



FORBIDDEN DESIRE

...The pressure of Brian's mouth increased, growing hotter and subtly demanding in an almost frantic way, as his fingers threaded through Stan's hair and loosened it out of the conservative way it was combed and into a mass of soft curls. Then Brian's hands made a slow journey across Stan's shoulders and down his back, following the long curve of Stan's spine until they slipped beneath slacks and briefs to cup his butt cheeks. One finger slid in to caress and play with the pucker between them.

Desire, hot and forbidden, flared in Stan's chest, then shot down through navel and belly to unleash in his groin, instantly causing him to fill until he was hard and ready, every nerve in his being primed for love. Breathless from the delicious sensations roaring through him, he held back and let his lover make love to him.

When the hands slid around from the back to the front to cup and stroke what waited there for Brian's touch, pleasure caused a soft moan to escape Stan's throat. When Brian unhooked Stan's trousers and slid down his briefs and slacks, he fought to stay upright and not give in to knees weakened by longing. When Brian knelt and took the length of him into his hot, tonguing mouth, Stan fought not to explode that instant, but to let the feelings crescendo to a mind-blowing eruption. Brian's turn to be loved came next.

He looked down on the kneeling figure and the dark head so dear to him, so intent on coaxing him to climax...and saw a flat trouser front with no tenting created by an aroused dick.

Through a throat so filled with desire and need he almost couldn't voice the most difficult words he'd ever had to utter, he begged, "Stop, Brian..."

ALSO BY CAROLINA VALDEZ

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Sweet Chocolate Ecstasy
Tears Of The Dragon
Tie 'Em Up, Hold 'Em Down
View From The Top
Where Vesuvius Sleeps
Woman In Black Lace

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BY

CAROLINA VALDEZ

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FORBIDDEN DESIRE
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*This book is dedicated to Karin Story,
co-owner and managing editor of Amber Quill Press,
for her expert and willing assistance with the intricacies
of writing for those who enjoy stories about men
who fall in love with men.*

CHAPTER 1

Brian opened his eyes and gazed into the startling eyes of a man standing at his bedside. At first, he thought the eyes were gray, and then a shift of the light and they appeared as dark blue, almost green. Rousing from the sedation he'd undergone, a sensual connection spread like warmth through him and settled in his belly. It was an "across a crowded room" kind of connection. Something you couldn't explain, but nice. Very nice. He smiled. He really liked those eyes.

He'd never seen the man dressed in teal scrubs with a stethoscope peeking out of his pocket before. Maybe he was a nurse or a nursing attendant, but they usually carried their stethoscopes around their necks. As he grew more awake, the sensual feeling he'd experienced was unsettling. Damn it, he was

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in a hospital and ached so much all over it was ridiculous to be thinking of sex. Still, the warmth and a telltale thread of desire lingered.

The man's manner was relaxed and confident, his smile one of sympathetic amusement as he extended his hand. "Doctor Stan Gordon. I'm a urologist. Doctor Hanes was called to an adjoining operating room on an emergency after we sedated you, so I handled your case."

"Any guy whose foreskin slips back and threatens to cut off circulation to the head of his dick *is* an emergency!" Brian's words burst out in hot irritation. He felt the blood rush to his face in a mixture of temper and embarrassment. Temper that Dr. Hanes had abandoned him. Embarrassment because his substitute was tall, fit and handsome, and he'd been playing around with Brian's equipment without his permission—as nice as that might have been under different circumstances.

"Dr. Hanes had to repair a bladder ruptured in an auto accident. I was called in because you *were* an emergency."

Brian cringed. "That makes me feel about an inch high. Sorry I was so curt."

"Not a problem. You've had a rough go of it."

Strong, slender fingers, a surgeon's fingers, pressed the stethoscope to his chest. The doctor looked down, intent on what he was hearing. Thick, blond lashes created shadows on fair cheeks. His skin was clear and tan, with only faint crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and mouth. Brian thought he and the doctor must be about the same age.

"Roll onto your side, please. Take a deep breath and let it out. Another. You can roll back now. Your lungs and heart are good. How do you feel?"

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"A little rocky in the stomach."

"That's the sedation. I'll have the nurse give you something for it. You can have a few ice chips after it takes effect. Stick to clear liquids and soda crackers tonight. Any discomfort in the area I worked on?"

"Some."

"Tylenol ought to help. I'll come in this evening and check things out. I put Vaseline gauze over the foreskin to keep it moist. I dressed it to protect it until the swelling subsides a little. Before I discharge you, we'll talk about how to prevent this from happening again." As if he understood what Brian was feeling, he said, "Hell of an embarrassing situation, wasn't it?"

Now Brian could smile. "Yeah."

"And so, *macho* Officer Storm, you delayed coming in." He shook his head and sighed, as if that was typical of tough men and all too often to their detriment.

He touched Brian's foot, and the heat from his hand seeped through the sheet. It felt good. Comforting. After what he'd been through in the last week, Brian appreciated a little human warmth and comfort.

Dr. Gordon squeezed his foot almost paternally. "See you this evening."

"Thanks."

"Not a problem. We're here to serve."

If Brian's stomach hadn't been so touchy, he'd have laughed at this bit of humor. To protect and to serve was the police department's motto.

Shock rippled through him the first time he emptied his bladder and saw they'd shaved him. He felt naked. The bandage encircling the normally pleasure-seeking, pleasure-giving head looked like a

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fat, white muffler. What he could see of his swollen and barrel-shaped cock resembled a rose-red flower stalk.

Hell. They must've scrubbed me with an antiseptic. I'll get teased unmercifully if anyone happens to get a glimpse of this at the precinct. He shook his head. Men understood from boyhood you looked straight ahead when at a urinal. It was a no-no for a man to sneak a peek at anyone's dick, but there were a lot of jokers at station houses. You never could tell who might have a wandering eye. At least that was how it'd been when he'd last worked in one, years ago. *I'll have to scrub this off before I go back to work, or pee behind closed doors until it fades.*

As he climbed back into bed, he realized women were in the surgical unit, too. He covered his eyes with his hands and groaned. *Everyone knows my secrets now. They've all seen my package. Handled my cock. Shaved my balls. Hopefully, they won't be in the ER when I bring in an injured suspect or a DUI to have a blood alcohol level drawn.*

Brian lay back, an arm over his eyes. How had he gotten into this mess? Of course, he knew *how*. Soon he'd have to answer to the special unit of the district attorney's office that met behind closed doors to investigate officer-involved-shootings without blowing the cover of the covert officers. They'd all know how stupid he'd been to be in a situation where he'd had to kill a man in order to survive. A mild throb began in his head.

An older nurse in brightly patterned scrubs came in. Brian thought she could have been a giant flower in that outfit. After filling his water glass, she handed it and a pill in a paper cup to him.

He looked at the pill, a question on his face.

"To settle your stomach. When it calms down, I'll bring some

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Tylenol. You'll feel better once they take effect, son." She had a broad southern drawl and could well have been his mother.

He nodded and downed the pill and water.

She handed him a cold pack in a protective cover. "Put this on the little soldier, and it'll fix it right up."

He nodded his thanks. *Little soldier? Good grief.*

Later, he downed the Tylenol she brought, then closed his eyes and let the rest of the sedative effects and the relief from the pills carry him off to sleep.

* * *

At dinnertime, the smells of roasted meat and braised vegetables wafted in from the corridor, and the soft sounds of food carts rolling along the carpeted floors awakened him. To his disappointment, his tray contained chicken broth and lemon Jell-O, the latter so stiff you needed a knife to cut it. He'd finished the meager meal and was sitting in a chair when Dr. Gordon breezed in, dressed in neatly pressed slacks, loafers, and a blue shirt under a white lab coat. Again, his stethoscope stuck out of one pocket. He found Gordon even more appealing dressed like this. The blue shirt deepened the color of his gray eyes to dark blue.

Gordon shut the door and shook Brian's hand again, then motioned for him to get back in bed. After pulling the curtain around it, he pushed Brian's hospital pajama top up, loosened the string on the bottoms, and slid the fly apart without touching him. The sight of those fingers undoing the string, and the brush of fabric across his skin caused a sensual stirring in Brian's belly. Thankfully, his cock was in no condition to respond.

"Did you have to shave me and paint my prick pink?"

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The doctor's eyes danced and the crinkles around them became more pronounced as he chuckled. "Sorry about that. We prepped you in case I had to circumcise you. I didn't or you'd have been a lot more uncomfortable than you are now. And for a whole lot longer." He opened a sterile package and put on the gloves it contained. With deft hands, he removed the outer dressing.

When he took up an instrument that resembled small, polished steel flat pliers with round loops for fingers, Brian stiffened. "What's that?" he demanded, holding out a hand to stop him.

"It's called a Kelly clamp. They're so handy a lot of non-medical people buy them to use around the house."

"Watch it," Brian said as Gordon approached his dick with it. "That's delicate."

Using the clamp, Gordon caught a corner of the Vaseline gauze and lifted it free of the glans. Brian relaxed as his trust in the doctor's skill rose about a hundred degrees. But, when Gordon lifted his dick and checked it with probing but gentle fingers, Brian shifted his thoughts to other things fast so his cock wouldn't get any larger than it was and put his poor hoodie back in the tourniquet-like position that'd brought him to the doctor in the first place.

What's wrong with me? This isn't some guy I met in a bar or at a party. He's my surgeon. Maybe the drugs they used to sedate me are making me a little sex crazed.

"It looks good," Gordon said.

"I'll take that as a compliment," Brian quipped. Then, remembering he wasn't back with the Huns as Johnny Rebelle, where that kind of repartee was common, he added, "Swelling's down a little."

Now the doctor threw his head back and laughed. "Keep the

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cold pack on, but not too cold or too long. I want to see you in a week. My office will contact you to make an appointment, but call me on my cell if you have any problems prior to that. No more toughing it out.” He handed Brian his business card. “If I discharge you now, can someone drive you home?”

Brian nodded. He’d have them call a cab. He’d spent enough time in hospitals during his years as a cop, and he could hardly wait to get out of here and head for home.

Gordon discarded his gloves and the Kelly, then pulled the fly of Brian’s pants closed, but left the strings for Brian to tie. He talked as he washed and dried his hands before he sat in the chair near the bed. “There are several things that can cause a problem like you had. Inattention to cleanliness, trauma to the glans from rough sex or other things. In your case, I’m not sure which. However, your ribs, arms and legs are seriously bruised and cut. You even have a scabbed abrasion on your left ear. While you were sedated, I checked to see if you’d fractured your urethra, but it’s okay. I hope you were examined and treated for the other injuries?”

“Line of duty. I’m a cop.” Brian shrugged and didn’t answer the question. He knew the urethra was the tube that ran through his dick to deliver urine and semen. He hadn’t known it could be broken, and since he didn’t know if they could’ve fixed it if it had been, momentary panic hit him. He took in a deep breath and let it out.

The fascinating gray-blue eyes studied him, and Brian expected the doctor to probe, asking questions he wasn’t allowed to answer, but Gordon only nodded and stood. “I hope you’re off duty until some of those heal. If not, I can write you an order for it.”

“Not necessary.” He’d be off duty not only until he’d healed,

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but until the investigators had made their decision. Then he might not be an officer of the law at all anymore.

“Good.” The doctor rose. “Any more problems before our appointment, call my office. Okay?”

Brian nodded. As he watched the doctor leave the room, he wondered how the man would look without the lab coat and dressed in something more casual. Probably remarkable. He closed his eyes. He hadn’t felt such intense curiosity about a man in his personal life in a long time.

* * *

Stan Gordon hoped he’d hidden his reaction to the injured officer with the dark buzz cut. These days it wasn’t uncommon for Caucasian males to be uncircumcised and, in the OR, he’d been just another man who desperately needed his skills. But awake and in bed, those disturbingly sensual, sea green eyes had looked into his and those oh-so-kissable lips had smiled at him and triggered a flare of want he hadn’t expected with a patient.

Earlier, in the operating suite, the surgical attendant had pulled Storm’s gown up to start the prep, and Jason Miles, the anesthesiologist, took one look at his thighs and said, “My God, what happened to this guy? A car accident?” He pulled the gown up to the patient’s neck, exposing his nipples and the pelt of fine, dark hair covering bruised ribs and cuts.

“No. A fight, I think.” Stan lifted the patient’s hands. He’d interned at the infamous Cook County Hospital in Chicago. They’d had their share of street violence, and he recognized these. “He’s got raw knuckles and defensive wounds on his arms. His forehead’s split and bruised, too. It’ll probably scar.”

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“Too bad with a good-lookin’ guy like this. How old are the bruises? Three days, maybe?”

“About that judging from their color.”

“Both arms are tattooed.”

“How odd—they’re fading. They aren’t permanent. I’ve never seen such elaborate fakes.”

This evening, the abrupt, “I’m a cop,” had told him a great deal about how he might have sustained those injuries, but why he had semi-permanent tattoos was still a puzzle. What his wounds indicated about the problem with his dick was more sinister. He’d seen cigarette burns on the officer’s groin. Someone had tortured him. He’d have bet on it. A strong wave of sympathy erased his usual physician objectivity. Damaging someone’s package was vicious and cruel, and he wanted to wrap his arms around this cop and shield him from that kind of battering ever again.

