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Livin' on a Prayer

A Phaze Rocks homoerotic romance by

JUDE MASON

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Chapter One

The soft leather sports bag lay like a blanket across his shoulder; the heavy barred doors in front of him looked like they'd never open. Logan White stood patiently waiting. He'd learned patience if nothing else in the last eight years. Eight long years, he thought, and shuffled his feet.

Something clanged behind him but he ignored it, unwilling to let anything deter him from his release, his first steps into freedom. Footsteps approached and the bitter smell of tobacco assailed his nostrils. A *hack*, a guard, it had to be.

"Getting out, eh White," a deep gruff voice asked.

"Yes, boss," Logan responded quickly, carefully. He couldn't take the chance of something getting in the way of his freedom. Not when it was this close. Close enough to taste. Close enough to give him a hard-on.

"Got yer paperwork, Warden spoke to you already?"

"Yes, boss. Everything's done. I'm just waiting for the gate to open so I can get outta here." He straightened his back, ready for whatever happened. Adrenaline coursed through him. *What the fuck did this hack want?*

"Am I gonna see your ugly mug again?"

A hand slid down his back and came to rest on his left butt cheek. He didn't move, didn't let on that he wanted to bash the guy's head in. "No, boss. I've done my time. And no offense, but the accommodations aren't what I'd call great."

The hand left him, and a voice whispered, "You'll be back. Stats say so." The man was so close, he felt the breath against his neck.

Logan's stomach muscles tightened. "Not me, boss. I'm outta here for good."

"We'll see. Keep your nose clean and steer clear of trouble."

“Yes, boss. That’s my plan.”

The gate opened, slowly, the rusted metal screaming as it slid to the side. It stopped, a great clang indicating it was open as far as it was going.

Afternoon sunlight streamed in, washing over Logan’s work boots and up the legs of his worn blue jeans. When it touched the bottom of his t-shirt, he strode through the tunnel leading to the outside world.

The gate screeched shut behind him, clanging loudly when metal struck metal. He was out. The Hell hole of COR and its atrocities were behind him.

By the time he climbed onto the Greyhound heading north, he was humming.

* * * *

Lurching forward, he scrambled to stay on the seat. His eyes sprang open. The bus came to a halt. It was dark and he had no idea where he was. For an instant, he thought he’d been tossed out of his bunk, another search for drugs that he never had.

Then it came back to him. He was free. He didn’t have to guard every word or keep his back to the wall. He could eat what he wanted—go where he wanted.

He yawned and stretched. Sliding out of the seat, he reached up and grabbed his bag from the overhead. The bus was empty when he lumbered down the steps and hit the pavement. Lights from the small town streetlight glared. The smell of coffee and pastries drew his attention to the depot’s coffee shop. Shrugging, he turned away and headed for the street.

An hour later, he’d found a room in something that resembled a motel. Brick, worn by years or decades of harsh abuse rose four stories off the sidewalk. Several windows on the ground floor were cracked or completely gone and mounds of trash hid any shrubs or plants in the small garden patch to the side. Cheap, filthy, smelling of sour cabbage and refuse, it would do until he could afford better.

Sprawled across the thin mattress and threadbare spread, he emptied his wallet. Twenty bucks a night didn’t leave much. He needed to find work and soon.

LIVIN' ON A PRAYER

It was late and the excitement of freedom had worn off. He stuffed the few bills he had remaining back into his wallet and climbed to his feet. The place was small, little more than a single room with a bed, a hot plate on the old lopsided dresser and a chair. The bathroom stank, obviously hadn't been cleaned in some time and consisted of a toilet, sink, and a shower. But, it was twice the size of what he'd been used to for the last few years.

Logan went to the window and pushed the ratty, once white curtain to the side. Peering out, he smiled at the scene below. The street was almost deserted, except for the occasional car speeding by and the two whores on the corner.

"Yeah, just like home," he mumbled and let the curtain fall back into place. He turned away and pulled off his t-shirt. Tossing it onto the bed, he sat on the rickety wooden chair and heeled off his boots. A sweaty sock went into each, and then he got to his feet and unfastened his jeans. With them hanging loose, he went into the bathroom and pulled the chain dangling from the single light bulb. Glaring white light made him blink. Dingy grey tile surrounded the tub and most of the tiny room; the rest was painted piss yellow. Stains around the toilet and over the sink made his stomach churn, yet it was no worse than he was used to. He reached past the tattered, green plastic curtain and started the water in the shower.

Satisfied that the water was heating up, he faced the cracked mirror above the sink. He ran his fingers over the stubble on his cheeks and chin, and wondered how he was going to get a job looking like a crazed derelict. His dark hair was too short--prison cut--and his eyes had a haunted look he hoped would fade. His nose was bent, thanks to a fight he'd had several months ago, and a small scar on the left side of his chin reminded him of where a ring had cut his face when he'd poked his nose in where it wasn't wanted. A con thought he was paying too much attention to his 'bitch'. Life on the inside could be deadly if you didn't play the game right.

He stripped out of his jeans and shorts, before stepping into the shower.

At a couple of inches over six feet tall, it was a nice surprise when the water hit him full in the face before it trickled down his

chest. Alone for the first time in years, he let his guard down and simply allowed the pleasure to build. He ran his hands over his chest, the thick matting of dark hair plastered flat. His nipples rose like tiny beacons of sensation and he brushed his palms over them until he had to bite his lip to keep from groaning aloud. His cock thickened and rose, the shaft pulsing as it filled with blood.

“Oh, yeah,” he sighed and ran a hand over the taut muscles of his belly. A six-pack rippled against his palm and he silently thanked the free hours he’d spent lifting weights. The palm of his hand brushed the mass of pubic hair surrounding his cock, then his fingers found the shaft. Grasped and squeezed, his prick bounced higher. The head tapped his belly and he shuddered.

With his free hand, he grabbed the small bar of soap from the dish. He rubbed it across his chest and stomach, building a rich fragrant lather before sliding his hand down over his crotch. Slick and wet, his hand slid over his erection.

Leaning against the tile, he spread his legs and allowed his hands free reign. With no one to interrupt or distract him, he simply basked in the growing bliss. His hips churned and his ass clenched.

“Fuck, yeah.” He shifted his feet and slid a hand around to his ass. With one on his cock, the other on his ass, the sensation was driving him insane. His knees buckled and he nearly fell, but he laughed anyway. “Whoa mister. Clean up then hit the sack. A long, leisurely fist fuck, sounds like just the thing.”

Logan washed himself, paying particular care to his genitals and ass, and rinsed off. Shutting the water off, he climbed out and dragged one of the threadbare towels over himself, then headed for the bed. Still hard, his cock led the way and he eagerly grabbed hold.

He pushed his gear onto the floor and pulled the cover back, baring the milky white sheet and a less than plump pair of pillows. He flopped onto the double bed and got comfortably on his back. With his legs wide and his knees raised, he began that slow easy stroke that would carry him to the nirvana he loved. Thoughts of an old lover’s sweet ass and mouth-watering cock filled his mind as he stroked himself. The thick pulsing rod in his hand leaked pre-cum over his fingers and provided the lube he needed to slip a finger over his anus.

The tight pucker clenched around his finger, clutching at it. He groaned as he pushed the sturdy digit in. He had to stop stroking his cock then, for fear he'd shoot before he'd had the chance to really enjoy his first time on the outside since he was nineteen. He knew it couldn't last long; he was just too excited and primed for pleasure.

When his finger nudged the walnut-sized prostate, he tightened his fist around his cock. The shaft throbbed and a stream of pre-cum oozed over the head and down the shaft. He strained to relax and let the feeling of urgency pass. With his eyes closed, he breathed deeply, enjoying yet not pushing for release. His balls lifted, the light covering of hair tickling his hand. He forced the muscles in his thighs to loosen and the arches of his feet to rest. His heartbeat refused to slow, but he did lose the feeling of imminence.

He took a deep shuddering breath and began a slow stroke. Using a softer grip, he slid his fingers to the base of his cock and reversed the stroke all the way to the flange. He didn't touch the head, refused to add even that much more stimulation to his already tingling prick. When he thought he could stand it, he eased his finger deeper into his ass, but instantly knew it was too much.

"Yes, fuck yes," he growled and held his breath. Fireworks exploded behind his eyelids and every muscle in his body tensed. His balls shifted, preparing for the first volley of cum he knew was a heartbeat away. Then it came, a blast of sheer bliss engulfed him. He rammed his finger deep and madly pumped his shaft.

A stream of cum erupted and a jolt of euphoria hit. His body jerked and he saw stars. A wet splat hit his chest. He grunted and another explosion tore through him as a second blast of cum joined the first. The pleasure seemed to go on forever, but he knew it could only have been moments. He unclenched his jaw and opened his eyes, just in time to see the final stream of his ejaculation ooze over his fist and down the shaft.

Logan's heart was beating so fast it was a wonder it hadn't exploded from his chest. Sweat streamed off him and his fingers had cramped from the rigid hold he had on himself. The finger buried in his hole slowly eased out and he rolled to his side.

“Holy bloody fuck,” he gasped. He scooped up the pool of cum oozing toward the sheet and sucked it off his finger.

Exhaustion hit and he reached down for the sheet and blankets. Pulled up, he snuggled into the pillow. That’s when realized how quiet it was. Silence was something that never happened inside and something he’d have to get used to again.

Just then, he heard a car pass by. “Won’t take long,” he sighed and closed his eyes.

He heard a noise coming from the rooms beside him and knew he wasn’t truly alone. There would always be someone close by in the flophouse but at least he had a lock on the door that he controlled.

He laid there pondering his new life until he sank into a deep slumber filled with a parade of men he’d fucked and the noises they’d made. He woke once, groaned and went back to sleep only to have nightmare shapes of a man raped and bleeding, begging him for help.

Chapter Two

"Can you start today?" The man who spoke was fat, his t-shirt and apron were splotched with unidentifiable stains and he had body odor that'd drive buzzards off a crap wagon, but he was offering Logan the job he desperately needed. The grease splattered kitchen reeked of food too old to be served and sweat from too many people in tight quarters.

This was the latest in a job search that had gone on for nearly a week. His funds were about gone and he needed a meal. Maybe his new boss would spot him a decent lunch. He looked around again and wondered if a decent anything ever left this kitchen.

"Yeah, I can start whenever you need me. The sooner the better." Logan tried on a weak smile and hoped it didn't look too desperate.

"First things first, where was your last job?"

"Uh, I've been away for awhile." His stomach tightened, anxiety growing. "Corcoran, worked in the kitchen for about four years," he added softly, almost hoping the guy wouldn't catch the location.

"Corcoran?" he growled, eyeing him suspiciously. "What for?"

Logan's heart sank. He almost turned around and walked out, but he had to try. "B and E, robbery I got eight years. I drove the car. I didn't actually take part in the breaking and entry, or the robbery." He purposely didn't say anything about the shooting or that a man had died.

"Sorry, can't hire an ex-con. Wife'd never allow it and I have to live with her." He turned and headed deeper into the rank smelling hole he called a kitchen.

