wasn't an artist of any kind, but Damien's body was definitely a treasure to behold—a physique blessed by the gods and honed by years in the Marine Corps.

"I could melt into this bed," Damien mumbled. Eyes closed, he rested his head on his folded arms.

Good enough to eat.

"Now you know how I felt when you were massaging me. And what was it you told me at the time?" He traced his finger

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down the crack of Damien's butt.

Damien sucked it a breath when Vic's finger tickled his ass. "No melting allowed."

"Exactly." Vic added a sharp hand smack. "That should wake you up."

Damien's fingers curled into the sheet. "It does." He lifted his ass for more.

Vic obliged with a smack to the other cheek. He saw pleasure ripple down Damien's body. "I brought a little surprise along for both of us."

"Really?" He glanced around. "Give it."

"Awfully demanding all of a sudden, aren't you? First, you confess to lascivious pursuits in your office, and now you're ordering me to give you my treat? Someone needs to be reminded of his manners."

Damien drew breath to reply, then clamped his lips shut.

Vic eased from the bed to retrieve the extra large plugs he'd purchased for them online days before. He covered both with lube, then picked up the soft leather belt from where it nested in the suitcase. The buckle jingled, warning Damien in advance what was going to happen. Vic was hard just thinking about it and knew Damien would be as well. This wouldn't be the full-out session they'd anticipated, but it would do.

Plugs clutched in one hand, Vic approached the bed, belt dangling all the way. Damien had turned his head to watch. His eyes were glazed with want. Teeth and tongue played on his lips while he waited. Vic's heart broke a little for all the times Damien had had to engage in self-discipline. Never

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again. Vic loved him enough to see he always got exactly what he needed.

He swung the belt and landed a stroke across Damien's ass. The resulting groan speared through Vic. If his hands weren't occupied one would have been around his dick. He struck again. The reddened stripe blossomed next to the previous one. Damien thrust himself into the mattress. Vic hit, harder this time.

"No cheating. On your hands and knees."

Damien rocked into that position without a word. His beautiful cock thrust toward the bed at the perfect forty-five degree angle. The moist tip begged for Vic's mouth. He licked his lips, anticipating the salty taste. Drawing in a deep breath to steady his resolve, Vic stroked again and again and again, just enough to bring a solid blush to Damien's ass, nothing that would show in a couple of hours. Blood pooled to Vic's groin, weighting his cock and balls as if he were the one taking the spanking. He landed a final slap and threw the belt aside. Sheer willpower kept him from pouncing on his lover.

Kneeling behind him, Vic licked up his thighs and flashed his tongue over Damien's testicles. A whimpered groan tore from them both. He traced upward, twirling his tongue over Damien's anus before gliding over his hot ass. Vic kissed and licked a path over every inch. The wait was killing them.

Pulling in a breath, he leaned back. Damien gasped when the plug touched his rectum. Vic rolled the tip around, then slipped it beyond the muscle and cupped Damien's sac. "My turn," he whispered.

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He stretched out beside Damien and handed him the second plug. Damien wrapped his fingers around the end. Vic grabbed his knees and pulled them to his chest, opening himself fully to Damien.

Damien passed a slow gaze down Vic's body. Tiny moans of appreciation sprinkled over Vic. Damien leaned down and dropped a kiss to Vic's cock just below the head, then he ran his tongue down to Vic's testicles and suckled for just a second before diving lower.

Tingles sparked through Vic at the first touch of Damien's tongue around his ass. He rocked into the rimming, gasping when Damien pressed deeper into the muscle and nudged his nose against Vic's balls. The shock of cool lube reined him in for a second, then morphed into sweetness as the plug hit home.

Damien planted kisses up Vic's body until they were face-to-face once more. Vic sealed them with a kiss and rolled Damien beneath him. Their cocks nested side-by-side, hot, hard, and desperate to come. Each flex of his hips tightened his ass around the plug, shooting more fire over his genitals. He clamped his fingers over Damien's ass, groaning into their kiss when Damien did the same to him. Neither of them was going anywhere but to the stars.