Stan tried to convince himself any man would have felt that protective of another male, but it didn’t work. Empathetic, yes, but protective, no. His feelings for this guy with the ready quips were special. *Sensual. Way too sensual.* He’d experienced too much relief when he’d rescued Storm’s dickhead, as he’d called it, and knew the swelling was subsiding. Plus he was far too eager to see the man again next week.

It would be much wiser to turn him back to the care of Dr. Hanes and not examine him again, but he couldn’t do that yet. He was the one who’d treated him for this, not Dr. Hanes. After he’d followed up on Storm’s progress, then he’d send him back to Hanes. Then he could stop remembering those muscled thighs and the swollen dick.

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Over his protests, the staff wouldn't let Brian walk down to the lobby and the waiting cab. Standard policy in California hospitals, they said. He knew this, but it didn't stop him from protesting. Sitting in the chair made him look weak and ineffective, and he hated that image. Especially since the incident causing his bruises had created those same feelings. If he'd been stronger and smarter, the other man would still be alive.

Finally, he acquiesced, as he knew he'd have to, and plopped down into the wheelchair. An attendant rolled him out to the red taxi at the curb.

"Where to?" the driver asked after he'd climbed into the back.

"The far end of the second parking lot. That's where my car is." He handed the guy a twenty to make up for the loss of a fare and, against doctor's orders, drove himself back to his condo, all the while very aware of the hairless, pink package naked in his briefs.

The chill of the dark condo wrapped around him as he stepped inside and stale smells assaulted his nostrils. A flick of the switch and the downstairs lights went on, revealing a messy bachelor's pad. The bright colors of junk mail clutter winked up at him from the floor in front of the mail slot. After retrieving it, he walked through to the kitchen, where he tossed the unwanted flyers onto a table crowded with old newspapers and months of unopened mail. He turned up the thermostat and climbed the stairs, where he changed into pajamas and left his clothes in a clump on the floor. Those he'd deal with tomorrow. He was too tired tonight.

Downstairs, he poured two fingers of Jamison's over ice and clicked the remote to turn the television on. Sitting on the couch, he lifted the drink to his mouth, but one whiff of the amber liquid created a mild ripple effect in his stomach. Swearing, he poured

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the expensive whiskey down the drain. He returned to the couch with a cup of hot tea and a plate of unappetizing soda crackers, and slipped the ice pack over his “little soldier.”

After a time, he realized his concentration was shot. It'd been a hell of a week. He should be happy to be home again in his own place among normal people who bathed regularly and didn't use *motherfucker* and *shit* every other word, but the cloud of possible disciplinary sanctions hung over his head. He had no love life and no friends here after having sold his soul, working on loan as an undercover agent for two years in the California high desert. The worst of it was, when he'd blown it and escaped, he'd been shocked as sadness tinged his relief at leaving the thieves and thugs he'd worked among.

During the months he'd been with them, terror had gripped him any time one of them came close to figuring out he was the law, but there was a surprising camaraderie among biker outlaws he hadn't expected. The biker world was their family and gave them a sense of belonging and purpose, even if that intention was destructive and evil. They were drunks and addicts, too often cruel, too often deadly, but when he'd returned after having flown out of state for his father's funeral, strong, tattooed arms clad in denim jackets with a California patch, the word “Huns” and the club's symbol on the back had encircled him in manly hugs and said, “Sorry, man. It's tough you lost your dad.” They'd meant it.

None of his police bosses had said anything to him. Not even his undercover back-up. There'd been no flowers at the funeral, not even a card sent by his lieutenant's clerk to the funeral home. Yet his dad had been his only parent, and his single other relative was his mother's sister, who lived across the country and whom he hadn't seen since he was a little boy.

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Today, the gentle touch of a concerned surgeon had stirred more than desire in his core. *Small wonder.*

Brian looked around a messy condo that lacked style and a sense it was home. *Get a life, Bri. You gotta get a life now.*

He gave up on TV and went upstairs to brush his teeth. It had been six hours since he'd taken the Tylenol. He washed down two Norcos and eased his aching body into bed.

Officer Storm, the doctor had said, and he didn't correct him because it was an honorable title and true enough. With pride, he wore the silver shield decorated with the outlines of city hall and police headquarters in gold with blue lettering. The full story, though, could be seen in the inverted chevron with four stripes and a diamond on the sleeve of his black uniform. Brian Storm, Detective III. That's who and what he was.

Right now, it offered little comfort.

Oh, go to sleep. No more Norco tomorrow. It's turned you maudlin.

CHAPTER 2

“Don’t be afraid,” he whispered back to Cherie. “You’re going to a safe place. Get on.”

Clutching a laundry bag that carried her things, the frail young woman climbed onto the back of his rattletrap Harley Davidson and wrapped her arms around him. In the pre-dawn moonlight, he rolled the bike over the drifting desert sand covering the hard, earthen road until they were well away from the gang’s encampment and on the highway. There he stomped on the starter and the bike jumped to life with a noisy roar. It reminded him he needed to replace the muffler.

The terror in Cherie’s face tore at his gut as he bought her a Greyhound bus ticket to her grandparents’ home in Arizona and pressed money into her hand.

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"Don't call your parents. They live too close. Right now, the only safe place is with your grandparents. Big Wally will come for you if he finds out where you are. Got that?"

Now tears streaked down her face. "I thought he was a nice guy, Johnny, or I wouldn't have come."

"Trust me. None of us are nice guys. Now up with you onto that bus."

"But you're nice," she said, and planted a kiss on his cheek. "Thanks." She waved as the lumbering bus pulled away with a whoosh of releasing brakes and closing door.

Her thanks echoed in his mind as he rode back to the Huns' camp. She'd been right. Sometimes he doubted it, felt almost corrupted by what was around him, but he was a nice guy—disguised as a bad one. Poor kid. Stage-struck by big muscles, good looks, long hair caught back in a sexy ponytail, plus leather pants and a jacket that declared to the world that Big Wally belonged to a powerful society, she'd hopped on the back of his bike one day and they'd roared off to adventure and romance.

Yeah, sure. Adventure and romance. Here in the searing heat of the Mohave high desert in rotting cabins with lousy plumbing where rampant open sex went on day and night.

Yes, poor, disillusioned, naïve kid, he thought, as he crawled back into bed and fell asleep. She deserved better.

Someone yanked the covers back and the screaming started. Wally in urine-stained boxers. Alcohol stench, fetid nicotine breath, lighted cigarette in hand. And wild with rage. Probably high on coke or meth.

Damn, Brian was in deep shit. He fumbled for his cell phone under his pillow and punched the single number that would send his back-up the message he was in trouble. He hoped to God he

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had a signal.

Wally's screams were ranting. Where was she? What had Johnny done with her? He'd taken her to a secret place so he could keep her all to himself and fuck her, hadn't he? They'd known he'd been eyeing the little cunt, wanting her for himself. He was only a probie. Big Wally was a patched in member of the Huns. Johnny had forgotten his place here; he was only a gofer—go fer this, go fer that.

Brian's Glock fell on the floor when Big Wally yanked him out of bed. Pain spread through his spine when he landed on it and then through his chest as Wally drove his fist into his ribs and thighs. Terror spread through Brian as he grabbed for Wally's arms and tried to talk him down while he lied through his teeth, denying he knew anything about her whereabouts. Had Wally checked the other cabins to see if she was with one of the other guys? Maybe she'd gone off with someone else or wandered into the desert in her sleep. He should be out in the desert looking for her, not here beating on Johnny.

The blows kept coming. Pain. Too much pain. He fought back while trying to protect himself. He passed out. Came to when the kicks began. Felt his skin split.

A hot sensation near his groin. Cigarette. "Godamn it, Wally," he cried in anger. "Stop!"

Then laughter. Maniacal. "Think yer gonna fuck her, do you? Well, you ain't gonna fuck no one ever again." A hand squeezed his balls hard and pulled.

Brian closed his legs tight before Wally could tear his sac away from his body. Then a hand clamped on his dick and squeezed. Pulled forward and back, forward and back. Over and over, his foreskin moving with the hand, his dick swelling. Pain knifed

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through his cock and crotch. Anger broke through the pain and turned to hatred and then to rage.

Brian kept struggling. Gathering every ounce of strength, he spit in Wally's face. He slammed his head into his nose, felt his forehead skin crack open as the big guy's nose crunched. Wally screamed and let go of Brian's cock. Relief from the punishing hand.

Gunfire. Something whined, grazing his ear before thudding into the wall. There was the acrid smell of gunsmoke and moonlight glinting off the black polymer object in his attacker's hand. Brian rolled, fumbling for his Glock. Gunfire. His Glock was hot. More smoke. Gagging, copper penny smell. Big Wally went down, bleeding from the mouth. Red spread across his chest. Gurgling...staring at Brian, his expression filled with hatred and the shock of betrayal...

Horror claimed Brian...

* * *

Brian woke himself screaming as he fought out of the tangle of bedcovers and sat up gasping, heart pounding in his ears as he convinced himself it wasn't real. Maybe he couldn't breathe, but he could wake up. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat with his head in his hands, trying to shut out the horror of Big Wally limp and bleeding on the cabin floor. Nausea threatened his gut. He'd killed someone...

Slow down, he coached himself. Breathe in slow and easy. To the count of five. Breathe in. Breathe out. Slow and easy.

When he'd agreed to take the undercover assignment, he'd never thought it would end with him killing someone. His

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reputation as a detective well established, he'd thought he might like a career change to ATF or the FBI. Well, it had all gone to hell, hadn't it? He got out of bed and went into the kitchen for a drink of water. Then he slept on the couch with a pillow and a blanket. For the moment, his bed held too much grief and horror.

Four days later, he appeared in full uniform before the D.A.'s investigative unit for undercover operations. The tattoos exposed on his arms below the uniform's short sleeves had almost completely faded. He told his story of having discovered the unexpected cache of weapons and drugs when he'd been sent to investigate money laundering and protection racketeering; of how he'd rescued the girl and then wakened to a crazed beating that resulted in having to fire his weapon in self-defense after almost being killed. If his back-up hadn't arrived before the other bikers had descended on him, he'd be dead.

Scumbag that Big Wally had been, every life was considered sacrosanct under the law, until a murder conviction with the death sentence. Brian felt like he'd been dragged through fire and ice by the time he'd answered their last question. When he walked out of the room, their faces gave no clue as to where he stood. He felt wrung out, and his spirits were at rock bottom.

Darnell Garson, his undercover back-up, was waiting in the hall. The big man was dressed in his best suit, tie and all. In shock after the desert attack, Brian had little memory of how Garson had intervened for him when the paramedics and sheriffs had arrived. He remembered handcuffs and someone shoving him into a patrol car before blacking out. He came to on the bed in Darnell's rented apartment, minus the cuffs. A woman physician was checking his injuries. Darnell made all the arrangements to get Brian back to L.A.

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Emotion filled him at the sight of the large man. Brian hugged him hard and felt the hug returned. "Thanks again for saving my life."

Darnell's dark face broke into a wide smile. "How ya been, my man?" Pointing to the uniform, he said, "Good to see you're wearing somethin' decent these days. But, seriously, you'd have done the same for me. Band of brothers and all that. And now I'm going in there and save yo' career and yo' ass."

Brian thought his tension must have been written all over his face because Darnell was as cultured as any Ivy League grad, but he'd slipped into street jargon to lighten the moment. When a woman officer opened the door and motioned him inside, however, his face became serious.

"You found the drugs and the weapons. You saved the girl's life, Brian. He'll never hurt her or anyone again, and the Huns will never find her. Thank God his bullet didn't do any serious damage. It and the scar just add interest to that ugly face of yours."

They touched knuckles, and Darnell said, "Take care, bro."

On his way out of the building, Brian stopped in the counseling office to set up the appointments every officer who'd killed someone was required to attend. He'd never shot anyone before and wasn't too keen on people probing his psyche, but if these appointments stopped the nightmares, he was desperate enough to try them.

* * *

Three days after that, he was thumbing through old magazines in the waiting room of the medical offices of Hanes and Gordon, nervous as hell. This time he wasn't sure his cock would behave

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when handled by Stan Gordon's warm skillful hands.

* * *

Stan was having similar worries as he wove through traffic to reach his office after finishing an emergency surgery in the hospital. The receptionist had rescheduled his other appointments, but he'd been so driven to see the cop that he said he'd return in time for the last one at four-thirty—Brian Storm's time slot. Storm hadn't cancelled, so he assumed things were okay. Just now, he'd checked with his office, so knew Brian was in the waiting room.

He was late. Struggling into his lab coat, he told the receptionist and the medical assistant, who both had young children at home, that they could leave. He'd lock up.

"Hi," he said, extending his hand to Brian, who returned the shake with a firm hand. "Sorry I'm late. Another emergency." The same quiver of excitement pulsed inside him as he looked into the amazing eyes. The buzz cut was growing out, confirming the almost-black color of his hair matching the soft brush on his chest. On him, the color was perfect.

"Not a problem."

"Have your injuries been checked again by your regular doctor? No?" He removed a gown from the drawer of the exam table and laid it on top. "Everything off from the waist up. Shoes and socks off, too. You can leave your briefs on."