Logan clenched his fists and pressed them against his sides to keep from punching something. He fucking needed a job. *How*

am I supposed to feed myself and keep a roof over my head if no one will hire me? He was a good worker. Even in prison, he'd been on time and always did what needed to be done, no matter what job he had. All he needed was a chance.

He turned and stormed out, pushing the torn screen door open with his fist, making it slam against the dingy grey outside wall. The place was a dump. The last of a dozen like it he'd tried to find a job. That was after he'd knocked on every garage and machine shop door in the area. He'd gotten the same cock and bullshit stories in every place, no jobs available or they couldn't hire an ex-con for whatever reason, or someone's nephew just got hired. Funny thing though, he'd go by those places the next day, and a 'hiring now' sign would still be stuck in the windows.

"Fucking morons," he cursed as he plodded his way toward his flop. He passed the tiny market but didn't stop. Dinner would have to wait. He had twenty-eight bucks in his wallet. Enough for one more night's rent and a burger. The AIDS test he'd taken the day after he'd first arrived had eaten up a good portion of his funds, rent and meals the rest. He didn't regret it; he was now sure he was healthy, even if he was broke. Of course his parole officer wasn't going to be impressed if he wound up on the streets, but he was doing his best.

The whitewashed front of the Lost Sheep Shelter caught his attention from across the street, as it did most days. The vision of the reverend filled his thoughts and for a moment, he wondered what the good father had done to deserve his placement in such a rundown part of town. He was a little younger than his own twenty-seven years; at least he looked it. Dark-haired and slender, the man had an animal magnetism that Logan found almost irresistible. Twice, over the last few days, he'd nearly entered the shelter, just to get a closer look at the sexy reverend.

He caught a glimpse of him standing in the doorway, his arms crossed over his chest, a smile on his handsome face. A young woman with a couple of kids stood talking to him, and suddenly they all laughed.

"What the fuck have they got to laugh about?" Logan growled and turned away. He'd seen the woman before too, servicing johns in the alley close to where she lived.

A couple of blocks further on, the wide open doors of the Drake came into view. Country music playing badly and too loud blared from the entrance of the watering hole frequented by whores and boytoys. So far, he'd managed to avoid the place. He was tempted now. He could use a drink and his luck was about as bad as it could get.

What could it hurt?

He stopped just outside of the doors and peered into the gloomy interior. The smell of booze and smoke hit him and he gulped back the bile rising in his throat. It'd been eight long years since he'd sat in a bar and had a drink.

"Hey shexy, wanna partay?" slurred a drunken redheaded woman as she staggered toward him. Her pale flesh bulged in all the wrong places and the brilliant green sheath was in danger of bursting at the seams. Plump round breasts were barely held captive and he didn't want to be anywhere near when they escaped.

Noncommittally, he raised his hand, but hurried away, going toward his room and relative safety. Now, if it'd been a sexy young guy, he might have moved toward him rather than away.

Stopping in front of his building, he eyed the trash surrounding the front steps and the battle-scarred door he'd go through to get 'home'. A lump formed in his throat. A shower, a bed with more lumps than a gravel road, and a few clothes, was all he had—that, and twenty-eight dollars.

He stepped back and looked the building over. It's scars and filth, the broken windows on the first floor and the dingy grime on the second. Scowling, he fleetingly thought of his life before the robbery and the murder.

Now, he had nothing, and it seemed he never would.

Turning back toward the center of town, he blinked back tears and walked. All he needed was a chance. He crossed the street to avoid the noise and draw of the Drake and the whores prancing around the great maw of a doorway. He glanced over once, then hurried on, unwilling to allow himself any chance of temptation. Drowning his sorrows might have sounded like a good idea, but he knew it was a fast road to the streets, and he couldn't afford that.

He slowed his pace, not sure where he was going, but sure he couldn't face his empty room. For the next few hours, he wandered the streets, watching drugs being bought, bartered, and sold; he watched kids way too young to be out on the streets being hustled by the uglier side of humanity. He interrupted a fight between two young men and then laughed when one approached him with a knife held too close to his body, and his hand shaking with fear.

"Get, boy, before I show you how to use that thing," he snarled and swatted the six-inch blade from the youth's hand.

"Fuck you, mister," the young hood said, in a voice that cracked at just the wrong moment.

"No, fuck you, if I was that kind," Logan growled and made a lunge for the boy's arm.

The young man fled, his arms and his legs pumping for greater speed. The one who he'd been about to rob turned and took off in the opposite direction without saying a word. A wry smile tugged at Logan's mouth, and he kept walking.

Crossing the street to the next block, he saw the shelter ahead and wondered if the doors would be open. Wondered if the reverend would be awake.

His spirits plummeted when he saw there were no lights in the building. When he got to the front of the shelter and peered through one of the large windows, it was dark, but he could hear music playing. Something by Bon Jovi, but he couldn't remember the name. He hadn't heard it for a while, a favorite from way back when he had something to live for.

He walked around the building looking for some sign of life, but found none other than the music. He stopped and leaned against the rough whitewashed boards. Another window to his left leaked music and he closed his eyes listening to the hard drumbeat, feeling it inside. His heart beat faster and he felt more alone than he had in months, maybe even years. He had no one. His mom had disowned him when he was sent to prison. His brother—he had no idea what had become of the distant young man who lived in his own private world. Just before he got out, he thought about trying to find Mikey, but realized he had nothing to offer him. Mikey wouldn't even know him. There was no one else.

His mood grew bleak. *How in Hell am I supposed to live if I can't even get a fuckin' job?*

Anger and frustration tore at him. Raising his hands into the air, he inhaled and yelled his pain and frustration into the night. His mind reeled with the agony of having no one and nothing. *How can I live if I can't find work? What the fuck am I supposed to do? I've paid my debt to society, but it doesn't fucking matter. All I need is one small break, just one.* Inhaling, he roared again, his hurt and feelings of solitude gushing out of him in an anguished scream. When he inhaled, he was close to tears and choked back the next yell, afraid he'd wake someone and they'd phone the cops.

"Hey, are you all right?" a deep masculine voice interrupted his outburst.

Logan whipped his head around and lowering his arms, curled his fingers into a fist. Crouching, ready for a fight, he gaped at the handsome reverend peering at him from the corner of the building.

"What the f..." he gasped and quickly lowered his arm. "Reverend, sorry. I...uh..."

The only light there was, came from a streetlight on the corner. It was enough to see the skin around those gorgeous blue eyes crinkle and the man smile. "I'm sorry. I must have startled you. I should know better." The man stepped into the open and extended his hand. "I'm Reverend Grayson, Shane to my friends."

Fighting to control the rush of adrenalin the man's sudden appearance had made, Logan thrust his hand forward and took hold of the reverend's. Smooth skin met his, strong fingers wrapped around his palm and another rush of adrenalin had him trembling.

The man's eyes were the most amazing blue Logan had ever seen and he wanted to dive into them. His nose had a slight bend to one side, his lips were perhaps a little too full, but the jaw was strong and the hair that brushed the white collar curled in such a perfect way, Logan couldn't find a fault anywhere. His glance trailed downward, taking in the rest of the man's frame. Long legs, slender, dressed in jeans that were worn at the knee, the

white shirt was loosely tucked into the waistband and the sleeves had been rolled back to reveal muscular forearms.

“Hey, are you okay?” the man repeated and took a step closer.

Logan dragged his eyes upward, pausing on the reverend’s bulging crotch for a moment before settling on his face again. When he looked again into those eyes, he realized he was looking straight ahead; the man was at least as tall as he was. He swallowed. “Yeah, fine. Sorry. Damn,” he managed then realized what he’d said, and added, “Uh... Sorry.”

The smile stayed on Shane’s face. “Sorry, for what?”

“My language, yelling. And for nearly popping you one,” he said, and felt his face heat up. “Fuck!” he mumbled and wanted to crawl away. “Shit, I...sorry, sir, Father...Reverend.”

“Reverend, Shane,” the man said, obviously trying to keep a straight face. He couldn’t do it and suddenly, he burst into laughter, choking out, “Nice language.”

Logan wanted to walk away. Hell, he would gladly fall into a hole if there’d been one around, but then realized he still had a firm grip on the man’s hand. His face got hotter and he tried to pull his hand away, planning to make a run for it. The reverend hung on.

“Sir, Shane, I...uh...” He tried to find something to say, something that wouldn’t make him sound like any more of a dork than the man must think he was already. Nothing came to mind. So, he stood there, waiting, embarrassed and ready to flee, while the reverend finished his belly laugh then straightened up.

“Now it’s my turn to apologize, I’m not usually so insensitive. I’m truly sorry,” he said still holding Logan’s hand. “Why don’t you come inside and we’ll talk.”

“I’m not religious, Shane. I’m not sure—”

As if he hadn’t heard, Shane pulled Logan after him, around the corner and through the door.

Chapter Three

The last few lines of Bon Jovi singing filled the room. The music was loud, the base too heavy, and Logan felt as if he was sinking into it. He closed his eyes and mouthed the last few words, *'take my hand dah de dah dah. Livin on a prayer'*.

"You and ninety percent of the people who frequent the shelter aren't religious, it makes no never mind to me, honest," Shane said, bringing Logan back to the present. He also released the hand he'd held ever since they met.

Opening his eyes, he was completely baffled for a moment until he realized the reverend had simply carried on the conversation from outside. "So, what are you doing here then? It can't be to push religion on the good folks in the neighborhood. They'd string you up before attending services, I'm pretty sure."

"No, I'm not peddling religion," Shane replied with a haunted look on his suddenly serious face. "This place is financed by the Methodist church, but it's a non-denominational shelter. I'm here to help whoever needs it. No strings."

Logan got the impression the reverend wasn't telling him everything, but let it go. He had no right to demand anything of the man. Trying a change of subject, he asked, "I saw you talking to one of the local streetwalkers earlier, her and her baby. Are they some of the people you help?"

"You mean Kissa and little baby Jade." The smile returned and Shane headed for a doorway off to the right where the light came from. "Yes, she's one. The baby's father deserted them when she was born. Guy wanted a son. No son, no child support, and Kissa's only eighteen. She's got no skills and prostitution pays the bills, mostly."

Logan looked around the large room. His eyes had adjusted and he made out four separate seating areas, all with at least one sofa, three or four chairs and some kind of table. Most of the

furniture looked like it had seen better days, but everything was still serviceable. The light colored linoleum floor appeared as if someone had dragged a metal rake over the most traveled areas and threadbare, mismatched rugs were scattered around. The walls bore years of graffiti and heavy-duty curtains covering three large windows had stains he wasn't so sure he'd want identified. A single light coming from another room illuminated the place.

Along one wall, he noticed several single fold-up cots. Two doors, he assumed leading to a bedroom and a bathroom, on another. With the music as loud as it was, he also assumed the place must be empty, or the man had lent the beds out to a bunch of deaf people.

He followed Shane, the reverend; he'd have to ask what the man preferred to be called, and wound up in a large well-lit kitchen, dining room. To his left was the working area of the kitchen, the entire length of the room was counters, cupboards, a large stove, two old fridges and a big ass mixer thing that looked like it belonged in a restaurant.