Tongues thrashed in time with cocks trapped between their bodies and they went at each other like jackhammers. They swallowed the moans that poured from their throats as long as they could. But the momentum, the rise, the climax driving them finally forced their mouths apart. Jaws clenched, they

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fought to keep their erections together. The heat—God, the heat!—commanded every move.

A twitch in Damien's dick urged Vic's to join in. Vic let himself go, closed his eyes and fell into the moment. Pressure swelled his balls and shoved toward freedom that suddenly felt miles away. Then it shot forward, blinding Vic to the world as it existed beyond his penis. The surge burst from the tip, fiery hot and thick. It mingled with Damien's release with each roll of their bodies.

Vic's senses slowly returned, easing the roar in his ears. Eyes half closed, he glanced down at Damien. He laid there, mouth agape, pulling in gasps for breath that mirrored Vic's. Their heartbeats raced in tandem, jism glued them together.

"When I can move again"—he brought lazy fingers against Damien's cheek—"I'm going to lick you clean."

Damien's eyes opened to slits. A half smile raised one corner of his lips. "Not if I get you first."

CHAPTER 4

Home would have looked better if it was Vic's house he was returning to and not his own. It was two in the morning, and Damien was dead tired. He and Vic had decided to stagger their departures from Vegas just in case. A flip of the coin decided who would leave when. Damien caught the later shift and rolled out of Vegas and into bumper-to-bumper traffic and a rainstorm at five. If that wasn't bad enough, he got a flat tire at the halfway point.

Good news was that he'd been able to pull into a rest area to change it. Bad news was he didn't see the broken glass under the car until he smacked it with his hand trying to put the jack in place. He'd bled like a stuck pig. The rain only

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aggravated the cuts. He'd wrapped his hand in an old olive drab T-shirt he kept as a rag and just done the best he could. The bleeding had stopped, but it still hurt like a son of a bitch.

Damien briefly considered going to the naval hospital on base to see if he needed stitches, but he was just too tired to deal with it. Already a four-hour trip had turned into nine hours. Blood stained his shirt and trousers and the rusty scent aggravated his empty stomach. All he wanted was a shower and a few hours sleep before having to be at work. Seeing a county sheriff's car parked outside his house piqued his curiosity. That doubled when two deputy sheriffs exited their vehicle and headed his way when Damien pulled into the driveway.

He glanced at his house. Everything seemed to be in order. As far as he knew, he hadn't violated any traffic laws—and most likely would have been pulled over on the spot if he had. His thoughts raced to his sons, to Vic. He shoved those possibilities aside. Gail would have called directly if something had happened to one of the boys. He winced. He hadn't turned the cell back on. As for Vic... Damien would be notified via Marine Corps channels if anything happened to him.

Damien fished his phone from his pocket as he exited his car, turning it on in the process. Sure enough, there were forty missed phone calls and an equal number of voice mail messages...but all from numbers with caller ID blocked.

A flashlight blinded him. "Are you Captain Damien Walker?" one of the deputies asked.

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He tried to shield his eyes from the glare. “Yes. What’s going on?”

“Want to tell us how you got to be such a mess, sir?” he asked.

They flanked him now.

Damien held up his hand, still wrapped in the bloodied T-shirt. His shirt and pants were damp with blood, rain, and dirt. He knew it look bad. “Leaned into glass while changing a tire. What’s this about?”

“Where?”

“On I-40 on the way back from Vegas. Again...what’s this about?” He saw the second deputy step away as he talked into the radio mic on his shoulder. Words like “possible suspect,” “bloody clothes,” and “disheveled” squawked out. Dread settled in his gut.

“Anyone with you?”

Before he could answer, a second vehicle joined them—this one unmarked. The two suits leaving the sedan left little doubt they were law enforcement, though. The older one sauntered forward, glare from the flashlight reflecting off silver-gray sprinkled through his black hair. The younger one hurried to catch up, smacking his gum like there was no tomorrow.

“I’m Detective Mike Collins, Homicide, San Diego Police Department.” He flashed his badge. “This is my partner, Ron Gage. You are Damien Walker?”

He thought he was going to be sick. “Yes.”

“Gail Walker is your ex-wife?”

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Now he knew he was going to be sick. “Yes.” God, he could scarcely breathe. Damien didn’t want to hear the next words.