"Boxers," Brian said with a crooked little smile.

"Really? I'd have taken you for a briefs man."

"Not since you took care of my embarrassing problem." Again that smile.

Laughter rumbled up through Stan's chest and out his throat as

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he pictured tight briefs grating against a sore dick. "Good choice." He waited patiently outside the room until he thought Storm had had time to change. When he entered, the officer was sitting on the end of the exam table. Stan pulled out the extension at his end and signaled him to lie down. Brian was tall enough to fill the length of the table and extension.

At the same time as Stan slid the gown up, he slipped a paper exam sheet under the gown to cover Storm from the waist down.

Brian immediately anchored the paper in place on both sides of his hips with his arms and hands. Satisfaction rolled through Stan. Few men displayed that kind of modesty in this office, so perhaps he was right in sensing Storm had shared the tiny jolts of sex that'd shot through Stan on their first meeting in his hospital room.

The ear abrasion had almost healed. "You're going to have a little scar on your forehead." He ran his hands over the patient's ribcage and felt him wince. "Your chest and thighs were x-rayed?"

"Yes. Just bruising, no fractures. Still, they've hurt like hell."

Storm tensed and closed his eyes as Stan pulled the gown down to Brian's waist and lowered the sheet to mid-boxers level. As he exposed the underwear, he noticed Brian had clenched his fists. "Are you still hurting down here?"

"No."

"Still pink?"

The man groaned. "Lord, yes, but only a little." Then he laughed, and Stan relaxed.

"You're going to itch as the hair grows back. Either keep it shaved or buy something over the counter for the itching. Shaved seems to be popular these days, though." Immediately, he regretted his words. More gay than straight men denuded their packages. He knew this not only because he was a urologist, but because he'd

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given up pretending to be straight a long time ago. He didn't announce it, but didn't hide it either.

Sliding the boxers down to the point just above the base of the patient's penis, he noted with satisfaction the cigarette burns were fading. *I'm going to touch you now, Officer Storm. Keep your mind on other things. I'm going to do the same.*

Storm closed his eyes again and his mouth tensed when Stan uncovered his groin. Moving Brian's dick aside, and keeping his mind on business, Stan palpated the balls in his sac and said, "No problems here. You should be good to go in that department. Does your trombone slide work?"

He took the flaccid penis in his hands and gently slid the silken foreskin back and forward. He'd almost said it was as smoothed as if oiled, then caught his lower lip with his upper teeth to stop himself. Pre-cum slicked the heads of erect cocks during foreplay and so did the use of warm lubricant. Instead, he said, "Your slide works. I should've told you I do good work. Now you know."

Despite his efforts to keep the comments light and his mind on his doctoring, he felt his own dick stir as it threatened to swell and lift its head, but the patient's remained limp. As big as the dick in his hands was it might have been still swollen either from the injury or beginning an erection, but it wasn't. Its size fit that of the man on the table.

Storm was still tense.

Good for you, officer. You've got great control. I bet the ladies love that about you. You hold back to satisfy them and then you explode.

He quickly pulled the boxers into place and covered them with the sheet. Then he checked the pulses in the officer's feet. "Circulation's good to your legs and feet. The thigh bruising didn't

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damage your veins.”

As he washed and dried his hands, he said, “Everything’s normal. The cigarette burn scars will take more time to disappear. You can dress. I’ll meet you at the front desk and let you out.”

Stan replaced his lab coat with a sports jacket and went out to the front. He’d never taken care of a cop before and the mysterious injuries, as well as the man, intrigued him. When he looked up, his blood heated and swirled as the ruggedly good-looking Storm approached him, dressed in casual navy pants with a pocket mid-thigh and a white, long sleeved slipover sweater. The desire to run his tongue over the hard body and absorb his heat as they lay naked skin to skin surged through him. Oh, he really wanted to know him better. And a lot more intimately.

He surprised himself by saying, “It’s a quarter to six, and I’m starved. I didn’t have time for lunch. Want to get something to eat?” A small thrill ran through him when he noticed Snow’s ring finger was bare and bore no marks of having worn a ring.

One eyebrow rose slightly. The green eyes flashed, but their gaze never left his own. He hesitated, and Stan was afraid he’d refuse, but then he said, “Sure. I’m hungry too. Until today, I haven’t felt hungry since I was wounded.”

Stan caught the word *wounded*. It was a term warriors used when injured in battle. It confirmed he’d been hurt, as he’d said, in the line of duty and not in some private street brawl.

They drove separately, meeting at Haverly’s Bar and Grill a couple of miles from the hospital. In the subdued lighting, they sat opposite each other in a booth upholstered in maroon leather, ordered drinks and studied their menus. Jazz played quietly in the background.

They agreed to first names, and talk came easily. Brian liked

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Stan Getz. Gordon said he admired Miles Davis's horn work. Pianist Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" was a favorite of both. They talked about the other greats in jazz and the up-and-comings, and then they talked about baseball. Brian was a Dodgers fan, and Stan favored the Angels.

When chat turned to families, Brian said he'd grown up in the Midwest, but had moved to Los Angeles to go to college and the police academy. His dad had been a sheriff, but had recently passed away from cancer. He had no other immediate family and had never married.

"I'm sorry about your dad. That's hard. Both of my parents are still living, and I'd be devastated to lose either of them. So your friends are all here?" Stan liked this guy. Liked him more the longer they talked. Loved the flickering light from the candle in the middle of the table as it played off the chiseled lines of his cheekbones and shadowed the hollow beneath them to deepen the mystery of who he was. Loved the way the green in his eyes had darkened to jade in the dim restaurant.

There was a long pause after he'd asked the question about friends. Brian studied the food on his plate, but finally said, "I've been away for a while. I sorta lost touch with people here."

The answer stirred Stan's sympathy for a man who'd just lost his only family member and seemed to have no support. It was an odd answer, and he was curious why he had no friends here, but he didn't intend to probe.

Soon they were chuckling over cop and doc stories—Brian's from his days as a rookie, and Stan's from his first year as an intern in Chicago. As they ate, Stan's foot ended up beside and touching one of Brian's. He didn't pull away. Stan didn't slide his back. He wanted the physical connection with Brian, even if it was

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through leather. Fact was, more and more he was wanting his hands on Brian's dick again, but this time as a lover, not a physician. He wanted to see it long and large, standing out straight from his shaven groin. Preferably, no longer pink, however.

What on God's good earth was he thinking? This man was a patient. It was unethical to date patients, much less have sex with them. It made them vulnerable to manipulation by an unscrupulous doctor whom they trusted. If a vindictive breakup occurred, it could be disastrous for your practice. Particularly if you were gay and in the closet.

Even though they were adults, this friendship with Brian could go nowhere. And he didn't even know for sure if the handsome cop was gay.

They each paid for their own meal and, because it couldn't be a date, Stan didn't protest, even though he assumed his income was higher. Outside, they shook hands goodbye, Stan pretending he hadn't ever seen or handled one of the most intimate parts of Brian's body. Brian pretended the same.

"You're good company. I enjoyed this," Brian said with a warm smile.

"I enjoyed it, too." Stan bit his tongue to keep from saying they should do it again because it would have sounded forward or overly familiar, but mostly because it could go nowhere.

Still, the time with Storm had added a lightness to his step as he hurried to his car.

* * *

Darnell appeared at Brian's door two days later, Seattle's Best coffee and Cinnabons in hand.

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"I can't tell you how good that smells and looks after the greasy crap I ate for months with the bikers," Brian said as he opened the door wide and waved him in.

The dining table was clear because he'd begun tackling the neglected condo to bring about order, but they ate outside on the deck. The condo was high enough and the sky clear enough to see all the way to Catalina Island.

Sipping coffee and downing the sugary buns in the warm sunlight, they talked about the case. Darnell told him the unit received his testimony favorably and he was sure things looked good for Brian. He and other law officers had arrived soon enough to prevent any destruction of evidence by the Huns, and they'd confiscated the weapons and drugs Brian had found. As for the shooting, there was no one to refute Brian's story. Medical evidence indicated he'd been beaten, tortured and shot. The bullet in the wall was in the trajectory line indicated by the grazing of his ear as documented by the attending physician.

"Brian, you rescued a young woman from a life of hell. You know that. Big Wally's actions, not yours, led to his death. You were doing your job. You protected yourself from a drunk high on coke or crystal meth, and he shot first."

Brian stared off into the distance. "Wally was the one who'd always suspected I was a cop. He wouldn't be dead if I'd left when she did, but did I leave? No, I played white knight and then, so full of myself I was too stupid to realize I couldn't pull it off anymore, I went back to bed because I thought there was more to uncover about their dealings." Brian ran his hands over his head. His hair was half an inch long now and felt like stickers. He didn't think he'd ever buzz cut it again. And the anti-itch stuff he'd purchased at the drugstore for his crotch wasn't helping much. He was a

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physical and emotional mess.

“Look, man, if he’d held the girl hostage, I’d have notified my boss at Quantico. More people than Wally, including you, might have lost their lives. They had an arsenal out there. Stop messing with your own head. Stop worrying about the outcome of the investigation.” He glanced at his watch and stood. “I gotta go. I’m flying back to my post in D.C. now that my assignments out here are over. Keep in touch.”

He saw Darnell to the door. They touched fists again, and Darnell strode away.

Brian was grateful for the visit, but his back-up didn’t understand his greatest fear. He wasn’t ready to share it with anyone, though, not even the counselor, because if he did, he might not be allowed to wear his badge and uniform again. It was a problem he had to figure out for himself.

That night, he ate at Haverly’s, hoping he’d see Stan Gordon there, but no one he knew came in before he’d finished dinner and returned home. He missed the man whose smile could have charmed gold out of a miser and had now charmed his heart as well as his dick.

* * *

If Brian had eaten again in the bar and grill, Stan had missed him. Missed him in more ways than one. His busy practice occupied his mind on workdays, but evenings and weekends, if he wasn’t on call or called out, he found himself listening to his jazz CDs and wondering if the cop would enjoy his selections. Spring training was underway in Glendale, Arizona, but soon the Dodgers and the Angels would play an exhibition game here in L.A. If he

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could get tickets, he wondered if Brian would like to go with him.

Storm's phone number was in his medical record in the office. Stan considered calling him on the pretext of checking up on his injuries, but that wasn't doable because he'd told him things were fine and discharged him. Also, Hanes was his doctor. It was unethical to take a patient away from another physician.

A good thing, too, he thought, because what's more unethical than wanting to feel a patient's bare cock and sac again while your groin awakens hungry, as if from a deep slumber, to burgeon and drip, preparing for love?

Had Brian kept himself shaved? Or was he suffering through the itchy stages of regrowth?

The only glimpse he'd had of Brian's butt was in the loose, casual pants with the thigh pocket, and that was only in profile when he'd paid his check at the cashier's counter. He was all too familiar with the flat belly and the mound in the front of his pants but, damn it, he wanted to run his hands over an ass free of clothing. He'd like to...

Stop it. You're a lonely guy with enough money to do pretty much what you want, but you've made medicine your only life and now you're making yourself crazy. He was a patient. You treated him and you enjoyed a meal together. End of contact. Got that into your thick head?

CHAPTER 3

Brian touched his officer's badge on the left side of his uniform. Its placement there wasn't only a sentimental statement, as in when you pledged an allegiance; it was added protection against any bullet fired with the intent to shatter his heart.

He shifted his duty belt because its unfamiliar weight and bulk felt awkward around his waist, but it carried fifteen pounds of essentials for his job—handcuffs, keys, baton, pepper spray, recorder, flashlight, radio, escape gas mask, and extra clips for the Glock holstered over his right hip. His Taser was strapped to his right thigh. The Kevlar vest was heavier and hotter than he'd remembered it. Some officers chose not to wear them on warm or hot days, but since the attack in the desert, Brian considered it a life-saving essential.

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It'd been years since he'd worn his uniform for work, but he'd been cleared medically, psychologically and, at last, by the D.A.'s investigative unit. They'd even pinned a police officer life-saving medal on his shirt for rescuing Cherie and risking his life for her.

He'd be working patrol. Everyone in this department learned every job and rotated through them. Their strength as a force was to be able to shift officers around in an emergency and know they were experienced in whatever assignment they handed them. Only when you reached the levels of lieutenant or captain did the rotations stop.

He still felt surreal back in the normal world. After his years as a detective dressed in street clothes with the badge clipped to his trouser belt, and then no badge when undercover, he looked forward to getting back on city streets again. Some detectives hated going back to patrol, felt it was a kind of demotion, but Brian knew right now, it was right for him. It would ground him. It might also tell him if he could still function as the cop he'd wanted to be since he was eight years old.

Before leaving the precinct, he used the urinal. No trace of pink remained. *Hot damn, I'm ready to go.*

Out in his patrol car, he racked his shotgun and stored it within easy reach, tested the Crown Victoria's lights and siren, checked the brakes, flipped on the computer that began chattering to him as it displayed locations of incoming calls and which units were responding. He turned off the dome light so opening the door after dark wouldn't make him a shooter's target, then attached the radio mike to his shirt and confirmed it was in working order.

Reporting to the dispatcher that he was rolling, he gunned the heavy, souped-up car and drove out of the lot. It was a new day, the beginning of a different phase in his life, and he loved it.