The music came to an abrupt halt, and he turned to see a small alcove where an old CD player sat. Shane had turned the volume down so they could talk.

Logan was impressed. The place looked like it could take care of a small army, and probably had in its time.

When he looked at Shane, he discovered the man staring at him. "What?" he asked feeling self-conscious.

"Nothing," he replied and looked away. "I guess it's my turn again to apologize. I didn't mean to stare."

Logan spotted two easy chairs in the corner, close to where Shane stood, and headed for them. One was upholstered in worn black leather, the other was heavy cloth in an outrageous pattern he couldn't name, in colors that made his eyes water.

"Have a seat... I didn't catch your name," Shane said hurriedly, and sat in the multi-colored horror.

"Logan," he replied and dropped into the other chair. He sank into the softness and sighed. "Logan White. I just moved into the neighborhood a couple of weeks ago. Trying to find work, and having no luck."

"What do I call you, Reverend? I know, Shane to your friends. Reverend for people you just met, or what?" He tried to keep his eyes on the reverend's face, but the way the man sat with his legs splayed was driving him crazy. The sizable package was like a magnet.

"Shane. Just Shane, okay?"

"Shane, yeah, that works." He wasn't sure what to say next. Shane was sitting at an angle from him, so just looking seemed a good idea. Those blue eyes captured his and he felt a little like a fish on a hook, wiggling to be free. But Logan wasn't sure he really wanted to get away.

"You said you're new to the neighborhood, been here two weeks, right?" Shane asked and settled back in the chair.

It seemed the man was going to ignore the outburst that had taken him outside. Logan leaped at the change of direction the conversation was going. "Yeah, got off the bus and here I am. Looking for work, which is proving to be a bi...next to impossible to find." *Damn, I'm going to have to watch the language*, he thought.

"Odd, there's a couple of jobs I know of right in the area. Nothing spectacular as far as money goes and menial, but you'd get a paycheck."

"I'd appreciate it if you'd point me in their direction. I'm about out of funds."

"There's a job at the diner on the corner, dishwasher, clean up, that kind of thing. It's not the nicest place, but around here, you're lucky if the food is edible." Shane rubbed the side of his nose with his index finger, thinking. "Oh, and the Drake, they're hiring bouncers."

Disheartened, Logan replied, "The diner was my last stop. No go."

"Really? That surprises me. He's been looking for help for a couple of months. I find it hard to believe he got anyone."

"I don't actually know if he did. He said something like: my wife wouldn't let me hire someone like you." Anger threatened to rise and he tamped it down. It wasn't Shane's fault he couldn't find a job.

"Like you? What did he mean?" The man got to his feet and went toward the nearest fridge, a stained white monstrosity with

no handle. "You want a beer or soda, or something?" He opened the door and pulled out a can of beer then looked over at Logan, expectantly.

"A beer would sure hit the spot. Been one hell of a long dry spell." He waited until the man had returned to his seat and he had a beer in his hand and opened before replying to the main question. "Like what you asked. I'm an ex-con. Just got out of COR a couple of weeks ago."

Shane did a kind of double take, but didn't say anything for a minute, as if he was digesting the issue. "Can I ask what you were in for?"

"B and E, robbery."

"Care to tell me about it? Tell me to mind my own business if you want to." He took a long pull on his beer.

Logan watched his Adam's apple bob, and wondered how much he should tell. The attraction he felt for the man was making him dizzy, and he didn't want to jeopardize anything that might happen in the future. He decided on the truth, might as well start out fresh, no lies. "You sure you're ready for the truth?"

"Hey, I may be a man of the cloth, but I'm not all that innocent, believe me."

Logan managed a chuckle, then took a healthy drink of beer. "Ah," he sighed with pleasure at the tingling feeling of the liquid sliding down his throat. "This is great, thank you."

"You're welcome."

"All right, here goes," he said and took a deep breath to prepare himself. "I guess I better tell you why I did it. There was just me and my kid brother and mom. My old man took off when it turned out my kid brother, Mikey, was autistic. Couldn't handle it, didn't want to deal with it, whatever. Anyway, it was really hard on my mom. Just keeping a roof over our heads and food on the table took pretty much all she made. Keeping Mikey in special schools, well that took more."

"I'd just turned eighteen when a friend told me him and his brother were planning to break in and rob a convenience store. They wanted a car and driver, you know, for a fast get away. I wound up the driver." He settled back in the chair and let the story unfold naturally. "We planned it for late one Saturday

night, thinking that'd be when the most money was there. I drove them to the store and sat out front waiting. I remember thinking it was going to be awesome not to have to worry about the money for next month's school for Mikey.

"I heard a bang, thought it was a car backfiring, and just sat there outside the store, waiting." He stopped and took a swallow of beer. "Frank and Eddie, the two brothers, they came charging out of the store with a brown paper bag full of money. They jumped into the car and yelled for me to gun it."

"There was someone inside?" Shane asked in a quiet voice.

Logan looked at him and was thankful for the calm look on his face. "Yeah, the owner. He was doing up his month end books. They shot him, killed him. But, being the dumb kid I was, I didn't put two and two together."

"So, you just drove them home, split up the money and what?" Shane encouraged gently.

"Yeah, that's pretty much exactly what happened. We stopped in the parking lot of our old high school and divided the money. My take covered Mikey's tuition for two months and I thought that was pretty cool. I knew it was wrong, but life hadn't exactly been kind to me or my mom." He stopped and took another long swig of beer, emptying the can. Holding it in two hands, he leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees, and then went on, "There was a video camera in the store. Frank and Eddie were picked up within two weeks."

"How long before they got you?"

Logan looked up at him and said, "Frank and Eddie gave me up as soon as they were booked. I'm not even sure if the cops had started the interrogation yet."

"But, you didn't know? You weren't involved in the actual shooting?"

"That's what my lawyer said. I was tried separately. But the guy died and I was part of it, no matter if I knew about the gun or not. I got a ten year stretch, was out in eight. The brothers got triple that."

Shane put his beer can on the floor beside his feet and reached out a hand. Placing it on Logan's knee, the reverend said, "And that's why you can't get a job."

The touch sent a shock from there, right to his prick. Fighting to keep from grabbing the man and dragging him into his arms, Logan replied, "Yeah, and I know it makes sense. I mean, who wants to take the chance of me robbing them, right? But it sure doesn't leave me much hope of staying clean."

"True, but there's got to be a job out there somewhere. I'll have a look around, if you don't mind."

Perking up, Logan replied, "That would be great. If you're sure, *you* don't mind. I mean, you don't even know me."

Shane cocked his head and then nodded, "I know you well enough. Hearing you ask that only reinforces my opinion of you." He yawned and stretched, then looked at his watch. "Hey, it's nearly two, mind if we call it a night?"

Lurching to his feet, Logan felt a sudden pang of guilt for keeping the man up. "I didn't realize it was that late. I'm really sorry, Shane."

"Never mind. Heck, I'm the one who invited you in. I didn't realize it was so late either, until I looked at my watch." He pushed himself to his feet and bent to retrieve his empty beer can.

While Shane was bent over, it gave Logan the perfect opportunity to check the man out. He'd been drawn to the guy ever since he'd laid eyes on him days ago, but up close, he was even sexier. A tight ass and those long muscular legs—just looking at them made him wonder what they'd feel like wrapped around his waist, or hiked up over his shoulders, while he rammed his cock into the tight hole he knew was nestled between those mouthwatering cheeks.

His prick twitched and he forced any further thoughts of what he'd like to do from his mind, before Shane noticed. He watched him straighten up, and noticed a hand going to the front of his jeans, but it dropped to his side so fast he couldn't be sure. Following Shane's ass with his eyes, he must have missed a question, because the next thing he knew, the man had turned around and was looking at him, expectantly.

"Uh, sorry, what?" He forced himself to focus on what the man said.

"I said, why don't you join me here tomorrow for some breakfast? Nothing fancy, toast, coffee, maybe some cereal."

Logan's thoughts reeled. Shane's offer of help was more than he could have hoped for, and now company when he'd been sure he'd never have anything, or anyone, who cared. He knew it was just breakfast, but for an instant, he let himself hope. "Toast and coffee would be great," he stammered and hoped he didn't sound too needy.

"Great, just not too early. I don't usually open up until about ten or so." Turning, he headed for the front door.

Logan followed, his eyes again focusing on the man's butt. *Yep, I'd like my hands on that, for sure.*

"I'll see you in the morning." Shane opened the door and stepped aside. "I'll check around first thing, and see what I can find out about a job for you, too."

Logan held out his hand and grasped Shane's firmly. "Thanks. I just need to get a toe in the door somewhere." He wanted to say more. He wanted more. But he would bide his time. Maybe even pray a little.

Chapter Four

Wetness surrounded Logan's cock, gently sucking the entire length deep into a tight throat. Shane's face, his beautiful blue eyes peered up at him from between his legs. He had such a lusty look; Logan nearly shot his load right then and there. He thrust his hips forward and held onto the man's head, steadying him for the release that would come much too soon. His balls tightened and a hand curled around them, cradling them, bouncing the orbs against each other, tugging and caressing until he wanted to cry out his bliss. The sweet pleasure mounted.

"Yeah, babe, suck me. Take it all, that's it, suck it," he mumbled and seesawed his hips back and forth. He stroked Shane's face, his cheek and then his hair, relishing the softness against his palm. His heart slammed against his chest and his balls pulled up. He was close. He couldn't breathe.

"Come for me," Shane murmured, his lips brushing the head of his cock as he spoke. "Fill my mouth with your juice. I want to taste you. I want you to fuck my mouth."

A finger slid between his cheeks, twirling around his puckered hole. A spasm gripped him and his cock throbbed, sending a ribbon of cum into the warm mouth that was suddenly back around it.

"Yes, yes, so good," he cried and sent another rope of cum deep into Shane's mouth.

Lunging ahead, he felt the tip of his cock touch the back of the man's throat. A shudder tore through him, and another spasm sent the last dribble of his spunk oozing over the head of his prick. He gasped, and felt his heart thumping wildly.

Sucked, or stroked, his hand slid along his shaft. He opened his eyes. It was still dark and the room was hot. The covers lay at the foot of his bed, thank Christ. He'd left the curtains pulled wide, which allowed light from the streetlights to illuminate the

room. A pool of cum filled his belly button. More dripped down the back of his hand.

"Damn," he muttered still more asleep than awake. "Fucking long time since I had a wet dream." How real it had seemed. How soft and wet the mouth, how passionate the look in Shane's eyes. Yes, he wanted more, so much more.

He clambered to his feet and staggered into the bathroom. There he wiped his stomach clean with a damp cloth. His cock felt raw, the skin hot. Exhausted, he stumbled back to bed. His head hit the pillow and almost instantly, he fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

* * * *

Opening his eyes, Logan's first thought was of Shane and their meeting the night before, and the sex he'd dreamed about. His second thought wasn't nearly as much fun. He had to pee. His third thought brought a smile to his lips. He had a piss hard-on that was going to make peeing next to impossible.