“Sir, we regret to inform you that your ex-wife was found murdered late this afternoon in the family home.”

Damien’s knees buckled. He leaned into his car to keep upright. “My boys. Who? How?”

He knew the blood covering his clothes now made him suspect number one.

“Your sons are fine and are with their grandparents. They did not witness the scene. Sir, can you tell us where you’ve been since Friday?”

Was it home invasion? Robbery gone bad? A thousand questions buzzed in his head. “Las Vegas.”

“Great, sir. Now if you could just verify that. Perhaps show us a receipt from the hotel, food, gas...”

“I...” Was screwed, is what he was. Everything was in Vic’s name, and he sure as hell couldn’t use Vic as an alibi. *The gambling receipt!* “Yeah, I do.” He shoved his hand in his pocket. Four police weapons locked on to him.

“Get your hand out of your pocket! Get your hand out of your pocket! Slowly!” Gage yelled.

Damien did as ordered and lifted his arms.

“Turn around and face the vehicle. Hands on the hood. Legs back and spread.” A familiar position...but not in this context. Damien complied. “I’m not armed. You’ll find a receipt in my wallet from the Galaxy Casino for slot machine winnings.”

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Collins patted him down, then pulled the wallet from Damien's pocket. "So...where's the money? I only count a hundred dollars here. They give you a check? Is it in your suitcase?"

Damien closed his eyes. He'd given the money to Vic to square the hotel bill and the remainder was in the bottom of Vic's suitcase for safekeeping. As for a suitcase...except for what he had on, Vic had everything.

"I wound up putting it all back into the slots." It was a plausible explanation.

"There's also a business card here for Reid Hansen, Attorney-At-Law."

"I met him in Vegas." Realizing the possible implications of what he'd just said, Damien quickly clarified, "He was sitting next to me when I hit the jackpot."

"And he just happened to give you his business card? Any particular reason why?"

Nothing that wouldn't make him more of a suspect, but what else could he say? If the police hadn't discovered the phone calls between him and Gail by now, they would soon. "My ex-wife and I had a discussion about the boys while I was on the road to Vegas. It didn't go well."

"Especially for her... Go on."

"I hit the jackpot and muttered something about being able to hire a lawyer and Reid Hansen overheard. He can verify all of this." Damien wanted to kick himself. Hansen could also confirm Vic was with him.

"Hmm...I see." Collins drew in a breath. "Sir, I'm going to

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have to ask you to come in with us while we sort this out.” Collins grabbed his bicep and steadied Damien to his feet. “We’ll notify your command of the situation.”

“And what, exactly, is the situation?” he asked. “I need to get to my kids.”

“Your kids are fine. We just need to sort a few things out. Make sure everything meshes.”

“Are you arresting me? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Sir, you can either cooperate and we can have a little sit-down in a comfortable room while we verify a few facts, or we can lock you up and you can spend the next forty-eight hours in a jail cell down in San Diego. Your choice which way it goes.”

It didn’t sound like much of a choice to him. He was surprised they hadn’t already cuffed him.

He held his hand out. “My wallet please?” When Collins obliged, Damien stuffed it into his back pocket. “Mind telling me how Gail died?”

“Bludgeoned to death. Very vicious. Crime of passion.”

Damien tried to force the images out of his head. “She has a guy she’s been seeing.”

“Yes, we found him...also dead inside the house.”

Fuck...what the hell is going on?

“The last call your ex made was to you. Coroner places death several hours later with her boyfriend not far behind.”

The hole just kept getting deeper and deeper. He had to presume the police wouldn’t want to contact Hansen. Doing so might invoke attorney-client privilege and cut off their

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interview with Damien. If Damien were smart, he'd call Hansen himself right now. Fear of exposing Vic kept him quiet.

"While I was in Vegas," he pointed out again.

"All of which we'll sort out." He waved his arm toward the unmarked sedan.

Damien cut a glance in that direction. They were intent on taking him in one way or the other. He suspected the threat of handcuffs was a bluff. If they had an arrest warrant, they would have served it by now. Although the sketchy details of his whereabouts over the weekend, coupled with his bloodstained clothes could give them enough to arrest him on probable cause. At which point, he'd call a lawyer and his relationship with Vic would surely be exposed.