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In his first action of the day, he arrested and booked a Latina teenager caught shoplifting by a merchant's security camera. Her polite father, as well-dressed as his daughter, had remained seated in a chair and had not raised his voice while he begged Brian not to arrest her.

"It's the first time," he said.

But experience had taught Brian it might only be the first time she'd been *caught*.

"Sorry, sir. Once a store calls us, we have to make the arrest." Eventually, he released her to the custody of her dad, but the process had taken more than two hours of his duty time. The father's response indicated he'd had some experience with his kids being in trouble with the law. He knew the right words and was respectful, carefully avoiding any belligerence.

Sad, Brian thought.

He ticketed people running red lights or speeding, got out and walked his beat at times, nodding at shopkeepers, letting people know who he was as he put a friendly but powerful police presence in the neighborhood. His heart rate spiked the first time he heard a motorcycle on the street. Just as his mind processed that this wasn't the sound of a worn-out Huns bike, a motorcycle officer lifted a hand in greeting as he rode by.

Brian had recovered from that episode when he spotted someone dealing meth in plain sight on the sidewalk. Sweat broke out on his forehead and palms as his secret fear reared its nasty head. Casually, he wiped his palms on his trousers and unsnapped the Taser and Glock holsters as he approached, hand at his waist just above them.

Officers' training taught you to use the least lethal weapons first if possible, so hands, arms and various holds were the initial

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weapons of choice and the pepper spray or baton a second. His secret fear, the one he didn't dare reveal to the psychologist, was drying up his mouth now. How had his judgment been affected in the Huns' camp? Could he fire the Glock if necessary? Or would the memory of a bloody and dying Wally paralyze him and he'd be the one to die? His other fear was that he'd hit the trigger too fast and kill again. Maybe even someone innocent.

He fought to steady himself. *This is your job, Bri. Keep your head on straight and your nerves sharp but not taut. Be glad your hands haven't started trembling. Keep walking.*

The buyer split the minute he saw Brian approaching and was around a corner and gone. The dealer was too dumb to run. This was obviously not his first capture. He gave up the tiny bottle of crystals that gleamed with the same clear, enticing beauty as diamonds, and let Brian cuff and arrest him without incident.

After booking him back at the station, Brian went into the men's room and splashed cold water on his face to wash away the sweat. He was grateful he'd dealt with his fear head-on in making this arrest and when he'd heard the motorcycle. But just what he'd do if he really needed to draw his gun was still a terrifying unknown.

His day ended standing guard from six to nine in the evening at the Free Medical Clinic, which volunteers operated in a rougher part of his patrol area. Arms crossed, he was just outside the door when a familiar figure in a white lab coat strode up.

"Dr. Gordon," he said. Happiness rolled through him, every bit as exciting as a college crush. His heart danced in his chest.

"Officer Storm!" Stan shook his hand with the familiar, firm grip. "Aren't you looking sharp? I almost didn't recognize you. You're a little younger than the last guard. Bigger, too."

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“Bigger? I’ll take that as a compliment.” Brian smiled, having fun with the reference to another time with the good doctor. The slight lift of one corner of the doctor’s mouth indicated he’d gotten the quip. “The other officer moved to an assignment in a different division. Actually, I’ve never met him. I take it you’re one of the volunteers?”

“Right. I do this as often as I can in my off hours. My specialty’s rarely needed, but it keeps me in touch with basic doctoring. See you later?”

“I’m here until the end of clinic time at nine, unless there’s a shoot-out somewhere.”

Those last words once more triggered beads of perspiration across his brow, but the rest of the evening was uneventful. Working for free in the community seemed to fit what little he knew of Stan Gordon. He’d sensed he had a generous spirit.

At closing time, Brian walked the final group of women volunteers to their cars after all the patients had left and the clinic doors had been locked. In this seedy commercial area, at this time of night, all the shops were closed, so he liked seeing that these people, who gave their time to the poor, were away safe.

Stan approached him as Brian walked back to his cruiser. “I have two tickets to the exhibition game this Sunday between the Dodgers and the Angels in Dodger Stadium. Any chance you’d be free to go with me?”

Darnell, the one sort of friend he’d had, had moved back to the east coast, and Brian hadn’t formed any friendships here because he’d been away and now had rotated to a new division. At times he felt disgusted with himself when he missed the warped camaraderie of the Huns. Still grieving the loss of his dad, without family or friends at this point, and loving baseball, Stan’s

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invitation gave him something to look forward to with a man he found interesting and heart-stoppingly attractive. The answer came easily. “You’ve got a deal. I’m not working that day. Want to be there for tailgate? I’ll bring the lunch.”

* * *

Brian picked Stan up in his truck and found a spot in the parking lot a few hours before the gates opened. The baseball lovers partying around them were in high spirits, barbecuing on Hibachi grills and drinking beer. Rock and country music blared from sites across the lot, while the smoky scent of hamburgers, steaks and wieners wafted through the air.

He’d bought sub sandwiches at Quiznos and potato salad and chips in the deli near his condo. There were cold drinks in a small cooler. They spread a tarp on the ground and set up folding chairs. He set his battery powered radio/CD player on the tailgate.

“This is great. All the comforts of home,” Stan said as he stretched out his long, sleek legs and crossed them at the ankles. He bit down on a twelve-inch turkey sub. “I haven’t done this since I was in college.”

“It’s been longer than that for me. My dad used to take me to the Kansas City Royals’ games. They were playing well then.”

“They don’t have much of a team anymore.”

“I know, but I’m loyal. If they play in town, I go if I can. Even if I know they’ll lose. They’ve been in a slump for years, but I’ll spend money to see them any time. Good memories. My dad was a great guy.”

Brian had thought they’d listen to jazz, but instead they talked baseball under a cloudless blue sky, while the balmy air bathed

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their skin. Sunlight glinted off Stan's golden hair, and he looked come-to-me-baby sexy in dark glasses and a pair of denims that hugged a tight ass and firm thighs. If he'd had his way, Brian would have jumped him right here and now. He sighed.

Stan looked up, a question on his face.

"Nothing. Just enjoying the company and the day."

Stan's smile was pure sunlight. "Me, too."

Their stadium seats looked out on the approach to first base, and the bright green turf and the familiar red-earth rise of the pitcher's mound they faced caused Brian's throat to tighten for a moment. This had been his dad's favorite spot in a ballpark. Then the ump yelled, "Play ball!" and the game was on.

It was a great game. They kibitzed and screamed for the runners, ate foot-long Dodger Dogs—Brian chose grilled and Stan steamed—from paper-lined foil wrappers and drank cold beer, then consumed ice cream bars and popcorn. Sometimes Stan's thigh touched his or their shoulders and arms touched. Stan didn't pull away, and neither did Brian. He loved the shivery race of excitement across his body when he felt hard muscles or the heat of Stan's sun-bronzed skin against his.

When the game had ended and the players were leaving the field, Stan held out his hand. "Pay up, buddy. It seems to me my Angels won."

Brian laughed as he pulled a twenty from his wallet. "Never say I don't honor my bets." He slipped the bill into a palm that radiated heat to his fingers as they touched. He wanted to pull Stan's hand up to his mouth and suck every finger, but that would never do.

Dream on, Bri. Dream on. Imagine Stan's shocked reaction if you did something like that.

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They sat for a while after the game had ended, waiting for the crowds to thin and the parking lot traffic jam to ease. Brian sighed. It seemed light years since he'd been able to relax, to forget about looking over his shoulder or guarding his words to be sure he stayed alive, and to have a conversation with someone who hadn't dropped out of school in the ninth grade and whose world experience was limited to that of dirty outlaw bikers. It felt heady. Wonderful.

Finally, they went down the stairs and out the gates. They were threading their way through lines of cars inching to the exits, when the rough rumble of poorly maintained motorcycles rang in Brian's ears. He froze and everything—stadium, people and cars—disappeared. Hypnotized by the rumble of old bikes as they drew closer and closer, he saw nothing.

And feared everything.

"Brian, what's wrong? You're pale as hell."

Stan's hard grip on his shoulder broke the spell and his voice overrode the rough sound of lousy mufflers. Brian's vision returned. Feeling his shirt damp in his armpits, he spotted the cyclists up ahead, patiently waiting their turn at the exit. No biker jackets. Real helmets, not the half-faces that provided almost no protection to the head preferred by outlaw riders. A wave of relief washed over him and weakened his knees.

"I'm okay."

"We were walking along, and suddenly you threw your arm out and pushed me behind you. Your right hand went to your hip, but then you just stood there."

"A cop's reflex. Something triggered a bad memory for me, and I was probably reaching for my sidearm. The one I'm not wearing. Sorry if I spooked you. I think I even spooked myself."

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Stan's chuckle was a little shaky. "Hey, if I need protecting I'd prefer it was by you, Officer Storm."

Warmth rolled through Brian. He wrapped his arm around Stan's shoulder, not caring who might see them or what they might think, and they finished their journey to his truck.

By the time they'd reached it, he'd recovered. He pulled up outside Stan's house and declined an invitation to go in for a drink. "Rain check? I have to work tomorrow." A rush of feelings for this man softened his voice. "I had a great time. Thanks for inviting me."

"We'll do it again," Stan said. "Maybe next time your team will win and you can recoup your twenty bucks." He squeezed Brian's thigh in a farewell gesture and slid out of the truck.

Worried by his reaction when he'd heard the bikes, Brian held onto the memory of that hand on his thigh all the way home. He didn't think a straight guy would do that. Was it just possible that Stanley Gordon, M.D., was gay?

CHAPTER 4

Two weeks passed before their paths crossed again. Brian was in place at the door to the free clinic when the familiar figure came striding up the sidewalk.

“Hi, baseball lover,” Stan said.

“Hi, yourself. How’ve you been?”

“Swamped or I’d have called you. Emergencies and on-call nights. It’s been rough.”

Brian nodded and gave him a little salute as Stan went inside.

At closing time, Stan invited him to his place for a late supper. “The cleaning lady always makes a main dish and tossed salad for me on clinic night. Says it’s her contribution to caring for the people who fall through the health insurance cracks. This time it’s homemade tamales. Can you come share it with me? You did the

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tail gate thing, so it's my time to treat."

Brian hesitated. He wanted to spend time with this man, but was it wise? Outdoors at the ballpark was one thing. Alone with him in his home was quite another. It'd been too long since he'd socialized with a normal man, longer still since he'd made love with one. All the clit flicking and finger fucking he'd had to do with the bimbos the Huns brought in had sickened him. Women appealed to him as friends and colleagues, but never as intimate partners. These girls had been so drunk and zonked on drugs, though, it wasn't surprising they didn't realize he hadn't entered them.

He shivered. If the Huns had realized he wasn't straight, they'd have beaten him to death and burned his remains. They'd laughed about having done that to a gay black man. He didn't like himself much for his behavior with the women, but it'd been necessary to staying alive. He hadn't dared have sex with a man over the duration of his assignment. That kept him free of sexually transmitted diseases, but left him hungry for love.

Emotion and the need for normalcy won out over logic. "I'd like that. Hear my stomach growling? I need to change clothes and cars first. I'll leave my black-and-white at my house and come in my own car. Where do you live?"

* * *

Light streamed from the house, casting friendly shadows on the walk to the beach. "Door's open," Stan called. "I'm in the kitchen."

He was pulling a pan from the oven, and Brian stood for a minute and drank in the sight of him as the smell of warm Mexican

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tamales and red salsa wafted to him. Bare feet, perfectly formed, long and sensual, tan cargo pants, shirt open at the neck, his blond hair no longer slicked back in a conservative style, but loose and messy as it had been at the ball park. He was completely relaxed and unselfconscious. Stan turned, and his smile spread across his face, deepening the crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and mouth. Was there something about the smile this time that was an invitation to love?

Brian's heart turned over.

"Hi! We'd better eat these while they're warm. Beer's in the refrigerator there. The wine's open and breathing at the table."

Brian liked beer with Mexican food, and there was nothing as good as tamales made by someone of that heritage, so he went to the fridge. Stepping out of his flip-flops, he followed his host to the patio, where they ate with the muffled crashing of surf as background music. They ate fast. It was late, and Brian was famished. Stan ate at that speed, too. Either he was as starved as Brian was or he always ate that fast. Salad and tamales gone, they lingered and talked over beer and wine.

"You have a great home."

"Thanks. I'm proud of it. My dad owns a lumberyard and planing mill, and my mother's a registered nurse. We jokingly say it must be through her DNA I came to love medicine. Dad helped build this house. With his contacts and discounts in construction, I was able to afford it. Do you have any siblings? I have a sister and two brothers. I'm the oldest."

Brian nodded. "I've always wanted a brother or a sister; it didn't matter which." *I'd wanted a mother, too, but that hadn't happened either. Dad never remarried after Mom's death, and I barely remember her.* "Your place makes my condo look pretty

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grim.”

The cleaning lady had also made flan, and the liquid of the scorched sugar flowed over the custard, enticing and golden. The sweet pudding was slippery on the tongue, cold and delicious. Stan’s nearest foot roamed over his, hot and gliding, warm and solid. Brian started, then heat flared through him. He’d wondered in the bar and grill if Stan’s shoe against his had been deliberate, if his touches at the game and on his thigh had been because he wanted to be in contact with Brian as much as Brian wanted to be close to him. He’d hoped it was, and maybe he’d been right.