Rolling out from under the covers, he scratched his chest then rose to his feet and headed for the john. His cock bobbed in front of him, as if it was pointing the way. Sunlight filtered into the small room from around the dingy curtains, telling him he'd slept long enough. Standing in front of the toilet, he pushed his shaft down, and waited for his erection to subside. And waited. Reaching over, he turned on the tap and within a minute, he managed to turn on his own waterworks. Sighing, he flushed and turned to the sink.

"Better get my ass moving, the reverend will be waiting." Thoughts of Shane and their first meeting sent his blood racing, and his cock pulsed to new life. He stroked the shaft but let it go before he was fully erect. Hopping into the shower, he soaped up and reveled in the solitude. He let the hot water run over his shoulders and back, rinsing off the suds, and then shut the water off.

Dried off, he brushed his teeth and ran his fingers over the stubble on his chin, wondering if he should shave. The disposable had one more shave left so he decided to save it for his next job search. Shane would have to deal with a rough face.

Again, his thoughts turned to what he'd like to do with and to Shane. The reverend was one hell of a sexy guy and it'd been awhile since Logan had a regular fuck buddy he really liked. In prison he always watched his back, never fully trusted anyone. He wasn't even sure he'd know how anymore.

Dressed in jeans, t-shirt and his boots, he ran his fingers through his too short hair and headed for the door. In his pocket, his wallet held the last of his cash. Twenty-eight dollars stood between him and homelessness.

The streets were quiet, it was still early and the sun gave everything a fresh, soft look. The occasional car sped by, cell phones stuck to the sides of the drivers' heads. A dog barked down an alley he passed but he didn't actually meet up with anyone.

The sign over the Lost Sheep Shelter came into view and he quickened his pace. By the time he crossed the intersection, he was smiling. Checking his watch, he saw it was just past ten and hoped he wasn't too early. Outside the front doorway, two young men leaned against the whitewashed wall, chatting with three women who looked five years their senior but probably weren't. They were all laughing, but when one of the men spotted him, he nudged his partner and all five of them turned and watched his approach, sober expressions on their faces.

"What you want, jerk-off?" the obvious leader of the group stepped forward and asked belligerently. Tall and skinny, he wouldn't have stood a chance against Logan if he'd wanted a fight. But fighting was the farthest thing from Logan's mind and he simply said, "I'm here to see the reverend. You?"

"Yeah, he'll be opening up soon. Breakfast." A dark-haired young woman, in the shortest skirt imaginable strode forward and put her small hands on her ample hips.

Two cigarette butts flew into the air, arching toward the street just as the front door opened and Shane's head poked out. "Come on in." He stepped aside, allowing the five to slouch inside. They barged in, pushing and shoving at each other, girls as well as boys. Once they'd gone past him, Shane turned and looked around the door. He spotted Logan and a smile lit up his face.

"Hi," Logan said, feeling shy for some reason.

"Hi, yourself. Come on in; I'll get you some coffee." Shane reached out his hand and grabbed Logan's arm. "And that breakfast I promised."

"Coffee would be great, thanks." Logan allowed himself to be manhandled into the building. The group of five had gone to the kitchen right off the bat and made a beeline for one of the tables filled with boxes of cereal, bowls, milk, and sugar. A toaster, along with all the fixins for toast, bagels, pop up waffles and such were on another table, all ready to go.

The smell of coffee drew Logan to the side of the room after Shane. The reverend released his arm and poured two cups of the black, fragrant brew, offering one to him and asking, "Sugar, milk?"

"Nothing, thanks. This is perfect." He wrapped his hands around the cup and blew into the steaming liquid. Sipping at it, he bit back a yelp when the burning coffee scalded his lips.

"Do you want to dig in and get some breakfast or drink your coffee?" Shane smiled at him. The man wore the same gear he had the night before, or something so close to the same Logan couldn't tell the difference. The only variation was that his hair was still damp from his shower. It curled around his forehead and around his ears, dampening the back of his shirt.

"Just coffee for now, unless you have to get to work or something." He didn't want to get in the man's way.

"No, I make my own hours really." He motioned toward the two chairs and headed toward them. He again took the multi-colored horror and Logan sank into the now familiar leather one.

Settling back, he tried to let some of the worry leave him, but his lack of funds and a job finally got the best of him. "Shane, have you been able to come up with anywhere I can find work?" He lowered his eyes, frustrated and ashamed for having to ask for help. "I've got enough money to pay for the day at the flop house I'm at. I figure two, maybe three days, before the old bat who runs the place is going to toss me out on my ear."

"Ouch, that close, huh?" He looked concerned.

"Yeah, the pay inside doesn't go far. Anything you can offer would sure be appreciated."

Shane took a careful sip of his coffee, put the cup down then got to his feet. "Give me a few minutes. I've got a couple of

calls to make.” Without waiting for a reply, he turned and headed into a doorway at the end of the room. When he opened it, Logan saw a desk covered with paper and folders and assumed it was his office. Over his shoulder, Shane called, “Help yourself to breakfast. I’ll be back in a flash.” He shut the door behind him.

Logan sat and finished his coffee, watching the group of five at their table. They must have been in their late teens, possibly early twenties, but they acted so damn young. The boys puffed out their chests and told dirty jokes while the girls pretended to be annoyed and then disgusted with them. The good thing was, they seemed to respect the place and even with Shane behind a closed door, they didn’t cause any problems.

After only a few minutes, people started trickling in. A few of them looked homeless in their shades of grey clothing and shaggy hair. A couple of too young mothers pushed buggies with babies swaddled in colorful blankets and parked at the table closest to the rear exit. The noise level rose, but didn’t hit anything near annoying.

The smell of toasted waffles mixed with that of the coffee and Logan’s stomach rumbled. He hadn’t eaten yesterday so the promise of food to fill the empty hole made his mouth water.

He got to his feet and ambled over to the toaster. Popping a couple of slices of bread in, he refilled his cup then waited. He ate four slices of toast and drank another cup of coffee before he heard the office door open.

Sitting in his preferred chair, he watched the sexy stud walk toward him, a smile on his face. Logan allowed his spirits to rise.

“Got a prospect for you,” Shane said, and handed over a piece of paper with an address on one side. “I don’t know this guy, but a friend of a friend passed this along to me. It’s not much, but it’ll help get you started. Dishwasher in a decent place sound all right?”

Not what he’d choose if given the chance, but like the man said, it was a place to begin. “Yeah, it’s definitely all right, as long as I get enough to pay the rent and feed myself. I can keep looking for something better.”

“That’s exactly what I’d hoped you’d say.” He looked around, apparently checking to be sure, there was still enough on

the tables to feed those in need. Turning back to Logan, he said, "Can you give me just one more minute. I need to talk to the girl over there. The one wearing the too tight red shirt."

Logan nodded and replied, "Sure thing. Hey, should I take off and come back later? I could go and see about this job."

"No, just give me a minute. You'll need directions."

"Okay, if you're sure. Don't want to get in the way." Logan was secretly glad he didn't have to go just yet. He liked the atmosphere and being close to a hunk didn't hurt either.

"Trust me; you're not in the way. Besides, we've got tons to talk about." He winked, and before Logan could say a word, his attention was on the young woman.

"Well, I'll be buggered." He watched the group of five get up and head for the door. Their table was full of their dirty dishes, used napkins and candy wrappers, but they simply left it. He thought for an instant about calling them back to clear their crap away, but stopped. He didn't know what the rules were.

He got up and began clearing dishes and wrappers away. Filling the sink, he stacked dishes in and tossed trash into the container he found by the doorway. That's when he noticed the sign asking everyone to clear their tables. Silently cursing the young idiots, he carried on cleaning up after them.

Another small group of people entered, a family, by the look of them, mom and dad, three youngsters and a baby in the woman's arms. The kids seemed to know the routine and rushed for the cereal table, filled their bowls and scooted over to the last free table. Mom and dad followed; the fellow limped and looked broken. When he filled a bowl with cereal, Logan saw that his hand was deformed and then realized he didn't have full use of his other.

Logan took a step toward the guy, but stopped when he saw the woman surreptitiously assist her man. They were definitely a well-matched couple and he smiled, turning back to the sink.

"Hey mister, want a job?"

The voice was familiar as was the playful tone, so he simply continued washing. "Depends, what kind of fringe benefits are there? Does the job come with meals? Room and board? Does the boss sleep with the hired help?" He bit back the next remark,

afraid he'd already said too much. If he could have kicked himself, he would have.

"Pay's awful, as for meals, room and board, I might be able to arrange something there."

Logan thought that was all Shane was going to say. He'd just inhaled to let out a deep sigh of relief when he felt the brush of a body against his back. A breath of air tickled his ear and the soft words that followed nearly floored him. "As for the boss sleeping with the hired help, it all depends on who the hired help is and how the boss feels about him."

Logan dropped the plate he'd been holding and if it hadn't been for the sink full of soapy water, it would have shattered. As it was, the plate hit the water and an instant later, he was soaked from mid-chest down to mid-thighs.

Leaping back, he bumped into Shane and yelped. The water turned cold almost immediately and his nipples tightened.

Shane's laughter caught him by surprise. So did the hands that caught him by the upper arms. Gently, they squeezed and then urged him back to the counter.

"Here, dry off," Shane had draped a towel over his shoulder.

Logan's breath caught and the front of his jeans grew tight as his cock throbbed, pushing against the snug denim. Heat burned his neck and rose up to his cheeks. If he'd been anywhere else, he'd have been able to handle it, bluff his way out of the sudden rush of excitement.

Grabbing the towel, he rubbed it over his chest and belly, but was reluctant to do any rubbing below the belt. His cock was ready and waiting for just such a move.

"Bugger," he grumbled quietly, and heard Shane's soft laughter again.

"Sorry, Logan," the man whispered.

Again the soft breath against his neck made him shudder. He bit the inside of his cheek to keep from groaning.

"My office, go cool off if you need to. We really need to talk."

Draping the towel in front of his crotch, Logan grabbed the paper with his future employer's name and address on it, he hoped, then made his way to the office door. Just before he

closed it behind him, he gazed out to see if Shane was there. He was, and smiled at him. Logan smiled back and winked, then shut the door.

"Fuck," he muttered to himself, and rubbed the towel over the front of his jeans. He thought about what Shane had done; the touching and whispers. *Could he be gay? A reverend?*

"Holy shit!" He was flabbergasted. In some weird way it made sense though. That was why the good-looking man was in this part of the city. He'd been banished. Maybe.

So deep in thought, he didn't notice that he was still rubbing his hand across the bulge in the front of his jeans until the discomfort made him look down. Pulling his hand away, he groaned. Still damp, the darker denim outlined his cock and balls. There was no way he could go anywhere until his erection faded and the jeans dried, or at least weren't so noticeably wet.

Hoping to distract his lust-filled thoughts, he turned his attention to the paper he'd brought with him. He flipped it over and admired Shane's tidy printed script and the name, Rocco Santino. Italian. The address wasn't familiar, but that didn't surprise him. He didn't know where most things were if he left the small area he'd been traveling around in the last couple of weeks. The name of the restaurant was simply Zarah's. He liked the name.