No, he had to trust that what little trail he'd left over the weekend exonerated him...and left Vic completely out of the picture. Cooperating would also get him to his sons more quickly. He was innocent and the detectives would figure that out soon enough when they found no physical evidence to place him at the scene.

He scrubbed a shaking hand down his face. God, what must be going through his kids' minds right now? He didn't doubt Gail's parents had told them their mother and her boyfriend were dead. He also wouldn't put it past them to have accused him of killing her. Yes, cooperating was much better than having the boys hear he'd been arrested as a suspect in her death. Much better.

"All right." He started for the sedan. "Let's get this over

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with quickly.”

“My feelings exactly.” Collins fell in step beside him.

CHAPTER 5

Vic pressed his hand against the donut boxes balanced precariously on the passenger seat. After the weekend with Damien, he was over-the-moon, kick-up-your-heels, whistle-a-happy-tune happy. And it showed. He didn't know how the hell he was going to hide it. How he was going to keep from going hard at the first sight of Damien. Even exchanging knowing smirks was out of the question. He sure as hell couldn't give in to the impulse and wrap Damien in his arms. So, he opted to distract everyone with four dozen Krispy Kreme donuts while he and Damien got a handle on their emotions.

Vic's joy ebbed when he turned into the parking lot and

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realized Damien's car wasn't there. Worry filled the void. Damien was beyond punctual. If he wasn't at work this time of the morning, something had to be wrong. They should have checked in with each other last night to make sure each arrived home safely. Vic had left Vegas ahead of the thunderstorm, but Damien would have been caught in it. Still, Vic's phone had been on the whole time. If something had gone wrong, Damien would have called.

Most likely got pulled out for an early appointment.

Vic grinned. He'd make sure he saved a couple of glazed donuts for Damien for later.

He eased into a parking slot, lifting a wave to his admin clerk who'd just arrived. Then he hoisted the donuts into his arms and tried his best not to whistle as he walked on to the office. The corporal held the door open, grin wide while he eyed the boxes.

"Oh, man, Gunny, I knew I smelled fresh donuts."

Laughing, Vic shifted part of the load into the corporal's arms. "We'll all have to run a little harder to wear them off, but what the hell, right?"

"I hear you on that one."

Office staff swarmed them when they stepped inside. "Make sure the CO and XO get a couple," he told them. "Put them on their desks." He grabbed two for himself and sank behind his desk.

"CO's got company already." His sergeant jerked his head toward the closed door. "NCIS was waiting for him when he got in."

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That wasn't good. "Everyone present and accounted for this morning, Sergeant?"

"Far as I can tell the only one who hasn't reported in yet is Captain Walker, Gunny."

Dread soured the bite of donut now lodged in Vic's throat. He washed it down with scalding black coffee, made a show of opening the office recall roster to find Damien's number, then dialed. The answering machine picked up. Ditto on the voice mail for his cell.

"Think something happened to him?" the sergeant asked.

Vic didn't think it; he knew it. He curled his fist on his thigh and tried to stay calm. "I hope not. I'll talk to Lieutenant Colonel Jackson about it just as soon as he's free." His gut told him that was the purpose of the NCIS visit. He fought panic while he ticked off the minutes that door remained closed.

When it finally opened, he vaulted to his feet. Jackson's gaze caught his. It was bad, very bad. Jackson escorted the two NCIS agents to the door, then did an about-face and strode back to his office. "Gunny, my office now...please."

Vic didn't hesitate. He stepped inside and shut the door behind him.

The CO motioned to the chair in front of his desk without making eye contact. "Have a seat, Gunny."

Shit, we're screwed.

"I'm not going to dance around this because there's no easy way to sugar-coat bad news," Jackson said.

Vic braced himself.

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“Captain Walker’s ex-wife and her boyfriend were murdered over the weekend.”

Vic released the breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding with an, “Oh, my God.” Why the hell didn’t Damien call him? *Unless...* That’s why NCIS was here.