“Do you mind me touching you?” Stan asked in a quiet voice, his body tense, as if he feared Brian’s response.

Brian looked directly into his eyes. His blood soared through his body as if on a drug high, but the drug was the gorgeous man whose foot was rubbing against his. “Why do you think I kicked off my flip-flops?”

They abandoned dessert and, not believing what was happening because he’d wanted it so much, Brian reached for Stan’s hand at the same time Stan reached for his. As their hands touched, locked, he felt the electricity between them and wondered if Stan felt it, too. They walked into the house.

They faced each other, holding hands at their sides, bodies touching only at the lips. The kiss was tentative. Stan’s lips were full and masculine, and they tasted of scorched sugar. His breath was warm and sweet. The kiss itself was soft, and in its softness tantalized and begged for something deeper.

Stan pulled his mouth back, and disappointment swept through Brian. Had the kiss not caused the same tingling in his tongue as it had in Brian’s? The same burning need to kiss again? And again? His lips were so alive with sensation he wanted more, craved more,

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not just of lips, but of Stan. All of him. But Stan seemed to be waiting to see how Brian had felt. Brian gazed down at Stan's mouth, then looked into his eyes as he traced down the silken skin of Stan's cheek with a thumb, then slipped it under the tip of his jaw to lift his chin. "Kiss me," he said, his voice so breathy it was difficult to speak, to steady the words he'd longed to say.

Stan groaned as his mouth met Brian's again. Brian opened to him, took him in.

They shared leisurely kisses, tongues exploring, tasting each other as mouths experienced the joy of coming together fully for the first time, discovering how well they fit. Brian was aware of the slow, measured burgeoning of his cock, of how it lengthened and ached as it rose against the cloth that bound it, held it back, but for now he was more captivated by the warmth and taste of Stan's mouth and his clean, masculine scent as it enveloped Brian. Stan didn't seem ready to move on from this part of their lovemaking any more than he did. It was too real, too new. Too delayed in coming.

Stan's arms wrapped around him and pulled him closer. Their erect, swollen cocks pressed against each other. Stan whispered against his cheek, "I've wanted to kiss you from the moment you opened your eyes in the hospital. Green eyes the color of the sea, with glints of silver and gold creating mysterious depths I didn't understand and wanted to know."

"You felt it, too, then," Brian said, his voice rough because he couldn't get control of his feelings, the happiness of being in Stan's arms.

Stan's mouth began a devastating journey over his face, nuzzling the nape of his neck, his full lips soft and hot, leaving their faint, damp imprint everywhere they touched and marking

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Brian as his. Brian looked down on the golden head and watched the slender but strong fingers reach for his shirt buttons and push them slowly, agonizingly, through their holes when Brian wanted him to rip it off. The slide of fabric across his bare skin as Stan removed his shirt brought back the sensation of the fly of his pajamas sliding across his groin and belly in the hospital.

Brian had wanted him as a lover way back then, mistakenly thinking the sedatives had made him crave sex, but it had been Stan. Caring, competent, sexy Dr. Gordon, who'd saved the cock now drooling and prepared for glory. This time Brian didn't have to hold back his feelings or his need for closeness with this man whose caresses doubled the speed at which his blood spun through his body.

When the mouth found his nipples to flick over them and his teeth bit them, sending electricity crackling through Brian, and hands slid over his shoulders and down his arms, setting his skin to tingling, Brian trembled.

"In the OR, when I saw the bruises here"—Stan kissed his ribs—"and here"—he flicked his tongue, hot and wet, into the dimple that was his navel—"I hurt for you." He slipped his fingers just under the band on Brian's pants and slid them to the front.

A ring of fire scorched where he touched Brian's skin. Stan tugged on the snap. "I wanted to take you in my arms and never let anyone do that to you again. I was furious at the cruelty of what someone did to your cock. I knew it had to have been a man."

Brian froze as those words stabbed him, triggering images of Big Wally—pounding, yanking, bleeding, dying—in his brain with devastating clarity. Desire drained away. His erection faded. He pulled free. Sinking down on a nearby couch, he covered his face with his hands, elbows on his knees. "I can't do this."

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“What’s wrong? Are you all right?” Stan knelt in front of him, his erection still tenting his cargo pants, and pulled Brian’s hands down. He was still breathless from the level of his arousal when he said, “Talk to me.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t expect this.” Agony. Pain. Shame.

“Maybe we moved too fast, before we knew each other better. I’ve wanted you so badly I pushed it when I shouldn’t have.”

“It isn’t you...or us. It’s me.”

He thought Stan blanched a little as he asked, “Is it HIV?”

His smile was weak. “No, thank God, not that.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

He shook his head. “I can’t. It’s classified. Related to my job.”

The color returned to Stan’s face. “In the stadium parking lot the night of the game, you thought we were in danger, didn’t you?”

Brian nodded.

“And it was related to something on your job?”

“Yes.”

“I can go with that.” Stan sighed and stood, then repositioned his unsatisfied erection in his pants. “Look, it’s okay if we don’t make love tonight, but I hope there *is* someone you can talk to about what’s bothering you.” He walked out of the room, returned with a loose sweatshirt and handed it to Brian. “I’m not going to let you leave when you’re upset, and this is more comfortable than your shirt for hanging out. You have your choice of jazz, TV or a DVD.”

Clever man, Brian thought. If he were wearing Stan’s shirt instead of his, he’d be less likely to leave immediately, but, confused and hurting, embarrassed that he’d broken away when Stan was still aroused and unsatisfied, he wasn’t ready to leave anyway. He pulled the sweatshirt over his head as he fought the

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thoughts and images swirling through his mind and the feelings lingering in his body. He couldn't have concentrated on television or a movie, so jazz it was.

The late, great Freddie Hubbard's trumpet rang through the sound system. Stan held his hand as they listened and talked quietly about music and musicians. Brian drew comfort from his touch, a touch that soothed, but didn't demand. Or hurt. It had been a long day. His first private evening with Stan and the disastrous affair with the lovemaking. He closed his eyes, anchored to this man he cared for, and let the music carry him.

* * *

Stan retrieved a blanket from the hall closet and covered Brian's sleeping form on the couch. At some point in the music, Brian's hand in his had relaxed and Stan realized he'd fallen asleep. Afraid to click the CD player off for fear it might wake him, he rolled the volume to low and leaned down to touch his lips lightly to Brian's cheek. The heat and smoothness of his skin touched Stan's heart. When Brian didn't stir, he crept out of the room.

Confused and frustrated by what had happened because he sensed Brian had felt the same electrifying connection and heat he had in their encounter, he tossed and turned before he finally slept.

The next morning, he found the couch empty and the blanket neatly folded in one corner. In the kitchen, his folded sweatshirt was on the table with a note on top. *Have to work. Thanks for everything. You're one beautiful man. Please don't give up on us. I'll call.* The scrawled signature was Brian's. He'd included his home address and phone number. Beside the note on the table was

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his police department business card. Brian Storm, Detective III.

He puzzled over the Detective III. What was he doing on patrol if he'd advanced to that level? Had he been involved in something to cause a demotion? If so, why did his cards still list him as a detective?

Curiosity over Brian's actions bothered him all morning. Something about Stan saying he'd wanted to protect him, to take him in his arms and never let anyone do that to Brian again, had knocked his cock down to normal size. It was a cop's job to protect *Stan*, so had he insulted him? Made him feel weak as an officer, as a man? A picture sprang into his mind of the handsome, rugged body in that dark uniform, wearing the duty belt they said weighed fifteen or sixteen pounds, with a gun on his hip and a Taser strapped to his thigh. He'd seen the outline of the bullet-resistant vest under his shirt, and that was another four or five pounds. Weak? Not this man. What in hell had happened to him?

You can't fix it, Dr. Gordon, much as you want to. Let it go.

He picked up the sweatshirt and held it to his nose. Brian's scent lingered. Needing to keep him close, he pulled it on to wear while he ran errands and took a long walk on the beach. Jogging would have covered the scent with sweat, so he walked.

Gulls cried overhead in the damp, salt air, and the sand warmed his bare feet. Surfers waited on the undulating, green sea for a swell, and kids tossed Frisbees, while college men and women dove into the sand playing volleyball. Clouds hovered out over the ocean, and Stan figured that later rain would ruin the sand playtime. The surfers might get some good waves, but the beachgoers would head for home. Soon the waves would be too rough even for the surfers and they'd abandon their fun, too.

He thought Brian would have enjoyed this walk. He wished he

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were here. Wished they could walk close, arm in arm or hand in hand and kiss. And in kissing move on to caresses of other hot, secret body places, maybe even while in a sheltered cove, their excitement heightened by the threat of someone discovering them in a compromising position. He smiled. *No, Detective Storm. I don't intend to give up on us. You can bet on it.*

The rains came later that afternoon, so noisy he almost missed the call. When he answered and heard, "Hi," in the voice he craved to hear, his groin tightened.

"I'm through again at nine, so how about if I bring Chinese to your house for dinner? I don't have to work tomorrow."

"How about a little leftover tamale and a Spanish omelet? It's dark and raining too hard even for a drive-through buy."

"You're on," Brian said.

* * *

Little rivulets of water dripped from the slate-gray coat the police officer was slipping out of when Stan opened the door.

"Where can I hang this?"

Stan stepped back from the doorway and pointed to a coat stand just inside the door where the floor was finished in huge ceramic tiles. Once Brian had crossed the door sill, he closed the door behind his guest. Was he dreaming? That Brian should have returned so soon after last night's fiasco was one thing, but the handsome detective in full uniform gave off an aura of power that tugged at Stan's emotions. For a moment he couldn't speak, couldn't even greet him. Then Brian leaned in and brushed his lips across Stan's in a quick kiss, and the spell was broken.

He found his voice. "Hi. We're eating at the bar tonight. I

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started the wood in the fireplace next to it. How was your day?" The last words echoed in his mind after he spoke them. Hell, you'd think he was a wife.

Brian unbuckled his belt as he walked and laid it at one end of the kitchen table. He removed his gun and unloaded it by removing the clip. When he began to unbutton his shirt to remove his vest, Stan turned away and enumerated the items Brian could choose from to put in his omelet. He dropped a pat of soy margarine into the hot skillet and poured the beaten eggs into the pan, adding green onions, avocado, tomato, crisp bits of bacon and lots of cheese—Brian's choices. They happened to be his as well. Only when he thought the enticing chest, with its dark pelt that underlined and emphasized the heavily muscled pecs before it led down to the dick he wanted to stroke to life, had been covered did he dare to look up.

The rain hammered the roof as they ate in silence before the blazing fire, sating their hunger. Stan wanted to satisfy his hunger in another way with another kind of thing that was filling, but he waited. This relationship might not work, but he sensed he had to be patient if it was to have any kind of chance. Maybe he was wrong, but he thought this man was worth it. "We ate all the salad last night, but I have fruit."

They ate fruit. They finished off the flan, then carried cordials of Kahlúa to sip while they watched a television show. By the time Brian stood to leave, the brunt force of the storm had hit. Thunder boomed, followed immediately by lightning arcing through the sky to touch earth somewhere and leave devastation in its wake. The wind drove torrential rain against Stan's windows and the palm trees in his yard whipped around at the mercy of the wind. At the beach, they could see ocean waves spraying up above the sea wall,

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sometimes washing over.

"Don't go home in this," Stan said. "You don't have to work tomorrow and neither do I. Stay here with me. The worst of this is supposed to have moved through by morning. I have a guest room and new pajamas and briefs or boxers you can wear. There are unopened toothbrushes and combs, too."

There was a long pause, then Brian said, "Actually, I sleep in the nude."

Stan grinned as a vivid image of a naked Brian in his house materialized. Excitement and anticipation hurtled through him like a runaway train. "That'll work, too."

He was getting out an extra blanket in the guest room, when Brian, arms crossed and leaning against the door as he watched, said, "Sleep me with tonight, Stan."

Serious green eyes turned to jade in the night lights gazed directly into his without looking away.

"But..."

"No lovemaking. I just want you near me." In a softer voice, the strong man said, "I *need* you near me."

"I'm not sure I can..." He wasn't sure he could sleep with him and not express his feelings in love play. Brian apparently didn't understand what an appealing man he was or how deep Stan's feelings for him ran. Stan himself was only just discovering this.

"Why do you think I came here straight from work, ahead of what I knew would be a white lightning storm?"

The wheels turned, and Stan said, grinning, "So I'd invite you to stay over?"

It was Brian's turn to grin. "You got it. Didn't think it was good manners to invite myself."

Stan touched his shoulder, not risking a hug. "I'd have been

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very happy if you had.”

Still unsure of his control over his feelings and desire, Stan turned his back while Brian undressed and slid naked under the covers. Unfettered happiness filled him at the thought of Brian in his bed, but not caressing him or being caressed by him? That was sheer pain. He shut his eyes for a minute, but as he undressed in the bathroom, Stan knew he'd have to wear pajamas. There was no way he could sleep nude next to a naked Brian and not touch him...kiss him. Press his body up against him, trail his fingers over his smooth, warm skin and enter the opening guarded by his beautiful ass.