He looked around the room then, noticing the two, tall, green filing cabinets and the stack of boxes sitting beside them. A small table under the only window held more boxes and a printer that looked like it had seen better days. Two chairs faced the desk and a pegboard filled with papers was about it for décor. He was about to snoop into the piles of paperwork stacked beside him on the desk, when the door opened. In walked a smiling Shane.

Chapter Five

“I guess I should say I’m sorry, huh?” Shane asked him, but the smile didn’t go with the apology.

“We both seem to be very sorry about a lot of things, don’t we?” Logan countered.

“Maybe an explanation would be a better idea?” He went to the desk and sat in the straight-backed computer chair. “Grab a chair and sit, if you want.”

Logan pulled one of the chairs over so he’d be facing Shane, but the desk would hide his lower half. His hard-on had faded but his genitals were still clearly outlined in the jeans. “An explanation would be nice, but I don’t have any right to ask anything of you.”

“True, but I feel like I owe it to you—especially after the way I behaved out there.” It was Shane’s turn to blush, and he did so beautifully. The color crept up from his neck and looked hot. He didn’t try to hide it, or turn away.

“All you did was whisper to me. Nothing wrong with that.” Logan wanted to give the guy an out, if he wanted it. He hoped that wouldn’t be the case.

“Possibly not, but in my line of work, it’s reason to be shipped off to what my superiors might class as the worst jobs. Running a soup kitchen and shelter isn’t exactly glamorous.”

“Like glamorous is something special. You do a job that many people wouldn’t tackle. From what I saw out there, you do it pretty well, too. Those young guys, if they weren’t handled just right, they’ll trash this place in a night.”

“Maybe. They’re good kids; they just need a little guidance—”

Logan laughed, interrupting whatever Shane was about to add. When he stopped, he said, “Kids are kids. They’ll take

whatever they think they can get away with. Doesn't matter where they live."

"You might be right there. But I do believe if they'd been given some decent parental guidance, there wouldn't be such a rash of minor crime around here. Being taught right from wrong is pretty basic, but they don't seem to know it. None of them."

"Sign of the times. Parents both work, too much alone time, and no respect for authority." Logan stopped, aware that he was treading on some very unfamiliar ground. What the hell did he know about kids?

"All that's true, too. But there are parents who manage to raise decent kids, even if both of them work."

"Yeah, you're right. And seeing as I don't have kids, I'm not really qualified to judge anyone," Logan said, trying to ease away from the subject.

"Well, if that's the case, then neither am I." Shane smiled. He sat forward, resting his elbows on the desk. "That's not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"I didn't think it was."

Shane took a deep breath and let it out slowly, then said, "I'm gay, and that's why I'm stuck in this corner of the city. The church is still uneasy about having a homosexual reverend anywhere they might be noticed." He smiled and added, "I'm controversial."

Logan swallowed hard. The reverend was gay, and as far as he could tell, free. His heart skipped a beat.

"Well, you didn't run screaming out of the room, so I guess that's a good sign," Shane said, in a quiet, uncertain, voice.

"No, I didn't run screaming," Logan hurried to reassure the man. "In fact, just before you came in, I was wondering if you were, gay I mean."

"And you came to what conclusion?"

"I didn't." He decided it was time to lay his own cards on the table. "But, I hoped."

Shane gaped at him. "No, you're..." he managed after only one false start.

Logan smiled and shifted into a more comfortable position on the uncomfortable chair, willing to allow his suddenly bloated

cock to come into view. "Yes, I am. Have been for as long as I can remember."

"Well, I'll be damned," mumbled Shane.

"I doubt that, unless you've been a very bad boy."

"A bad..."

"Boy," Logan provided. He couldn't hold in the laughter. It felt wonderful not to have to hide what he was. He also found the reverend insanely attractive.

Shane's mouth opened and closed, like a fish out of water, and that's probably how he felt. Logan had pity on him, but not much. "I'm sorry, Shane, sort of. Ever since I saw you, and that'd be my second day in the city, I've been watching you from a distance. I had no idea you were gay, but I did hope. I also hoped you were single." He left it there, and held his breath.

"You've been watching me. Really?"

"Yes, really. You've got a great ass."

"I have a...what?"

The banter was giving Logan such a hard-on he was sure he could have used his rod as a battering ram. He ached to take it in hand, but didn't dare. "You have a great ass: tight, muscular. Do you want me to go on?"

Shuddering, the man shook his head and held up a hand, "Mercy me, no. Please."

"Is this going to be a problem for you? I mean your religion."

Shane looked at him, apparently confused. "What do you mean?"

"I'm attracted to you. I want to see you. Hell, I want to bed you," Logan blurted.

"There's no marriage between same sex couples, so it's not like I'll be breaking any rules I haven't broken already." He managed to grin, a lopsided affair that made Logan smile.

"Are you seeing anyone?" *Might as well get it all out in the open*, Logan thought, and crossed mental fingers.

"Uh, no. There aren't a lot of gay men willing to hang out with me."

Taking the bull by the horns, Logan got to his feet and walked around the desk. He stopped in front of Shane and reached for his hands. Pulling him to his feet, he whispered,

"Their loss." Leaning forward, he pressed his lips to Shane's. The contact was soft at first, just their lips brushing against each other's, but the pressure increased and Shane's hands slid around his body, pulling him closer. Lips grew hungry and tongues slipped out to taste the rich sweetness of each other's mouths. Chest to chest, nipples taut and firm bellies pressed together.

Logan's head spun and his cock was ready to explode. Hot breath caressed his cheek, as their kiss grew more intense. He slid his arms around the man's back and slowly moved them downward, until he could cup the glorious mounds of his ass. Breathless, his heart racing, he thrust his groin against Shane's. Hips gyrating, the room seemed to spin around him as their lust soared.

Finally, he pulled his lips from Shane's lush soft mouth, and looking into the brilliant blue eyes, whispered, "We should save this for later, shouldn't we?"

Shane gasped for breath and for a moment simply looked at him. "Yes, again, I'm sorry. I really should get out there and make sure there's still food out and the tables are cleared."

"I...my lord, man. You're amazing. You have to come by later so we can talk...or something." He must have realized the implication of what he'd said because his face turned a bright red and he lowered his eyes.

"Damn," Logan said, and wondered if he was saying it for himself or for Shane.

Looking up again, Shane captured his eyes. "Yeah, what you said."

He wriggled his hips, thrusting his cock against the enormous bulge in the front of Shane's jeans before stepping back. "I should go and see about this job. I really do need to find work or I'll be joining the line up at the door here every morning."

"I know, you said you were getting pretty close to the end of your funds. I'll draw you a map to get to Zarah's." Shane dropped into his seat, cringing when his arousal got in the way of his comfort. He shifted in his chair, but it didn't seem to help. He adjusted his crotch and then opened the drawer. Pulling out some paper, he grabbed a pen and began drawing streets, labeling them as he went. "We're here, at this intersection. You have to go four

blocks and then go right. You go about half a block and on the left, you'll see the entrance to an enormous courtyard. It's got a gate with a metal sculpture just inside. Looks kind of like a giant butterfly. No idea why the city wanted it, it's ugly as sin. Anyway, go into it and then look for a sign to the right, Zarah's. It's not a huge place, but it's classy and they're supposed to have some pretty rich clientele." He finished scribbling names on things and then held the paper out.

Logan grabbed it, but also grabbed Shane's fingers. Leaning down, he nipped at the knuckles before taking the paper. "Thanks. You've really been a huge help."

"It's been a pleasure. An understatement if there ever was one."

"I'll see you later." Pulling Shane to his feet, he took the man into his arms again. Kissing him lightly on the lips, he added, "Not as late as last night though. Maybe we can talk some more."

"Yes, we'll talk, and then we'll see."

He left Shane in the office, trying to pull himself together. The poor man had an erection that just wouldn't quit.

* * * *

"Mr. Santino?" Logan reached across the man's desk to shake hands with one of the fattest men he'd ever met. He'd called and Santino had told him to come right over. Apparently, Shane had told the man about him and the job was still open.

"And you're Logan White; Reverend Grayson spoke highly of you."

"Call me Logan, please. I really need the job; I hope Reverend Grayson explained I need to start as soon as possible."

"Sit down," he said and lowered his bulk into the office chair. The office itself was small, a filing cabinet and the desk with the two chairs was about all there was room for. Santino filled his side of the room, and more. Balding and in his late forties, at least, he had a dour look that made Logan slightly uncomfortable for some reason. "Yes, Shane told me you were new in town and money was tight. He also told me you're fresh out of COR."

Logan's stomach lurched, but he sat down opposite the big man. *Here it comes*—the excuses and reasons why he couldn't hire an ex-con. Logan readied himself for the disappointment.

"Yes, I've been out for about two weeks, maybe a little longer now."

"Any trouble inside?"

An unusual question, he thought, but replied, "No, nothing. I did my time and got out."

"And you want to start right away?" Santino shuffled through a folder, sorting out a set of papers.

"Yeah, the money I had is about gone. I either find work soon or I'll be out on the streets." The confession came hard.

"Can you have these papers filled out by tomorrow morning? You can start then."

"Really?" Logan asked, shocked, glad, confused, but most of all just happy to have a chance. "I mean, yes, I'll have the paperwork back to you first thing and what time would you like me here?"

Santino laughed, a loud belly laugh that rocked his chair, threatening to break it. "Well, we don't do a breakfast so get here at no earlier than ten. Chef can show you where you'll be stationed and where things go.

"One thing, you mind your own business and whatever goes on at Zarah's stays in Zarah's. Got it?" There was a threatening tone to that last remark and Logan wondered what the deal was, but agreed. He really had no choice.

He left shortly after that and went to his digs, where he filled out the paperwork and using the phone in the hall, he got in touch with his parole officer with the news. One less thing he'd need to worry about. He walked the streets, killing time until he felt it was all right to go back to the shelter. Before slipping out into the street in front of his flop, he tapped on the super's door, gave him the day's rent, and got a receipt. He was good for one, maybe two more night, after that.

He desperately wanted to see Shane again and share his good news. The walk seemed to take forever, but finally he was crossing the intersection and could see the open door. Light reached out over the sidewalk and music filtered into the city air. Again, it was a Bon Jovi tune, the reverend must really like the

group. This time it was the slow, hip grinding, *Never Say Goodbye* blaring.

Logan smiled and entered the main room. There were a dozen or so people sitting or standing around the place. Mostly young people, but a couple of guys who looked like they were about a step up from dead huddling together in one corner.

He spotted Shane in the kitchen, talking to a group of four dark-haired, hard looking, young men and sauntered that way. Leather gear, bandanas and tattoos abounded and when they noticed Logan's approach, he added sneers to the list. They backed away from Shane, but not far, and carried on speaking as if Logan was invisible.

For his part, when Shane turned his way, his face lit up and he stepped forward to draw Logan closer. The firm hold on his arm sent a shiver through him, and he eagerly stood at Shane's side.