“Sir, Captain Walker did *not* kill them. In fact, he was nowhere near San Diego this weekend.” Vic didn’t care what it did to their careers, he was not letting Damien take the fall for this. “We spent the weekend in Vegas. We went Friday after work and didn’t leave to come back until around noon yesterday.”

Jackson stared, unblinking. “I don’t know whether to be relieved, pissed, or suspicious. I’ll start with relieved. You can account for his whereabouts the entire time?”

“Friday night, all day Saturday, and Sunday until noon we spent every second together.” He leaned forward, knees on thighs, ready to spin the half-truth. “Sir, you are well aware Captain Walker and I have been friends for a very long time, long before the Marine Corps. We know fraternization is a violation, but we also know exceptions are made in circumstances such as ours, as long as we’re discreet. We felt we couldn’t get any more discreet than going to Vegas over the weekend. We even took separate cars. We spent the weekend hanging out like old-time best friends do.”

And fucking each other’s brains out.

Jackson nodded. “That took care of all my concerns in one fell swoop, Gunny.” He leaned back on a sigh. “It’s going to be a rough week for Captain Walker. He’s lucky to have a

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friend who can help him through it. I want you with him every second to see he's got all the support he needs. It's what we do for our fellow Marines...and old-time best friends," he added with a failed attempt at a smile.

"For now"—he pushed his chair back—"you and I are going to go to the sheriff's office. Detectives have him there for now as a person of interest. Your alibi will clear things up. Why the hell he didn't just give your name in the first place..."

Vic had a damn good idea why. "Shock over Gail's death. Frantic about his boys. Sir...I doubt he was thinking much beyond getting to his kids."

"God...I hope they weren't in the house when this happened."

Vic started shaking his head before Jackson finished the sentence. "Damien...uhm...Captain Walker told me they were spending the weekend with their grandparents at Disneyland. Apparently, he and Gail had words over the phone during the drive to Vegas about visitation. That might be why the police wanted to question him."

"Well..." Jackson looked everywhere but at Vic. "From what I've been told, he didn't get back to his house until two this morning." He swallowed. "And he was covered in blood. He told them he cut his hand on glass when he was changing a flat tire. Other...inconsistencies...made the police...wary."

Vic jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "I'll check his wall locker for a change of clothes." He shot to his feet. "I presume we're leaving now, sir?"

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“We are,” he replied. “And, Gunny...”

Hand on the doorknob, Vic looked around. “Yes, sir?”

“Calm heads. Hauling out your inner drill instructor isn’t going to help the situation.”

Staying calm ranked up there as one of the hardest things he’d ever had to do. All he wanted was to storm the halls of the sheriff’s office and damn the consequences. “Yes, sir. I’ll consider that a direct order.”

“Whatever it takes to save our man, Gunny.”

Jackson didn’t realize—or maybe he did and didn’t want to say—that Vic would do anything to save *his* man.

CHAPTER 6

Damien glanced at his watch. Six hours they'd kept him in this concrete room—no windows, stale air that make a locker room smell springtime fresh, and the metal chair from hell that had left permanent crease marks in his back. Worry, exhaustion, and a dozen other things plagued him. He'd checked his cell phone repeatedly, hoping the signal would clear. Each time he got the “no service” message, until the battery died.

They'd offered him something to drink repeatedly, even offered the opportunity to change his bloody clothes and slip into one of the jail jumpsuits on hand. Damien declined it all, fearing anything he did would be twisted into evidence against

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him, despite his innocence. They'd collect DNA from his clothes, saliva from drink cups, even collect urine. Hell, maybe they'd find an excuse to execute a body cavity search and discover remnants of Vic's semen in his ass.

A surveillance camera mounted high in the corner monitored his every move. He knew the detectives watched for something, anything, to pin guilt on him.

Damien rubbed his burning eyes, then scrubbed his hand down his whisker-roughened face. He knew lack of sleep made him paranoid, but didn't give a damn. The Marine Corps had taught him how to survive when captured—give nothing up. He used that training to shore his defenses.

It killed him to think of his sons, crying over the loss of their mother, wondering where their dad was. He could see Doug and Keith huddled together against the world. The brothers had always been close. Only a year separated their births.