Under the blankets, Brian's warmth was close, his scent all around him, and Stan's cock filled and rose as tingling started in his sac and spread rapidly to the pucker between his butt cheeks. But physical love, even desire, was forbidden and, for whatever reason, Brian needed him. For now, he'd asked for this much intimacy, but no more.

Asking for them to sleep together meant he was trusting Stan to honor that boundary. Sighing, Stan realized when the time came it would have to be Brian who initiated love play, either by word or action.

Stan thought he'd die of longing, but he didn't. Finally having conquered the struggle to turn his thoughts elsewhere and shut off the compulsion to touch Brian, and knowing from the deep, even breathing beside him that Brian slept, he turned on his stomach and drifted off.

The red numbers on the bedside clock read 1:15 when he wakened to Brian twisting and turning as he moaned and muttered. Dreaming, Stan thought, and attempted to return to sleep, but Brian grew increasingly agitated, trying to sit up, calling out to someone

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to stop.

"No!" he screamed, and then in a broken voice that tore at Stan's heart, "Oh, God, no." He threw the covers back and stood beside the bed, arms crossed and hands on his shoulders as if to protect and comfort himself.

Not dreaming. A nightmare. Stan spoke in a hush so as not to startle Brian if he was going to sleep walk. "Are you okay?"

Brian nodded, but remained silent and still.

Stan rose and pulled a thick terrycloth robe from the closet. Brian's skin was ice as Stan stood behind him and guided his arms into its sleeves, pulling it into place and hugging his shoulders. Brian gathered it together in the front and tied the sash.

"You're chilled. Maybe that's what started this. Let's go into the kitchen and have something warm to drink," Stan said.

Stan stirred the fireplace to life, and, as they drew their chairs up to its warmth, the tea kettle whistled.

Brian swished a bag of tea in the scalding water in his cup. "What a lousy guest I turned out to be, waking you up like this. The dreams had tapered off or I wouldn't have stayed with you."

Stan scoffed. "Dreams? Nightmares I'd call them if they're all like the one you just had. I don't mean to probe or to coax you into telling me things you shouldn't, but if you can tell me enough to make me understand a little, it would help."

Brian squeezed the teabag with his spoon against the cup to get the last drops of the dark liquid out of it, then discarded it and cradled his cup in his hands, letting the steam warm his nose. "They're the residue of something that happened on my latest assignment. I'm not free to share the circumstances, but last night horrible pictures cropped up in my mind when you were so skillfully seducing me. It felt wonderful, but even as much as I

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wanted you, as aroused as I was, the images killed any desire I had for sex. I went numb. That's why I told you it wasn't us, that it was me. Why I asked you not to give up on us. I have to work through this."

Stan was silent, thinking about what he'd just heard. "Tough to do?"

Brian nodded. As if he'd read his mind, he added, "I do have someone to talk to in the department. Someone trained in this sort of thing."

Stan nodded. "Good. I'm relieved."

Warmed by the fire and the tea, they started back to the bedroom. Brian paused at the door of the guestroom. "I'll sleep here so I won't wake you if I have another episode."

Stan gave him a little swat on his ass to hurry him past the open door. "Oh, no, you won't. I can tolerate a few nightmares."

His reward was a quick kiss on the lips. Once they were in bed, he reached for Brian's hand and held it tight. "I'm here. Whatever you went through is over. You're safe." He kissed his hand, and Brian turned on his side and slept.

Stan curved his body around his back and bum. His cock behaved. He wasn't a lover now, but a physician sheltering a wounded man. Maybe desire was forbidden, but with the barest of touches, he slid one foot near Brian's to share its heat.

At four in the morning, he wakened and sensed the space beside him was empty. Rising, he stepped noiselessly to the family room door and saw Brian, a blanket wrapped around him, standing in front of the big window staring out at the violent storm. Whatever was going on inside him was something Stan couldn't help with. At least for now. He returned to bed as silently as he'd left it.

CHAPTER 5

The rain was drumming on the roof and Stan was still asleep when Brian slipped from the bed so as not to wake him. Rummaging in the guest room, he located an unopened package of briefs and a toothbrush as promised. After showering, he stepped into the skivvies and yesterday's uniform trousers. When he tiptoed into Stan's bedroom to find the sweatshirt from the night he'd slept on the couch, the bed was empty and the door to that bathroom open. He saw Stan step dripping from the shower and reach for a towel he dropped over his head. He began to rub his hair.

Brian held his breath. Stan had seen his body, but he hadn't seen Stan's. He'd touched very little of it. His hoodless dick lay quiet on a thatch of blond curls and a relaxed sac weighted by

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testicles. The action of soaking up the excess water in his hair flexed his sizeable chest muscles while it outlined defined, firm abs. Brian's blood warmed at the sight of the beautiful proportions of Stan's body, long legs perfectly balanced by torso and arms. The narrow male hips made him hungry for what lay between them, and when Stan turned and he saw the fine curve of his back and the firm butt it led down to, he felt torn between dread and want.

Stan finished with his head and moved to the rest of his body. Looking up, he saw Brian standing there. He met his gaze for a long moment, then pushed the door shut with a quiet motion, as if he knew how difficult seeing his body would be for Brian and whatever demons he battled.

Neither mentioned the bathroom incident. They hung out together that day with Brian dressed in Stan's sweatshirt.

"It smells like you," he said at one point.

Stan laughed that full, throaty laugh Brian loved. "I think you're confused, man. I wore it yesterday because it smelled like you. Today, I'm sure it smells like both of us."

Brian marveled at how easy it was to spend an entire day with Stan. Cocooned away from the storm raging around them, they played cards and checkers, watched a movie and talked about everything under the sun. Except sex. They both understood that, for now, the subject was as forbidden as their desire for each other. It was hard on both of them.

The larder was bare, so they fixed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch washed down with cold, fat-free milk. For dinner, they ordered Papa John's pizza, one apiece. It was a favorite of both, but they each ordered different toppings.

"Thank heavens for that," Stan said. "We wouldn't want to be

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so much alike in our tastes it would get boring.”

Brian laughed. He watched Stan as he ate. He was neat...nothing dripped onto his chin or his shirt. He hadn't shaved for two days and fine blond stubble covered his upper lip and jaw line. If Brian had dared touch it, he knew he would feel soft and silky. The thatch between his hips would be wirier and pleasing as it tangled with Brian's dark stubble there. Brian wondered how his stickery hair would feel to Stan. Would its sharp roughness be erotic? With another sigh of regret, which he seemed to do too often these days, he dug into his own pizza.

The rain had faded to sprinkles by the time Brian headed back to his condo. He didn't have to report for duty until noon the next day, but he had a morning appointment with the counselor. For once, he looked forward to it.

Stan kissed him hard and hugged him tight when he said goodbye.

Brian held onto him a moment longer than necessary. “I'll call.”

* * *

From a window, Stan watched the black-and-white driven by his favorite cop pull out, disappearing down the street in the pre-dawn light. He struggled with a feeling of regret over what he'd done this morning.

He'd left his bathroom door open on purpose. He'd known the minute Brian had walked into his bedroom and Stan had exited the shower accordingly. Thinking that seeing him naked might break down the unnatural barrier to desire and loving, he'd been stunned to see the tortured conflict on Brian's face, and so he'd closed the

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door without a sound. Then he'd buried his face in the towel, ashamed he'd let his own needs hurt someone already in pain, hoping Brian could forgive him for pushing him before he was ready.

He looked around his empty house. It was going to be unbearable to be alone here tonight. He wasn't sure when they'd connect again, but he had to believe they would. They had unfinished business together. Until then, he couldn't face sleeping in his bed until he saw or heard from Brian and knew things were okay between them.

Life goes on, he told himself. He dumped the empty pizza boxes into the recycling bin and loaded the dishwasher and started it before he dressed for work.

As he was scrubbing for a morning surgery, Jason Miles approached the sink next to him and tore open a sterile scrub brush package. He started the water by pushing one of the faucet knee handles with his leg, then he stepped on the pad that pumped soap into hands and began to wield the brush with vigor over his fingernails and fingers, onto his hands and arms to his elbows.

"Morning, Jason," Stan acknowledged. "How's it going?"

"Great. Did I see you at the ballpark for the exhibition game this weekend? I thought I saw you with that police officer we worked on."

Stan steeled himself against the coming disapproval. "Storm. Detective Storm. Yes, we were together. We've become good friends. His big problem is he's a Dodgers fan."

"Wasn't that a terrific game? But the Dodgers made a good showing. Their fans can be happy. The Angels are my team. What about you?"

Stan smiled as the memory of his wager with Brian popped up.

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“Angels, of course. They out hit, out played the Dodgers.”

And, as simple as it was, that was the end of the conversation. No frowns, no criticism or wagging fingers that he'd been out with a patient. He could have danced with relief. Instead, he smiled and whistled “Somebody To Love” as he finished scrubbing.

* * *

Brian strode down the corridor and entered clinical psychologist Jasmina Alba's office. Greetings over, he accepted her offer of coffee, which was about a hundred flavor steps above the sludge in the staff coffee maker. He sank down on one of the brown leather chairs reserved for clients.

“What's up?” the older woman asked. She blew on the steaming cup of tea she held and waited.

“I think...” It was harder to say than he'd imagined it would be on the drive here. “I think I was raped.” He shut his eyes as images of the torture flooded his mind. “I wasn't sodomized, but what happened to me was a kind of rape.”

A slow smile spread across the counselor's face as she set her cup down and leaned forward. “I was wondering when you'd figure that out. This is a big step toward dealing with what you endured. What brought you to that conclusion?”

He told her about Stan.

She nodded. “Instinct guided you when you asked to sleep with him without love play. Unconsciously, you knew that intimacy is about more than intercourse and passionate climaxes. It's about sharing warmth and laughter, about kindness and touching. From what you've told me, you've already experienced many of those things with this man, and he obviously wants you in his life. Even

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without knowing the full story of what happened to you, he's holding back his own needs to give you time to come to terms with it. That's a very good thing."

Brian should have left feeling less troubled than when he'd entered her office, and filled with confidence about his discovery. But the psychologist couldn't tell him how long it would be before his reaction to what he'd suffered would wear off, and he wondered if Stan, who dripped with sensuality and could attract any man he wanted, would have the patience to wait.

* * *

It had been a bad day at work. A multi-car collision on the nearest freeway had filled every available paramedic ambulance and brought them to Stan's hospital. He and every surgeon on staff they could muster had been in surgery all day repairing damaged bodies. Now fatigue had soaked into his bones. Too tired even to remove his clothes and shower, he'd managed to fix only a sandwich for supper, and he was holding half of it in one hand when the doorbell chimed.

A glance out the peephole showed a police officer dressed in a thick black jacket and hat standing with his back to the door. Stan's heart lurched. Something must have happened to Brian, and they'd sent an officer to tell him. Before the illogic of that—because no one so far knew they were an item—had soaked in, the man turned, and joy sent Stan's blood racing through his body. He flung the door wide.

"Hi," Brian said, his face solemn as he removed his hat.

"What a wonderful surprise, Officer Storm." He addressed him formally, tongue-in-cheek. "I didn't expect you tonight. I just got

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home, and I haven't listened to my messages."

"Didn't leave one. Took a chance you'd be here." Brian stepped across the threshold and shut the door behind him. He removed his jacket and let it and his uniform hat fall to the floor. After taking Stan's sandwich out of his hand, he laid it on a nearby table before drawing him into his arms. He pressed Stan's face into his shoulder and rocked with him as if he never wanted to let him go.

Tired enough to drop, Stan rested in the strong arms that held him, in the feel of their bodies tight together from head to toe and the rhythmic movement of the two of them set by Brian. Suddenly, the fatigue of the day slipped away and all was right with the world because Brian—a Brian who must've conquered the images that had ruined sex and desire for him—was here, holding him. Stan kissed his neck and pulled back. "Hmm. You're skin's chilled despite that heavy jacket."

Brian's face showed determination as his mouth closed on Stan's. At first soft and searching as he kissed Stan's mouth at the corners, his tongue traced the line of his lips, and upon reaching center, sought entrance. Stan opened so their tongues could intertwine to taste and seek out the warm moisture inside and draw them closer as lovers. The pressure of Brian's mouth increased, growing hotter and subtly demanding in an almost frantic way, as his fingers threaded through Stan's hair and loosened it out of the conservative way it was combed and into a mass of soft curls. Then Brian's hands made a slow journey across Stan's shoulders and down his back, following the long curve of Stan's spine until they slipped beneath slacks and briefs to cup his butt cheeks. One finger slid in to caress and play with the pucker between them.

Desire, hot and forbidden, flared in Stan's chest, then shot

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down through navel and belly to unleash in his groin, instantly causing him to fill until he was hard and ready, every nerve in his being primed for love. Breathless from the delicious sensations roaring through him, he held back and let his lover make love to him.

When the hands slid around from the back to the front to cup and stroke what waited there for Brian's touch, pleasure caused a soft moan to escape Stan's throat. When Brian unhooked Stan's trousers and slid down his briefs and slacks, he fought to stay upright and not give in to knees weakened by longing. When Brian knelt and took the length of him into his hot, tonguing mouth, Stan fought not to explode that instant, but to let the feelings crescendo to a mind-blowing eruption. Brian's turn to be loved came next.