"But, why do we have ta get schooled? No jobs for us anyway. Welfare pays all right," the eldest of the group snarled. The others nodded and stuffed their hands deeper into their pockets.

"Because in five years, you'll be stuck with no future, if you don't do something about it now. No girl's going to want anything to do with a guy who doesn't have a decent job. Right?" Shane argued calmly.

"Maybe. But we got chicks now. They're all over us when they see us on our bikes."

"That's now. What about when you're older? When you're mammas and daddies quit paying the bills and you're out on the street. Welfare doesn't pay much. Enough for a roof and crap groceries."

"You don't know shit," the young man growled and turned away. The others followed and in seconds they were gone. A moment later, the roar of bikes stopped all conversation in the shelter, while the four sped away.

"That went well," Shane said in a dull voice. "We have the same conversation every couple of weeks. One day, maybe, they'll learn. I'm not holding my breath though."

"They're young, they know it all, or at least they think they do."

"Yeah, I guess we all had that attitude when we were that age." Shane faced him squarely and smiled. "Hey, how did the job interview go?"

Logan couldn't contain his happiness a moment longer. "I got it. All I have to do is show up there at ten, or shortly after ten. The paperwork is done and I'm in."

"Yes! That's fantastic." Shane's smile got wider and he appeared overjoyed for him. Grabbing him by the shoulders, for a moment Logan thought he was going to kiss him.

"Yeah, it is. And I can't thank you enough for the help." Logan tried to keep his voice calm. He felt anything *but* calm. Shane's hands on him sent shivers down his spine.

"We'll talk in a while. The shelter's going to be full tonight. I've got to get them settled in. Ten beds aren't enough."

"Hey, I can help, or come back later, if you want." Logan didn't want to leave, but he would if Shane needed the space.

"Help would be great. Get yourself coffee first and I'll sort some of these people out."

"You bet," he said and headed for the coffee, while Shane went into the main room.

Logan watched him get bedding from what he'd thought was a bedroom and carry it to the other room. Through the door, he saw bunk beds lining the walls. Shane tossed sheets and blankets on each bed and then returned to the main room. He glanced over, but simply smiled as he headed toward the corner where Logan had seen the two derelicts. On the way, he stopped and spoke to a family, or so he thought, and pointed them toward the bedroom.

Logan turned away and watched a small group of older women pocketing fruit from the food table. Ignoring them, he took his coffee and went to stand by the back door. His stomach grumbled and he realized he hadn't eaten since that morning.

He was about to go grab an apple when Shane came into the room and crooked a finger at him. When he got close, the man smiled again. "Think you can get us some dinner? My apartment's upstairs. I haven't eaten since this morning and I'm starved."

Chuckling, Logan said, "I was just going to grab an apple, but dinner sounds better. Where do I go?"

“Follow me,” he said and turned toward the door he’d brought bedding from. “Right up there. I’ll be up in about fifteen minutes. Doors close at ten here.”

“Except last night.” Logan was puzzled.

“Yeah, well some guy was yodeling outside and I had to check it out.”

His face grew warm at the memory. “Right. And I’m sorry for that.”

“I’m not. I wouldn’t have met you if you hadn’t.”

“Fifteen minutes you said.” Logan was ready then. Remembering his dream of the previous night, he wondered if he’d get a chance to live it out.

“Yeah,” Shane replied and opened a door just inside what turned out to be a storeroom. “Up there, light switch at the top of the stairs.”

Logan looked up and saw a door and a switch on the right side. “What’s for dinner?”

“I’m sure you’ll figure something out. Feel free to poke around.”

The double meaning brought another smile to his face and he was about to say something rude when he saw Shane’s face.

“Don’t say whatever you were thinking.” He laughed and turned back to the people waiting for him.

Logan climbed the stairs, feeling as if a new chapter in his life was about to start. He hoped so.

Chapter Six

Logan brought the plates to the small table and smiled when Shane rubbed his hands together.

"Pork chops and carrots, an awesome meal," Shane said.

The apartment was three times the size of Logan's room at the flophouse and clean. Something he didn't realize was that important until he looked around the place. A decent sized kitchen and dining room combo adjoined a small living room, with an electric fireplace in one corner. He looked forward to trying that out with Shane. The bathroom was huge, with a shower and one of those old claw-foot tubs he remembered seeing at his granny's house when he was very young.

"I hope I didn't burn the chops. It's been awhile since I actually cooked real food." Logan sat across from Shane.

After Shane said a short prayer, and Logan sat wondering if he should pray for something or sit quietly, the blue-eyed man picked up his cutlery. Cutting into the chop, he said, "It looks great. Now shut up and eat. I'm starving."

They ate in silence, Logan stealing glances at the man opposite him. Hair fell over the man's eyes and he pushed it back every few bites. He seemed unconscious of his good looks, unaware of the feelings he garnered. The white shirt stretched tight across his chest, a curl of chest hair poked over the top button.

Logan finally tucked in. The food was better than anything he'd had in years. He savored every bite, sighing with deep satisfaction after he'd chewed and swallowed the final mouthful. Only then did he notice Shane watching him.

"All right?" the man asked.

"More than all right, thank you." He rose and reached for Shane's plate, but was stopped by the gentle touch of the man's hand on his.

“Dishes can wait. I want to talk.” He pulled and Logan followed him into the living room. “Do you want a drink or anything?”

“Have you got beer?”

“Yeah, it’s what I drink, too. Hang on a second. Sit, get comfortable, please.” Shane got them both a beer and waited while Logan sat down before settling next to him.

“Thanks again for checking around and finding this job for me. I really appreciate your help, Shane.”

“I’m glad it worked out. I do wish I knew the guy, but it’s a start.”

Sipping his beer, Logan let the tart liquid slide down his throat slowly. “Ah! It feels nice to just be able to sit and relax.”

Shane scooted a little closer and took a sip of his own beer, before saying, “That’s not what I wanted to talk about.”

Logan looked into the man’s beautiful blue eyes. “I know. I just don’t know how to make the first move with you.”

“I think you just did,” Shane put his beer down on the floor and leaned closer to Logan.

He didn’t seem to know what to do next, so Logan reached out and pulled him into his arms. Their lips met and they kissed, slowly, easily, their mouths soft and wet, tongues easing across the seam until lips parted. Breathing each other’s air, the scent of man and lust filled his lungs and sent his thoughts reeling. His cock swelled against his jeans and he groaned at the tormenting pressure. Yet, he refused to break their kiss. That glorious lusty kiss he’d craved since he first saw Shane.

Shane was the first to pull away and he gasped, his head resting against Logan’s shoulder. In a flash, the man’s fingers found the hem of his t-shirt, drew it off and tossed it on the floor, leaving Logan naked to the waist. His nipples puckered, the tiny hairs on his chest bristled.

“Sit back,” he whispered huskily.

Shane pulled away and sat up straight, a confused look on his face. It wasn’t there for long as Logan reached for the buttons on his shirt, quickly fumbling them open. He skimmed the shirt down over the man’s arms and tossed the soft cotton garment onto the floor after him. Not stopping there, he pushed Shane

back and reached for his belt buckle. Unfastened, he popped the button free and unzipped his jeans.

Lying back against the cushions, Shane let himself be manhandled up until then. When Logan tried to pull his jeans off, he stopped his hands. "Why don't we go to the bedroom? It'll save time and be much less complicated."

"For someone who's unsure of himself, you sure are bossy," Logan chided and was relieved when Shane chuckled.

"Yeah, well, just get moving, before I attack you right here." Shane grabbed his hand and pulled him to his feet, and together they went to the bedroom.

They stopped just inside the door and faced each other. As if they'd practiced, they stripped the last of their clothing off. Eying Shane, Logan followed the man's every move as closely as he could. Boots and socks tossed in the corner, jeans slid over his hips in the most seductive way he could manage. Watching Shane's movements, the smooth play of muscles beneath the skin of his upper body, aroused him tremendously. The light covering of dark hair on the man's chest and arms, the tiny circles of pink nipple, made his mouth water. When they dropped their jeans and stepped out of them, he wanted to reach out and grab. He controlled the urge, but barely. His hunger for the man was intense and from the size of Shane's erection, he wasn't the only one starving.

"Rub your cock. Don't take your shorts off yet, not for a minute," Shane said in a voice that was incredibly rough.

Taking a step back, separating himself from his soon-to-be lover, Logan ran a hand over his chest and stomach and then over the bulge in his shorts. The shaft jerked against his palm and he stifled a groan. Watching Shane, seeing the man's gorgeous body react, had his need soaring. "You like to watch? You like to talk dirty?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes to both," he replied, his gaze glued to Logan's crotch. "Course I don't get a lot of chance for either."

Logan spread his feet giving his hand more room to move around, and Shane a better look at what he was doing. His white jockeys stretched taut around his hips. Shane wore the same kind, and seemed to be as ready to burst at the seams as his own.

His hips twitched and he clenched his butt cheeks tight to control the trembling that threatened to overcome him. Sliding his fingers down the shaft of his cock, his knuckles bumped into the firm roundness of his balls. He cupped them, tenderly cradling them, and watched, transfixed, as Shane did the same.

“So hot, you’re driving me crazy,” he said in a husky whisper. “Pull the material tight, I want to see your cock. Oh yeah, that’s it. Show me, babe. You’re leaking so much pre-cum, I can see right through your shorts.” He licked his lips, aching for the taste of that pre-cum, the smell of it.

“Oh my God,” Shane groaned and thrust his hips against his hand. “You’re going to make me come.”

“Not yet, I want more. I need more of you. I need to taste you before you shoot.” Logan eased his shorts over the head of his cock and pushed the material down. The elastic dragged over his shaft, pulling at the skin. He squeezed the base before sliding them down over his balls and legs. So hard he ached. So close to coming, a drop of pre-cum oozed over the head and dribbled over the edge.

“Oh yeah, you’re so hot.” Shane thrust his own shorts down, apparently too eager to take it slow any longer.

“Time for the bed yet?” Logan asked, his knees already feeling as if they were about to collapse.

“Yeah, lay down, I want to taste you.”

“Better climb on so I can get at you too, or I’m liable to complain.” Logan stretched out on the bed, leaving half of it for Shane to lie on. He wasn’t disappointed when a moment later the man crawled on. They wriggled around so they each lay on their side, head to foot, and their mouths within inches of each other’s genitals.

Logan leaned forward and rubbed his face against Shane’s pre-cum coated prick. The slick cock head slid across his cheek, the scent filled his nose and he sighed with pleasure. Reaching up, he gripped the shaft, shuddering at the intense pleasure of holding another man’s cock—the softness of the skin, the steel hardness of the shaft. He stroked it. The smooth heat of it sliding through his fist like a piston. The tip nudged his lips and he flicked his tongue across it.

“Yeah, lick it,” Shane urged.