Damien squeezed his eyes closed against the image of the two of them scared and crying. He prayed Gail's parents weren't using the opportunity to poison their minds against him. *Please let them be reasonable...for once.* Although, they were much easier to get along with than his own family.

He gave in to the need to rest his head on his folded arms. *So tired.* The pain in his hand when he leaned down brought him upright once more. He still had it wrapped in the olive drab T-shirt, stiff now with dried blood like his shirt and trousers. The stench turned his sour stomach. He reeked.

By now, his CO had been notified he'd been detained.

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That meant Vic would know. He'd be worried sick. Damien wished he could reassure him that he could ride this out. He wished he could reassure himself, too. All he wanted was to lean into the comfort of Vic's arms. Then to get the hell out of this place and be with his sons.

He worked long division and compounded interest in his head to help stay alert, then gave up because it made his headache worse. He tried laying his head on his arms again, this time avoiding his injured hand. He'd just slipped into the first layer of sleep when he heard the door open. He suspected they'd been waiting for just this moment to come in, thinking his exhaustion gave them the edge. Damien wasn't in the mood to play with them anymore.

"By now I'm sure you've searched my car," he told Collins, annoyed the man looked refreshed, rested, and clean-shaven. "You've found the tire iron, jack, and trunk all with my blood on them. You've also found the flat tire. If you check the mileage and the gas log book I keep in the console between the bucket seats, you'll see the mileage equals a trip to Vegas and back. No more, no less. Gas receipts in the console also show that. There's no way I could have driven from Vegas to San Diego and back here without it reflecting in the mileage."

"You wouldn't have to." Collins squealed the chair legs on the floor as he hauled the chair back. He tossed a manila folder onto the table and sat. One flick of his finger revealed the photo inside, he and Vic at the casino slot machines.

"Got a buddy or two working in Vegas," Collins said.

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“They were able to secure this surveillance from the Galaxy Casino.”

The good-ole-boy system hard at work.

“Looks like a payoff to me.” Collins tapped the picture. “This clearly shows you giving this man a good deal of money. Ten grand, perhaps? Even odder is that he matches the description of a man seen leaving your ex-wife’s house early Saturday morning. Same height, same build, same coloring, same Raiders T-shirt and cap.”

What was left of his morale plummeted, while his rage built. Damien didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, but he was damn well pissed. He’d never been a direct suspect in the first place. Collins was merely digging for something—apparently anything—to loosely tie Damien to the crime. He must have pissed himself with joy when he saw this footage.

Thousands of men in Southern California wore Raiders gear. But Damien was clearly shown handing off ten grand—damning evidence of a different nature. All he had to do was tell Collins it was Vic. All he had to do was give up the man he loved, ruin his career, both their careers. Damien refused. There had to be justice somewhere.

“I’ve been as patient and cooperative as I can be with you,” Damien said slowly. “I’m done. I’m leaving.” He pushed away from the table and stood.

Collins glanced up. “Long walk back to your house, Walker.”

“That’s why we have public transportation. At this point, I’ll even walk every step if I have to. I have sons who need

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me.” He cut around the table and headed for the door, then prayed he wouldn’t find it locked to ruin his grand exit. Before he could touch the handle, there was a knock and the door opened.

Gage blinked in surprise at finding Damien standing there. He blocked the doorway. “He’s clear, Collins. He’s got an alibi.”

“That still doesn’t explain this.” Collins flashed the picture.

“The hell it doesn’t.” Vic pushed his way into the room. Lieutenant Colonel Jackson was two steps behind him. Damien’s emotions tumbled. Dressed in cammies, both men looked combat ready and set to kill anyone who stood in their way.

“That’s me.” Vic stabbed his finger toward the photo. “And I can account for every single cent of it. It’s still buried in my suitcase at my house. I’ve got hotel receipts to back me up, and you can check my car for mileage. Captain Walker and I were together the entire weekend.”

Collins’ eyes went wonky.

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” Vic snapped. “We’re best friends and have been for years. The CO knows it, too. We spent the weekend away from base so we could hang out. Come on”—he wrapped his fingers over Damien’s shoulder—“let’s get you home and cleaned up. You don’t want the boys to see you like this.”