He looked down on the kneeling figure and the dark head so dear to him, so intent on coaxing him to climax...and saw a flat trouser front with no tenting created by an aroused dick.

Through a throat so filled with desire and need he almost couldn't voice the most difficult words he'd ever had to utter, he begged, "Stop, Brian."

When Brian's voracious tongue persisted and slid into the slit on the moist, aching tip of his cock, Stan grabbed his shoulders and dug his hands in hard. "Please. I'm asking you to stop. Now. Before it's too late and I come."

Brian reluctantly released Stan's swollen cock and looked up, his face a study in puzzlement.

Stan tugged him up to stand, then leaned over to tuck his shrinking cock into his briefs and fasten his slacks. He pointed to the flat front of Brian's uniform pants. "You aren't aroused. What do you think you're doing...some kind of escort service thing?" He couldn't keep the edge of bitterness out of his voice.

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Brian buried his face in his hands, and now Stan was the one who pulled him into his arms. They rocked together, this time Stan setting the rhythm.

Brian's voice was thick with emotion as he said, "The nightmares aren't any better, and I think of you everywhere I go. I pass the hospital and remember how we met. I eat at Haverly's and remember how you touched me with your foot the first time we ate there, and how I hoped you were gay, too. I remember discovering we liked the same music, and I turn on the radio on and there's a ballgame being played somewhere. I think of rain and waves washing over the seawall, and how you feel when I kiss you. What it was like with your hands roaming my body. How your heat radiates to me when we're in bed together.

"I was afraid you'd get tired of waiting for me if we didn't have sex. I thought if I satisfied you, I wouldn't lose you."

Stan's groan was guttural. "Christ, Brian, loving isn't a one-sided deal." He drew him over to sit on the couch beside him and put an arm around his shoulders. "I won't pretend it isn't hellish for me to hold back, but when you've worked through whatever's blocking you we'll share passion *together*. Never separately. It's not *I* or you, it's *us*. Got that?"

Brian nodded. "I'm sorry I made such a mess of things."

Stan's laughter was free and easy, on the edge of joy. "You're supposed to feel bad because you've let me know how much I mean to you? I don't think so." He slid his hand under Brian's chin and kissed him. "You'll never know how happy that makes me, and I hope you've gotten the message about how deep my feelings for you run, too."

Punching Brian's shoulder with a playful touch, he asked, "How does a cheese and tomato sandwich for supper sound to

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you?”

* * *

Things were easier for Brian once he knew he wasn't going to lose Stan. He could concentrate on his job and getting his emotions back in order.

In one appointment, the counselor asked, “Has talking here about the details of your attack and the rape lessened the nightmares?”

He shook his head.

“Made sex possible between you and your lover?”

Again, he shook his head. “Since that first episode, it's gotten worse. Now I can't even get it up. Can't feel anything. Fear the images will return numbs me.” He felt his face flush with embarrassment and shame.

Fingers tented and resting on her lips, Dr. Alba's thoughts seemed to draw inward. When she finally spoke, she said, “As bad as what happened to you is, I don't think you have true post-traumatic stress disorder. You've suffered a serious shock, but not to that level. You can be glad about that. It's much harder to deal with true PTSD.

“For some clients, talking helps. For others, it doesn't. When it doesn't, they learn to shut down much or even all the memory of what happened to them.”

Haunted by the nightmares, of the loss of passion and desire, he said, “I find that hard to believe.”

She just smiled. Patiently. Like Stan. “When we've discussed what feelings and thoughts you had during the attack and after, you've told me of your terror, but also that hatred for your attacker

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triggered the rage in which you killed him.”

“Yes.”

“But isn’t it your job as a police officer not to lose control? Then you lost it and a man died at your hands. Isn’t that what you’ve told me happened?”

Pain crept across Brian’s chest as he nodded. Why was she doing this to him?

“Interesting. The man is shooting at you...and yet you feel like you *murdered* him?”

Again, he nodded. This hurt, but she understood his feelings.

“So you feel you stepped down to the level of behavior of this gang by killing. On top of that, you’re alive. He isn’t.”

She was really laying it on the line. He held on, not knowing where this was leading, but trusting her despite the pain in his chest.

“And because of this, you feel...”

“Guilty.” The word popped out before he had time to think.

“Why do you think you’re reliving this event over and over and over in your nightmares and in your mind?”

It took a long period of thought. Of letting everything he’d done and felt surface again, here in broad daylight with sunlight splashing through the windows onto the bright, cheery carpet in the psychologist’s office. “Punishment. I became less than a cop, and he died. I didn’t.”

“That’s right. You survived. There’s a name for that. I’m sure you know it.”

He’d been fighting back the dampness in his eyes. Now he smiled through it. “Survivor’s guilt.”

“Can you guess how common those feelings, this reaction, are when an officer kills someone?”

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Brian smiled even more broadly as her meaning became clear. “You mean I’m not unique?”

“Right. You’re not unique. Or special. Oh, in the greater order of things, as a good and decent human being and a conscientious law officer, you are, but not in this matter. You’re very ordinary.”

She stood, as she always did as a sign the session was at an end. This time, she extended her hand. Her handshake was warm and firm. “I’m always here if you need me. Right now you don’t, detective. I think you have the tools and the strength to heal yourself. Concentrate on the healing process, not the trauma, and be well.”

“Thank you, Dr. Alba.”

“Remember, you still have work to do. I’ll leave you with one last idea—if you had the power to change what happened, how would it have ended?”

Brian hung onto hope this time as strode out the door with her words in his head.

* * *

Darnell called from D.C. to notify him they’d only arrested a handful of the Huns at the encampment. Several had been away when the raid occurred, and there was no direct proof they’d been aware of the drugs or weapons. Those indicted weren’t ratting out the others, another sign of the strange brotherhood of outlaw bikers. Because he’d experienced a small taste of it, Brian knew those men loved each other. Bottom line, however, was they knew if they squealed on someone they’d have to be put in a witness protection program because their lives would be worth zilch anywhere there was a Hun.

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During his two years with them, he knew they'd all been involved at one time or another, but when it came to the trial, his testimony would only be elicited for those indicted. He'd testify in shadow, with his voice distorted, but he dreaded it because he didn't know how much talking about what had happened would ruin some of the progress he'd made in dealing with it.

* * *

For a couple of weeks, he and Stan couldn't connect to see each other, but they kept in touch every day, no matter how short a time they had, by phone. Brian was curled up in bed one night when Stan called.

"I want you to meet my family. I'm the oldest, but a couple of my siblings still live with Mom and Dad."

Brian hesitated. "Do they know?"

"That I'm gay? Of course, they do. My siblings are all straight, but we love each other. My parents love each other, and my family will love you, too. You'll see."

"Do they know about us?"

"Not yet, but they will when I take you home. Mom's a very perceptive woman. She'll know how we feel almost right away, and if Dad doesn't pick up on it, she'll tell him. Trust me." He chuckled.

For Brian, the idea of being accepted in a big family with the man he was falling in love with was exhilarating.

"We'll have to work our schedules out, and I'll have to be sure I'm not on call, but will you come?"

"I'd be crazy to say no, wouldn't I?"

Stan's wonderful laugh rang through the phone. "You bet you

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would. If you said no, I'd come to your condo, break down your door and drag you there anyway. I'm not going home again without you. Mom's a great cook, by the way. Just be prepared to argue with Dad about the Dodgers. He's a major Angels fan, and he's not as gentle about it as I am."

"Sounds better and better. You're on."

For the first night in weeks, he slept without waking or dreaming. Since his final visit with the counselor, it had been a struggle, but with practice he'd learned to intrude when a nightmare began. *This is a nightmare, and it stops here.* He'd wake himself before the death scene. In time, he even learned to change the ending to Wally being cuffed and loaded into a police car. Terror had settled into peace.

When ugly memories would clutter his thoughts during the day, he'd deliberately replace them with cheerful memories, learning that "Go to your happy place" wasn't just a crock. It worked. Most of those happy memories involved Stan, but many were of his father and of his early days as a cop.

Thanks to the insights Dr. Alba had aided him in discovering, he knew he had control over his reaction to what had happened to him. He didn't have to be its victim forever. Once was more than enough.

CHAPTER 6

Stan hadn't made it to the free clinic for a couple of weeks, so Brian's face lit up when he saw the familiar stride and white lab coat. Once during the evening when there was a brief lull, Stan came out to chat with him and down a bottle of water. He confirmed the weekend date they'd set to spend with his parents had been cleared with them. "We're good to go."

Just before closing time, Brian stepped inside to help the volunteers move something heavy. Patients, nurses and physicians said goodnight, filtered out and left. Only the lay volunteers and Stan remained, and they walked outside while the clinic coordinator locked the doors. Brian was waiting for the women he always walked to their cars.

Stan was already striding toward his car when he stopped and

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said in disbelief, “They’re stealing my hubcaps!”

Expecting teenagers at work, shock rocketed through Brian when he saw two motorcycles, one parked in front of Stan’s car and the other behind it. Not teens. The plan had obviously been to prevent Stan from driving away had he shown up. They’d have robbed him and left him unconscious. Or worse.

He radioed for back-up and was assured two black-and-whites would be there within minutes. He unsnapped his Taser and Glock holsters.

One biker was stuffing hubcaps into bags on his bike; the other had a crowbar he was apparently going to use to pry the door open or vandalize the car. They were dressed in jeans and wore heavy biker boots. As they turned their backs to him, he read the word Hun and recognized the Hun logo. They’d be armed and wouldn’t hesitate to kill.

Dread filled him as he signaled Stan to take the women back into the clinic, lock the door and take cover as best they could.

Christ, they must have pulled up while he was inside the clinic, so he hadn’t heard them. And what were Huns doing two counties away in Mongol territory committing petty theft? It was not only brazen, it was the height of stupidity. It could start a biker war similar to the one between two of the Big Five biker gangs in the nation—Hells Angels and Mongols. That had begun because the HAs viewed all of California as their territory, and the Mongols had had the gall to add a California rocker on the bottom of their jackets. Mean as they were, the Huns were weak imitations when compared to them. The war would spread over several counties and into Nevada.

He drew his Glock. His pulses hammered at his temples, threatening to make his head explode. His armpits were drenched.

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His training kicked in, though, and his mind cleared as he advanced toward the men. They hadn't noticed him. Holding the gun with two hands and sighting down it, he turned his body slightly to the side so he'd be a smaller target in case they fired on him.

"Police! Drop what you're holding and put your hands on your heads."

The guy with the hubcap dropped it. It clanged against the old concrete street. He made a slight movement toward his sidearm.

"Hands on your head or I'll shoot! At this distance I can't miss," Brian yelled.

The bearded hubcap man, whom he recognized as Bandito, put his hands on his head and stood still.

Rollo was the moniker of the longhaired biker with the crowbar. He looked ready to throw it at Brian.

"Don't even think of it. Drop that bar and put your hands on your head."

He felt steady now. In control of the situation. Unless someone did something really, really insane, no one was going to get hurt.

"Motherfucker! That voice. It's Johnny Rebelle," Bandito said.

Brian's chest tightened. His cover had just been blown, which, considering what he'd been through on that gig, maybe wasn't such a bad idea because then he could never work under again. Revenge by the Huns, however, was another thing. He didn't want a hit put out on him.

"No, it ain't."

"Sure it is. Big Wally always thought he was a cop," Bandito sneered.

"Yeah, well, look at his arms, *stúpido*. No tattoos, and Johnny had them solid on both arms. There'd be some scars if they'd been

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removed. And this guy's got a scar on his forehead. Johnny was a pretty boy. No, this ain't Rebelle. The Feds took him for sure."

"Turn around slowly," Brian ordered. The tight muscles across his chest relaxed when he knew he hadn't been made.

Sirens split the air as police cars entered from both ends of the street.

"We're screwed," Rollo said.

"You screwed yourselves, gentlemen." Brian holstered his Glock, removed Bandito's weapon and cuffed his hands behind him as officers poured out of the two cars with guns drawn.

When one of the officers had released Stan and the women, he became an instant hero. It embarrassed him. He was the one who should be grateful. He knew he was a cop again.

To Stan he said, "Sorry about the hubcaps, but they're evidence, and your car needs to be dusted for prints. Officer Mike Winthrow will take you home. I have to report to the station to write this up and book them. I'll see you this weekend. Want me to drive?"

"No. If they haven't finished with my car, I'll pick you up in whatever I can borrow from my family or rent. And if it's my car, it'll have hubcaps so you won't need to be embarrassed," Stan quipped. Under his breath, so only Brian could hear, "I'd like to hug you right now and kiss the hell out of you."

Brian laughed, easy and relaxed, in fact, almost limp with relief now that the crisis had passed, he was alive and he hadn't killed anyone. He was strong again. Police strong.

"This weekend," he said.

CHAPTER 7

As it turned out, Stan would have had to rent a car, so Brian insisted on driving his truck to the Gordons' home in Del Mar. Their house was large and overlooked the ocean. "Mom, Dad, I'd like you to meet Brian Storm.

"Brian, my parents, Evelyn and Mark Gordon. This is Tim, my youngest brother, and Emma, our baby sister."