Suddenly, the shaft of Logan's cock was held, the crown engulfed in a hot mouth. He nearly cried out with surprise at the intensity. He flicked out his tongue, desperate to taste the cock so sweetly nudging his lips. Soft and wet, tasting of salt and man, he lapped hungrily at the offering. More pre-cum oozed and he eagerly took it. The cock throbbed and he held it more firmly, unwilling for it to escape in any way.

His hips thrust forward, and his body shuddered when more of his shaft was swallowed. A tongue swirled around him, sending shivers down his spine. His balls churned and pulled in tight to his body.

Pulling his mouth away, he took a deep breath and held it, trying to control the need to come. It helped, but when he felt Shane's hand reach between his ass cheeks, he couldn't contain the growl or the sudden spew of cum erupting from his cock.

"Yes, fuck yes," he gasped and thrust his cock deeper into the man's hungry mouth. Pleasure, release, a gut wrenching spasm hit and took his breath and spun stars behind his eyes. Responding in the only way he knew how, he leaned in and sucked Shane's cock into his mouth, craving more than the miniscule taste of pre-cum. He wanted the man to come. He needed to taste the load stored in those walnut-sized balls so softly covered in man fur. He caressed him, gently tugged on them, and when his next spasm struck, he got his reward. A salty, musky liquid filled his mouth.

His ass clenched as he swallowed. They mirrored each other in their climaxes, grunting and gasping, swallowing mouthfuls of cum and holding blissfully to the other. Arms wrapped around thighs, fingers exploring dark recesses and clenching on fingers not their own. Sweat trickled and slid between them.

Logan thought he'd died and gone to heaven. The man seemed to know exactly which buttons to push to keep him from coming down too soon. His climax went on for longer than any he'd experienced before.

He licked and was licked, until all traces of spunk were gone. Exhaustion threatened but was held at bay, for the moment. Gasping, he released Shane and rolled onto his back.

"Holy fucking shit. I can't believe how amazing that was," he stammered. His body was covered in sweat. His cock felt raw,

his balls ached with that empty feeling he got when he was fucked to a standstill.

Chuckling, Shane replied, "You've got such a way with words, you brute." He slid his hand over Logan's chest and belly, gently caressing his limp cock when he got that far.

"Yeah, I know, a regular Stephan King here."

"I think he's more for horror and suspense. This would be the erotic porn type writer."

"Mind's blank, you'll have to fill in a name for me."

"Rock Hard maybe. How about, Dick Mee?"

Groaning, Logan rolled onto his side again and reached around Shane's body, slapping his firm ass cheek. "Those are awful."

"Yeah, well it ain't my job, man."

Lifting his hand up, he checked his wrist, his watch, and said, "Speaking of jobs, I'd better get out of here. I need to get some sleep tonight, I have this job you see."

"You could spend the night. There's room and I'm sure we can find some clean undies in the morning for you."

"You sure? I mean this is all pretty sudden. I don't want to push too hard, too fast."

"Babe, you can push as hard as you want. As for fast, we'll just see how it goes."

"Then, thanks. I was dreading the walk back." He twisted himself around until he could pull Shane into his arms. "Thank you."

Leaning in, Shane kissed him on the tip of his nose, and then said, "Thank you. It's been a very long time since I felt like this about anyone."

It took Logan some time before he slept. Too long guarding his back and afraid to let anyone close made a relationship something he wasn't sure he could handle. Not yet. But, Shane made it impossible to keep any kind of distance. Deep down inside, he knew it was what he wanted, he just wasn't sure if he could let himself reach for it.

Chapter Seven

"Listen, fish, you'll do what you're told or you'll find yourself out on the street." The man's breath stank of old garlic and cigars. He'd grabbed Logan and slammed him up against the hallway's rough wall. Pressing his fat body against Logan's back, Santino wound one of Logan's hands up between his shoulder blades. "Ex-con should know better than to snoop into someone else's business, shit head."

"I was just getting some stuff from the storeroom for the chef. He asked me to get him a bag of onions and a case of—"

"Never fucking mind, fish. I saw you checking out the office. None of your fucking business. Now get upstairs and don't let me catch you sneaking around down here again." Rocco Santino, Logan's boss, pulled him away from the wall and shoved him toward the stairway. "You're a fucking dishwasher, not a chef. Go and wash the fucking dishes."

Logan bit back an angry reply and stomped up the stairs. He'd been on the job for nearly three weeks. From the beginning, he'd had an uncomfortable feeling about Rocco and his restaurant. It seemed like the place wasn't open enough hours to make the money he'd seen moving. Meetings in the office downstairs were common but those Rocco met were of the shady variety, thugs and worse. Once he'd seen people go in, and not all of them came out. Several hours later, a large cooler had been wheeled through the kitchen to a van waiting in the back lot.

He'd kept quiet, but every day had been hell. He really wanted to tell Shane, but knew his lover would urge him to do something about it, like call the cops. He dug back into his sink load of pots and tried to push his boss' deeds out of his mind.

Shane, now he was something--someone--worth thinking about. They'd essentially moved in together. Logan had lost his flop two days after they'd spent the night together and Shane had

told him the spare room was his, if he wanted it. He'd moved his few possessions in there, but never slept in that bed. That Friday, when he'd seen his parole officer, Frank Skinner, he'd told him about the move and then filled out a change of address form. Frank seemed pleased with how Logan was readjusting into society.

Each night, after Shane had tucked in those who slept downstairs and locked up the shelter, he and Logan talked about anything and everything. The hardest discussion had taken place two evenings ago when he'd shared a little of his prison life. Shane had asked several times what it had been like, but he'd put it off until then. Finally, while they'd lain in each other's arms in his big bed, Logan had talked.

"This happened a few months ago, not sure how long ago exactly. It's hard to judge time inside. My cellblock was assigned shower privileges from seven-thirty to eight in the morning. There was a bunch of us sharing this long row of showerheads, like a locker room after football practice."

Shane snuggled close and whispered, "Wouldn't know, I didn't play football. Soccer was more my style."

"Yeah, I can see you in a pair of those nice silk shorts."

"Never mind," he chuckled and said, "Go on, what about the showers? Someone drop the soap?"

"Not quite, although that might be how it all started. It was one of the new fish, a new guy. You know the type, young, stupid, thought he was invincible. He got nailed for tax evasion or some dumbass white-collar crime, and was doing a six month stretch in Corcoran. Anyway, I heard a commotion at the other end of the shower room. It didn't take long to figure out a bunch of cons were raping a guy." He shuddered, even now the memory was disturbing, one of many.

Shane looked upset, but kept silent.

"The guy was screaming like he was being gutted. I'll never forget it. But, that kind of shit wasn't unusual. COR is one of the worst prisons in the country, maybe *the* worst."

"What did you do?"

The memory came back again.

"What the fuck are they doing?" One of the guys from Logan's cellblock, Dan Something, asked, and that's how it all started. They wandered over and tried to look beyond the wall of gawkers.

"Never mind. You know what they're doing. Stay out of it."
Another guy, Damien Somebody, said.

"Why do they have to do that?" Logan had asked, knowing there wasn't going to be an answer— hating being there and unable to stop the animals.

A big guy, Snake, with a python tattoo slithering down his arm stood next to him. He grimaced as he scrubbed. "The dumb asses watching are worse."

Dan said, "I can't listen to it. We've got to do something."

"Are you out of your fucking mind?" Damien grabbed his arm. "The tall guy with all the tats, he's a lifer. Felix Nelson, don't mess with him, you'll regret it."

Dan snarled, "I know Felix-the-fucking-cat-burglar Nelson. He's a cock-sure asshole."

Logan waved him off. "We don't need any trouble."

Snake growled and shoved some of them aside. "Take off, you idiots. Show the poor guy some respect."

The crowd dispersed and that's when he saw what was going on. Two men held the doubled-over fish by his arms. A con twice his size had just finished raping the guy. He was grinning and strutting around, flaunting his bloody dick.

Another man took his place behind the fish, who was sobbing like a baby.

"Fuck." Logan reached for a towel and tossed another to Dan. "Did you see that? He's bleeding."

"Trying not to think about it," Dan said, and dried off.

"I can't just let it go. We have to do something." Logan was sure the fish was dead if they didn't stop the rape.

Some other cons in the shower agreed but didn't do anything.

"If you can think of something, I'll be behind you." Dan told Logan.

"Behind me, eh? How fucking brave of you."

"Hey, I'm standing here in a fucking towel. What do you expect?"

"I don't know." Logan grew serious again.

"Let's go." Dan nudged his arm. "We might get our asses kicked, but we been there before."

Logan nodded. "All right."

Snake came up behind them. "No ass kicking today if I can help it. Let's do it."

Logan grinned. Their odds were getting better.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck..." Damien wrapped himself in the towel. "You stupid son-of-a-bitches are gonna get me killed."

"I'll protect ya." Snake grinned.

"You better." Damien piped in.

They converged on Felix and his goons, ready to dance if they didn't back off and let the fish go when one of his men said the guards were coming. The poor guy was left quivering, a bloody heap on the floor. The screws, guards, took him to the infirmary.

They were all questioned, and someone let it out that Nelson was behind it. He wound up in solitary.

"That's good, right?" asked Shane in a hollow voice. "I mean he couldn't hurt that poor man anymore, or you guys, right?"

"You'd think so, but prison isn't like the outside. Nelson had guys all over who'd do whatever he told them. He had a few of us watched. We had to be careful for a while, but things calmed down, eventually."

"Did you ever see the guy you saved? Was he okay?"

Logan swallowed hard, remembering Joe Magee, and how he'd been so shaken when they finally met again. "Yeah, we met, we talked. He said if there was ever anything he could do, I should call him. Haven't, can't see why I would. Contact between ex-cons is prohibited."

"How would you even know where to get in touch with him?"

"He gave me a phone number. He got out before I did. I hope he's doing all right. I honestly don't know if he'd make another stretch in the joint."

"I hope he smartened up then and he went straight," Shane said and leaned over to kiss him. That had started another session

of wild sex, which seemed to be how they spent a good deal of their free time.

"Hey fish, what the fuck are you daydreaming about?" came the harsh snarl Logan had come to recognize as his boss' voice.

"Uh, nothing. Just scrubbing dishes." He quickly worked the brush around the inside of an enormous pot. A stack sat in the other sink, waiting to be dried before he tackled the next batch.

"Fucking lazy bastard," growled the man. He shuffled along the line, tasting here and there, complaining about how they were all a bunch of screw-ups and robbing him. On his way back, he stopped behind Logan and in a gruff voice whispered, "I want you in my office in ten minutes."

"Yes, sir," Logan replied and wondered if he was about to get his walking papers. His parole officer would love that.

The man sauntered out, humming to himself as if making everyone's life as miserable as possible was his job and he'd done it well. He turned into the staircase and vanished from view.

Sighing, Logan turned and looked at the others in the kitchen. Four prep-cooks and young apprentice chefs, who all jumped when the big boss yelled. The almighty chef, Santino, put his finishing touches on dishes only when they were ready to go out, and service wasn't due to start for a couple of hours yet.

A blond-haired prep-cook looked at him, and said, "Sorry man. The boss seems to have it in for you. Don't know what you did, but I hope it comes out all right."