Damien let Vic steer him from the room. Jackson cut the detectives a glare and followed. No one said a word until they

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were outside. Sunlight warmed Damien's face, but chills now wracked his body.

"Fucking idiots," Jackson said. "Not you." He jerked his head toward the building. "Them. Let's get you to the hospital and have someone take a look at your hand."

Damien plucked his shirt away from his skin. "Not like this, sir. I want to call my kids, clean up."

"I'll see he's looked at, sir." Vic handed Damien his cell phone. "Call the boys. The CO's going to take us back to your place. I tried to get you a change of clothes from your wall locker, but it was empty. I'd forgotten it was Monday."

Damien cleaned out the locker every Friday after work and started fresh on Monday, whether he'd used the clothes in there or not. He slipped the device from Vic's fingers, trying hard not to make contact. If he touched him, he might never let go.

Now Jackson squeezed his shoulder. "We're going to give you all the support you need, Captain. The gunny's going with you to help things along. Rather nice to have a command presence and a longtime friend all wrapped into one package."

Among other things.

"Thank you, sir." He felt himself starting to break down. Shock wearing off or setting in, he wasn't sure. Damien needed to hold himself together for the sake of his kids. And if he started crying now, he knew he'd been in Vic's arms a second later. That would blow their old-buddies-hanging-out defense sky high.

Hands shaking, he tried to recall the phone number to

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Gail's parents. Everything was a blank.

"Take the battery out and put it in your phone," Vic said, then wound up doing it for him as they walked to Jackson's car.

He paused when the back door opened. New car smell enveloped him and here he was stinking like he been dredged in a bucket of blood, sweat, and tears. Without a word, Vic took off his cammie blouse and tossed it over the back seat. Damien closed his eyes against a rush of tears and dialed his former in-laws as he sat. Gail's mother answered.

"It's Damien. Let me talk to the boys."

To his relief she didn't hesitate. But the first sound of their voices punched him in the gut. His chin quivered, like he knew theirs did. The tears that trickled down his cheeks matched those of his sons. He needed to be strong for them, didn't want to lose it in front of his commanding officer.

Then he felt strong fingers wrapped around his knee. Vic sat beside him in the backseat. Strength poured from his hand into Damien's body. He could do this...now.

He watched the miles roll by without really seeing them. Each word and sob from Doug and Keith twisted another hole in his gut. And each time he clung to the lifeline Vic gave. He promised the boys he'd be there by the end of the day, explained he'd been helping the police find who did this, then agonized over hanging up when Jackson finally pulled up in front of Damien's house.

He gave both phones back to Vic to handle and fumbled for the door handle.

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“I’ll expect daily reports from you, Gunny. You need anything, anything at all...call,” Damien heard Jackson say.

Tears now blinded him. Damien put one foot in front of the other from memory—the walkway was nothing but a blur of concrete and sand. He knew he’d gotten his keys from his pocket because he felt them in his hand, but he couldn’t see the lock to open the door.

Vic wrapped his hand over Damien’s and slipped the keys from his fingers. The door opened. The sanctuary of his home called. Damien stepped across the threshold, heard the door close behind him, and broke down in Vic’s arms.

CHAPTER 7

“It’s okay. Let it go. I’ve got you now.” And Vic never wanted to let go.

He’d been shaking with rage from the moment he and Jackson had arrived at the sheriff’s office. Before that, his gut had been writhing knots of worry. Knowing Damien wasn’t in the best shape didn’t prepare him enough for the reality. He’d wanted to tear the young detective’s head off from the second he and Jackson had walked into the office. Vic might have done that if his CO hadn’t been there. The detectives were fabricating something out of nothing, gathering evidence that didn’t exist on an innocent man rather than going after a more logical suspect...like the man seen running from the house.

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Then he'd seen Damien—the blood, the exhaustion and worry dragging him down. Vic had played hell not dragging him into his arms.

"It broke my heart to hear the boys crying and not be there to hold them," Damien cried.

"I know. I know." Vic rubbed his back and kissed his temple.

"I wanted her reasonable, not dead. Thank God, Doug and Keith weren't in the house. Thank God, they didn't find her like...that. It's bad enough her father..."