Baby sister was in college, and she growled at her big brother. "Someday, Stan. Someday I'll make you stop with that baby stuff."

Brian fit right in, as Stan knew he would. He'd ached for a strong man who'd been hurt and had no support system, so this was Stan's gift to him. Watching them, Stan's emotions roamed between pride at how his parents Tim and Emma welcomed Brian, and pride over how Brian responded to them. He'd brought flowers

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for Stan's mom and a huge box of candy. He didn't balk when each parent wrapped him in a welcoming bear hug.

Stan took Brian upstairs and showed him to his room. "Breakfast will happen any time you decide to get up tomorrow. This isn't a house with a tight schedule."

After lunch, he and Brian drove to the market to pick up some salad items for dinner. The tide was out, and the air was salty and clean. On impulse, they took time to hold hands and sometimes kiss as they walked on bare feet, shoes in hand, across the damp sand. The air had never seemed so fresh, the sea so beautiful or the beach so pleasant. Brian was here. And he was family.

"With her curly blonde hair and unusual gray eyes, I see your mom in you," Brian said. "No wonder you made the crack about her DNA and your interest in medicine."

"True, but I also have my dad in me. Surgeons are very spatial, and my dad can take a piece of board and cut it in any shape without using a pattern."

"You're a lucky man to have a family like this. I'm trying hard not to envy you."

Stan took hold of his hand. "Believe me, I know just how lucky. Especially since you've come into my life. You're part of this family now."

Brian responded by tightening his hold on Stan's hand.

A guest joined them for dinner. Stan introduced Brian to his dad's very good friend, Jim Paul, a man the age of his parents, with traces of silver at his dark brown temples. A special friend of his dad's, Stan had emphasized. He wasn't sure Brian got the message.

Over dinner, Stan listened as Brian engaged everyone at the table in conversation, showing genuine interest in them and what they were doing. His siblings flooded him with questions about

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what it was like to be a cop.

His mother had outdone herself with a delicious meal of scallops and lobster, and the talk flowed easily. The laughter sometimes caused them almost to choke on their food. Once again, love for his family rolled through him like a smooth tide from a warm sea. Realization that he loved Brian, truly loved him, hit Stan low in the gut like an arrow from Psyche. His spirits soared.

After they'd eaten, as they carried their dishes to the kitchen and put them in the dishwasher to lighten the cleanup chores for Mrs. Gordon, his sis took him aside and said, "What a great guy Brian is. He's a keeper, Stan."

"For nineteen, you're a pretty perceptive woman, little sis."

She tossed her long, straight hair behind her shoulders and chuckled. "Just wait. Mom'll tell you the same thing."

A keeper. That he was. But could his feelings help Brian through this thing that forbid physical love between them? He had no idea. All he could do was be himself and not rush him. He knew some people never moved beyond serious traumas they suffered. He was prepared for that, if it happened, but he was going to live day to day.

They played pool until late, then his brother and sister kissed their parents and headed back to their college dorms to study all day Sunday for exams on Monday.

"It's called cramming," Emma said, her eyes dancing with humor. She stood on her tiptoes to brush a kiss across Stan's cheek and then Brian's. "He's a great guy, this oldest brother of mine," she said.

Tim extended his hand to Brian. "None of that mushy stuff for me. Glad to have met you. And, yes, I hate to admit it, but you couldn't meet a nicer man than our big brother."

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The night air had chilled, and Mark had started a fire in the huge fireplace in the family room. It was late when he and his wife retired to their rooms for the night.

That left Stan and Brian sitting with their feet on footstools, facing the fire, holding hands, talking in low voices and just hanging out. When the flames had burned down to glowing embers, they started up the stairs.

At Brian's door, Stan kissed him goodnight and went into his own room. Everything in him wanted to stay, to spend the night with him, to caress him and tease his pucker and enter him, but he reminded himself that he'd made a commitment to let Brian initiate any love play. Earlier, pushing him had only made his problem worse.

After tossing restlessly for almost an hour, he couldn't stand them being in separate rooms any longer. He rose. There was a solution for this kind of thing, and he'd learned it from Brian. He padded to Brian's room, opening the door with as little noise as possible. "Are you asleep?" he whispered.

"Can't."

"Neither can I. Is it okay if I climb in with you? This time I'm the one who needs *you*."

A soft chuckle came from the bed. Brian moved to one side and lifted the covers. Stan slid under them and turned on his side to face Brian.

"You're like ice, and I'm too hot. Move closer," Brian said.

Against his better judgment, Stan did, and his chilled body drew Brian's warmth. Cocooned under the blankets, soon they were equally sharing the warmth.

"You aren't wearing pajamas," Brian said, running a hand over Stan's hip and lingering in the hollow of his nearest butt cheek.

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“When in Rome...” Stan replied.

It was difficult to talk as Brian’s hand continued to rub and stroke, finding all his most sensitive and responsive parts. His hand was smooth. Strong. The memory of a man in the dark uniform of a police officer drawing his gun against outlaw bikers heightened Stan’s awareness of Brian’s power and sensuality. His burgeoning cock was responding to that image and the subtle caresses of a hand and of Brian’s soft breath. He was all too aware of the body in front of him. He groaned. He should have known he couldn’t do this without wanting to make love with Brian.

“I won’t touch you if you don’t want me to,” Brian said, his voice hoarse in response to Stan’s groan.

Stan shivered with pleasure. “Don’t stop. I want this more than is good for us.”

“When did love start being a bad thing?” Then Brian’s mouth was on his—hard, hot and demanding—while his hands taunted and teased until desire was a hot flame inside Stan’s heart and his crotch a smoldering ball of unfulfilled need. Stan pulled him closer and felt Brian’s erection rigid against his. Joy raced through him.

Brian kissed his eyelids and face, then stopped, his body growing taut with concern. “You have tears on your cheeks.”

“Happiness. Because I love you and you’re whole again.”

Brian wiped the tears away with one thumb. “Yeah. And feel just *how* whole I am.” He pressed Stan’s hand against the velvety skin of his rock-hard cock. It resembled a boxer’s iron fist in a glove.

“Do you still glide smoothly?” Stan smiled in the darkness.

“I do, Dr. Gordon. I do. Maybe you should check it out to be sure it’s in working order.” He cupped Stan’s fingers around a hard-on damp with pre-cum and slid them up and down, up and

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down.

“I’m afraid I’ll hurt you.”

Brian moaned against Stan’s lips. “Don’t worry about it. You’re not hurting me. You’re killing me.”

Stan wanted to be inside him. Wanted to push him to his back and dip in and out of Brian’s tight ass and pump his dick deep until they both shuddered in a violent climax. But Brian had been tortured. He’d been a victim...powerless. Stan thought Brian needed to be the one with sexual power this time. He rolled and pulled Brian on top, sighing as their cocks met, and Brian began a slow, dizzying slide from side to side that felt so good Stan almost let himself explode. Instead, he murmured, “Do you have any idea how sexy you looked in that black uniform with a gun in your hand?”

“Hell, no. They were dangerous outlaw bikers. All I was thinking was to stop them so no one got hurt. You were supposed to be safe inside the clinic, not watching me.” He kissed Stan slow and deep. “That wasn’t a gun you had in your hand just now.”

“As good as. It might have shot bullets any minute, you know. I’m serious, Brian...I want you inside me. Now. Before it’s all over for me.”

Brian stopped moving. “What about your parents? I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty noisy, and after all this time we’ve waited I don’t intend to hold back. They’ll know what we’re doing if we finish this.”

Agonizing over the pause, Stan said, “We have a rule: No gay sex while the straights are home. The straights have returned to college.”

“But your parents—”

“Are gay. Jim is my father’s lover. Mom’s couldn’t be here

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tonight. Please, I'm in agony. Just fuck me, Brian. Make love to me."

Brian shifted so Stan could raise his knees and spread his legs. Stan felt the weight of Brian's body lift off and then his mouth, hot and wet, lapping at his cock as fingers sent shivers up his inner thighs with their caresses. His mouth circled the pucker between his butt cheeks, lubricating it. It was delicious, but it wasn't enough.

"Don't tantalize me. I want you inside me," Stan moaned.

In response, he felt the head of Brian's cock push gingerly against the opening and ease partway in. It was uncomfortable, and Stan winced. Brian retreated.

"I'm hurting you!"

"It's been a long time since I've been stretched. Just do it. Don't worry about a little pain."

Pleasure mingled with that pain as Brian pressed in and pulled out over and over, stretching him, progressing deeper each time with Stan's murmured encouragement as he drove them higher and higher. Stan closed his hand over his own aching cock and pumped, adding to the wash of feelings Brian was building in him.

Brian stopped. Stan tightened his muscles around Brian's erection, released and tightened. His reward was a gasp of pleasure from Brian. "Open your eyes and look at me, Brian. Think only of my body hot and tight around you. Of my hands on you, loving you. Of how your cock's head feels each time it crosses over my opening. Think of pushing until all you feel is..."

Brian's groan came from deep in his throat, loud and filled with pleasure. He pushed hard into him again, pumping fast, deeper and deeper, as Stan tugged faster on his own hard cock. They reached that nanosecond of stillness just before their balls tightened, and

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then, crying out together, they emptied themselves in a blinding moment of explosion, of sensations so passionately intense they shut out the whole world. No one existed but these two men, this one body.

Finished, Brian slumped on him. Stan held him tight.

Locked in each other's arms, they dozed, and then Brian voice broke the dark stillness as he pulled out and lay beside Stan. "What do we do now?"

It struck Stan so funny he laughed quietly. "We do this...as much and as often as we want. And I guess we just live our lives, together now, not apart. I'd call us an item, wouldn't you?"

It was Brian's turn to laugh, low and hearty. "Yeah. I guess I'd definitely call us an item."

In the morning, Stan walked naked out of the bathroom after his shower. Brian had showered the night before and was lying in bed with his arms behind his head watching him. Staring at Stan's groin, he licked his lips with deliberate care.

Stan's sac tightened and instantly his cock rose at the sight of the man in bed and the promise of love. "You're sexy even minus the uniform and gun."

"And you're the magnificent, patient man I love." Brian tossed back the bedclothes, uncovering a cock as full and hard as Stan's. "This isn't just an early morning erection. Come to me, Stanley Gordon. Come."

Stan, heart full and desire unleashed, went to him.

CAROLINA VALDEZ

Carolina Valdez, author of the popular Amber Heat Wave winner *Dark Stranger*, composed her first stories at the age of eight. That was about the time Santa left the first books she had in her home-abridged versions of the *Wizard of Oz* for children. She has happy memories of trips to used bookstores with her mother to locate and buy the full versions when she was ten or twelve.

Captivated by the odd characters and their adventures, Carolina wrote a letter to L. Frank Baum, the author. Ruth Plumly Thompson replied, enclosing a map of the Kingdom of Oz. Sadly, the letter and map have disappeared over the years, but the love of writing and creating her own fictional worlds have remained. Carolina has a collection of Oz books, one of which, given to her by her mother when it was new, has recently been appraised at \$350.

Before writing for Amber Quill Press, Carolina had more than sixty publications to her credit, ranging from children's stories to articles in professional journals. A public health nurse with an advanced university degree, she won *RN Magazine's* First Award for Writing, and has been published also in the *American Journal of Nursing*. She was a Guideposts Writers Workshop and Guideposts Reunion Workshop winner, and her work has appeared in that periodical and several *Daily Guideposts* books. Among her other wins are the Soul-Making Literary Prize for Essay, the Marjorie Davis Roller Award for non-fiction, Della Crowder

Memorial and Millennium awards for poetry, and the Norman E. and Marjorie J. Roller first prize for a story about a horse that can float on water.

She contributed (under the name Carol Holman) to *Mean Girls Grown Up*, a book regarding adult female relational aggression.

Dark Stranger was her first venture into sensual romance. Her first attempt into the murder genre can be read on-line at *Mysterical-E*. Her latest can be found in the 2006 crime anthology, *Landmarked for Murder*.

Valdez is a member of the Orange County, From The Heart, and Hearts Through History chapters of Romance Writers of America and Sisters in Crime/Los Angeles.

She resides with her husband in sunny Southern California.

* * *

**Don't miss *Hole In One*
by Carolina Valdez,
available at AmberAllure.com!**

During the days, they were fierce nineteen-year-old rivals in a collegiate golf competition, but at night, their passion sizzled under the sheets. After Team USA won, Rio "River" Vargas returned to his native Spain and Greg Thorenson headed back to

his home in the United States. But when Rio didn't respond to a letter he sent, Greg wasn't sure if Rio's silence was because Greg had beaten him for the win or because their affair had been only a four-night-fling.

Now, professionals at the height of their game, they meet again as competitors in a major tournament in the California desert, where the prize of thousands of dollars is at stake. It's been six silent years since those wild, hot nights as young men. Maybe for Rio that earlier passion had been an experiment, an aberration of who he really is and of whatever Greg may have meant to him. But to Greg, that earlier passion had been something deeper...he had fallen in love.

Upon seeing Rio again, Greg is torn between ignoring the past or re-igniting the banked embers of emotion to see where they'll lead. But can he risk it? If Greg opens himself to love, and also wins this tournament, Rio may very well walk out of his life a second time...

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