Bad for anyone from what Vic had gleaned from Detective Gage. Gail killed in her bedroom, her boyfriend killed later just inside the front door. "They'll find who did this."

"They wasted so much time." He griped Vic's shoulders. "It was a nightmare that just kept getting worse and worse."

"Why didn't you just tell them you were with me?"

Damien pulled back, eyes bloodshot from tears and lack of sleep. "And have you dragged into their twisted version of justice?" He shook his head. "I was afraid of what he'd do with the information. I never expected things to get to the point they did. I'm innocent, damn it. I figured that would come out on its own. When I realized Collins had little interest in the truth, that was it. In fact, I was walking out and ready to call that lawyer when you walked in."

Vic cupped his face and rasped his thumbs over Damien's whiskers. "If I'd had his number, I would have called him, too. Maybe I still will and we can sue somebody's ass for... whatever."

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"I'll be happy if I never have to see Collins and Gage again." Damien rested his head on Vic's shoulder. "Right now, this is all I need. Well...and to shower and shave."

"And eat and sleep," Vic added. "Here...let me take a look at your hand."

Damien unwrapped it slowly. Vic tried not to wince when he saw the cuts over his palm. None looked deep enough to require stitches, but it was swollen and possibly infected.

"Broken beer bottle under the car." Exhaustion weighed Damien's voice. "It was raining so hard I didn't see it when I put the jack in place."

"We'll run by the hospital before we head out and have the doc take a look. For now, I'll see about getting you something to eat while you clean up."

Damien kissed him, then hugged him tight. "I love you, Vic."

"I love you, too." He cupped his butt. "Go shower. I'll make you an omelet that'll chase all your worr... that'll melt in your mouth."

He gave a half-hearted smile and walked on to the bathroom. Vic closed his eyes against his own sudden tears. He felt so damn helpless, wanting to help, but not knowing exactly what to do except take the next step.

"Vic?"

He looked up. Damien stood in the hallway. "Yeah?"

"Come with me. I...need you. If only to scrub my back...I need you with me."

That he could do. "Right behind you." He understood that

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need well and knew it had nothing to do with sex and everything to do with comfort.

Damien nodded and walked on. It took Vic a little longer to follow. Cammies and combat boots weren't the easiest things to jump in and out of. By the time he reached the bathroom, Damien was already in the shower. Steam billowed up over the tub and he watched Damien's silhouette against the curtain, standing there braced against the wall while the spray fell over him. He didn't look up when Vic opened the curtain, merely scooted enough to make room.

Vic stood behind him and wrapped his arm around Damien's waist. Relief settled them both into the embrace. Twenty-four hours ago, this same position would have seen them with raging hard-ons and going at each like...well, like the horny guys they were.

Vic had loved Damien for years, but the true meaning of that hadn't sunk in until now. *This* was what love was about—being there physically and emotionally, knowing if you could never have sex again the love would still remain. Through thick and thin, richer or poorer, sickness and in health, 'til death...

Even if they might never be able to utter the words in a legal union, the promise still existed. He loved Damien no matter what, would sacrifice anything and everything for him...as Damien would for him, as he'd tried to do for Vic when the simple mention of Vic's name would have nipped all the detectives' speculations in the bud.

"Touch me." Damien draped one hand around Vic's neck.

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With the other, he pushed Vic's hand down to his flaccid penis. "Hold me. Love me. I need you."

"I will always love you," Vic said against his ear. "I will always want you, need you."

A sigh rested Damien's head against Vic's shoulder. He stroked Damien's cock to life slowly, wishing he had lather to make it extra sweet, but unwilling to let go long enough to grab for soap. His own cock stirred to life, lifting until it rested between Damien's butt cheeks. They rocked into each other slowly, with no hint of the frenzy that had overcome them in the past. The climax that rolled over them was just as fulfilling...if not more so.

A simple kiss capped the moment.

Damien rubbed his rough cheek against Vic's smoother one. "Now I can face anything... as long as I have you by my side."

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm beyond committed to you. I always have been. Now..." Vic reached for the soap bar and sudsed his hands. "Let's clean up and go get those boys."

Damien captured his lips in a deeper kiss, then sighed when Vic's hands washed over him. A sigh Vic echoed with all his heart and soul.

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