Logan nodded. "Thanks, Scott, I do too. I'll be finding out soon enough." He worked at getting the sink emptied before he had to go see the big man. Sweat was pouring off him by the time he wiped his hands on his apron and headed for Santino's office.

Standing outside the office door, Logan took a deep breath, preparing himself for the worst. Sweat trickled down his chest and sides making his t-shirt cling to him. His apron was filthy, his shoes felt sodden with dishwater. He tapped on the door and waited, hating the feeling of his life being in the hands of such a slob, such a cheap hood as Rocco Santino.

"Come," came the gruff command to enter.

Logan entered and stood in front of the man's desk. Santino liked to make people sweat. That little bit of power seemed to turn the big man on. Logan was used to it and simply stood waiting, his mind at rest.

"So, you been here a couple a weeks. Like the job?" Santino asked, almost conversationally.

Logan wondered what the guy's angle was. "Yeah, it's pretty good, thanks," he replied cautiously.

"Pay all right?"

What the hell? Logan looked at the chair beside him, but didn't dare sit. Boss was chatty, so he'd try to keep up his end of the conversation. "Yeah, pays the rent and such. Thanks, sir."

Santino placed his hands on the desk and glared up at him. "Well, that's about to change, fish."

Logan froze. *What the fuck!* He felt as if he'd been kicked in the stomach. Opening his mouth, he wanted to say something, but nothing came out. He must have looked like a carp gasping for breath.

"I finally got the skinny on you. Murder. You were involved in a murder and got out early because of some mamby pamby judge figured queers need a break."

Logan felt his temper flaring. He curled his fingers into fists to keep from jumping across the desk and belting him. Clenching his jaw, he refused to reply.

"Yeah, fucking queers get the breaks and the regular guys get butt fucked by the queers inside. Ain't no fucking justice." He pulled himself to his feet and stomped around his desk until he stood in front of Logan with his arms folded across his chest. Then, looking up at Logan's face, he snarled, "You'll work here, but you'll ask me nice for any more money you get. I might see clear to giving you half what I was paying you."

"But..." Logan began but let the sentence fade away. Taking a breath, he tried again. "That won't leave me enough to live on. You can't—"

"Listen, fish, I can and I am doing it. If you complain, I've got a couple of guys who'd love to party with a card carrying fag and then I go to your parole officer and tell him you been stealing from me."

A chill raced up Logan's spine. The man had him by the short and curlies. He couldn't afford to have his parole officer think he was stealing. He'd find himself back in Corcoran before the day was done. He couldn't go back.

Swallowing his pride, he managed to say, "Yes, sir."

The smile Santino gave him made his blood run cold. No matter what he did, somehow he knew Santino was going to find a way to screw him, royally.

"Get out. I'm sure there's work waitin' for you in the kitchen. Might see about getting you a pretty little apron to wear while you're in there, too."

Logan turned and walked out, before his control abandoned him and he took a swing at the guy. His life had just taken a turn for the worse and he had to think.

He spent the rest of the evening doing just that. He had to find something else. He couldn't work for half of what he should be making. For one reason: Shane would find out. And two: he wasn't about to give Rocco Santino the satisfaction of ruining his life.

He left that night still fuming. The walk calmed him a little and by the time he spotted the shelter's sign in the distance, he was ready to let his anger go.

Chapter Eight

“Hey good looking,” came Shane’s good-natured call when Logan walked into the kitchen. There were a few patrons around, but not the usual crowd of people needing help. The weather was good and he assumed that was part of it. Sleeping outdoors wasn’t so bad and often people would stop in for a meal and then head off to some secret hidey-hole they called home.

“Hey sexy,” Logan replied when he was close enough to whisper. “Did you miss me?”

“You know it,” his lover replied and leaned forward, giving him a quick peck on the cheek.

Shane seemed able to ignore the few people who gave him that knowing smile. Logan wasn’t quite there yet. So much had changed while he was away. Being gay didn’t have the stigma it did, at least for most people. His thoughts returned to Santino and his mood darkened.

“Are you all right?” Shane asked him, lifting his chin with his cupped fingers. “You look a little down in the mouth.”

Determined to deal with Santino on his own, Logan forced a smile and answered, “Yeah, I’m good. Just been a long day, it’s good to be home.” Home, was it really his home? He’d thought so, but maybe he’d have to think about leaving. Damn Santino and COR.

“Good. Well, not so good. I’m sorry you had a rough day. Want to go up and make us some dinner or would you rather hang out here and we’ll go up together in awhile?” Shane looked around at the slowly disappearing mob. “A half hour and we’ll be pretty much empty. I think there’s only four staying tonight and they’re already bedded down.”

“I’ll go up,” Logan said and headed for the stairway. He’d called that his stairway to Heaven ever since that first night. It had made Shane smile. “See you in awhile.”

“You bet.”

Logan took the stairs two at a time and shut the door when he'd entered the upstairs apartment. Shane had cleaned. He wandered through the small living room and dining room and entered the kitchen. He needed a beer and pulled one out of the fridge. Standing at the sink, he gazed through the window over it and let his thoughts go back to what he should do.

The past three weeks had been the most amazing of his life. Shane was a dream come true and he knew he was falling in love with the man, if he hadn't already. Living with him was more than he'd ever dreamed it could be. He'd hoped they could have a life together, but with Santino and his threats, he might have to leave. Hell, he knew he couldn't let Shane be dragged into the man's vile homophobic world. Shane was too good for that kind of crap.

He took a long pull on his beer and shivered when the cold brew slid into his empty belly. He should eat before he drank, but it didn't seem important. He was thinking he might have to leave. He wanted to scream, or cry, or run.

The city looked so peaceful. The streets were quiet, rush hour had ended hours ago and now only the occasional lone car sped by. He knew that not far away whores were working; drugs were being bought and sold in the next building, even. But right there, he felt safe there, and loved.

He emptied his drink and carefully turned to put the bottle in the case. Opening the fridge, he reached for another beer and popped the top off. Lifting it to his lips, he downed the first swallow.

“Hey stud, what's up?” Shane entered the room and walked toward him, arms open.

He went into the gorgeous man's arms, ignoring the question and all it might entail. “Just need to feel your arms around me for awhile, babe.”

“Mm, I like your idea.” The men embraced, bodies melding together as if they were made for each other. “Want to take this into the bedroom or are you hungry?”

The thought of food turned Logan's stomach. Sex sounded like a much better idea. “Bedroom.” He placed his beer on the counter and reached around Shane's body. Cupping the man's

ass in his hands, he pulled him close, grinding their crotches together. The firm bulge pressing against his own refocused his attention to a much pleasanter place. He wanted to strip the man and worship him.

Holding Shane close, he shuffled them both toward the bedroom, kissing and nibbling on Shane's neck as they went. With each step, their crotches moved against the other's, with each move, he became more excited and urged his lover closer to the big bed he knew awaited them.

"My, but you are horny tonight." Shane reached up and began unbuttoning first his own shirt and then Logan's.

"Yeah, horny and hungry for you."

Once the door was closed behind them, he held Shane away, but only far enough so he could strip the man of the rest of his clothes. His own clothes followed, and soon the two were naked and in each other's arms again.

"I want you to fuck me. I need it tonight," he moaned, his face pressed against Shane's neck.

His lover's hands moved over his back, caressing him until Shane cupped the cheeks of his ass. Squeezed and pulled apart, Logan sighed with pleasure. His cock pulsed and slid along Shane's. Pre-cum painted both of their bellies.

"Yeah, I want that too, sexy." Shane leaned in and pressed their lips together.

Logan opened his mouth, accepting the delicious intruder, batting at it with his tongue, nipping at it with his teeth. The outside world vanished. All that mattered was pleasing his lover, making him happy. He tasted of coffee, and Logan was sure his own mouth tasted of beer. His thoughts spun as he lost himself in the kiss. The soft caress of tongue against tongue, the gentle nip of teeth, went on and on, until he was sure he'd go mad with need.

Finally, Logan dropped to his knees and pressed his face against Shane's groin. Pubic hair tickled his nose, the steely hard shaft slid along his cheek, the tip so very close to his lips, his mouth watered. He flicked his tongue over the shaft, tasting the salty maleness of his lover. Reaching around, he cupped Shane's smooth, hard buttocks. The mounds flexed and he squeezed them

firmly. Easing them apart, he ran a finger along the damp seam, circling the puckered opening when he encountered it.

His lover moaned and shifted against him, easing his legs apart. "Yeah, fuck me with your fingers. Mm, that feels so hot."

In response, Logan moved slightly, just enough to allow him to swallow the enormous erection pressed against his face. He sucked the tip, swirling his tongue around the tip before taking it in. Slowly, reveling in each inch, he took the monster in until the tip pushed at the back of his throat. He swallowed and the cock eased in deeper, stretching his throat to the max. His eyes watered, but he loved knowing he could take it all.

Holding on to Shane's hip, he eased the man's cock out of his throat and inhaled before driving it back in deep. Several more times he swallowed the thick cock, and worked his finger into Shane's tight hole. Seesawing him between mouth and finger, he was soon breathless with desire, needing to fuck the man before he shot all over the floor.

He pulled his mouth away, burying his finger deep and looked up into Shane's face. The man's eyes were closed, a look of euphoria on his handsome face.

"On the bed. Hands and knees," he commanded.

Shane smiled and climbed onto the bed, grabbing a clean towel from the stash and sliding it under him. Logan slipped his finger out and went to the bedside table where he retrieved a tube of lube and a foil packet. Watching Shane get settled, Logan slid a condom over his throbbing erection and gave it several slow strokes. Ready, he climbed onto the bed behind his lover and opened the lube. Slathering the man's ass crack with the slick cream, he pushed a finger into his tight hole. One went in easily, so he eased another in and then a third.

"Yes, fuck yes!" groaned Shane in the deepest, sexiest voice Logan could ever remember hearing. The man rolled his hips and clenched his anal muscles, as if trying to trap the thrusting fingers.

"Ready, stud?" Logan asked, carefully withdrawing his fingers.

"Yeah, fuck me. Fuck me hard. I need to come."

Getting up behind the man's luscious ass, he stroked himself, making sure some of the lube anointed his shaft. Then,

with his breath caught in his throat, he wedged the tip of his cock against Shane's fluttering ass hole.

He leaned in and Shane's body tensed for the span of a heartbeat, as if taking an instant of time before accepting his intrusion. His slickened, sheathed prick sank in. Tight, clenching heaven gripped him as his prick slowly disappeared. He pushed forward, not stopping until his belly pressed against Shane's butt cheeks.

Gasping, he had to stop and gather himself before he moved. His balls shifted, rose and fell, preparing to expel their stored jism. When he finally did move, it was the age-old dance of lust and passion, and the need to share his love. Holding tight to Shane's hips, he thrust slowly in and out of his lover's ass. Straining to hold on until Shane exploded, he reached around and grasped the man's cock. It throbbed in his hand as he stroked the length of it. Pre-cum oozed over his fingers, lubricating the stroke.

"I can't hold off. Gotta come," Shane cried and his body tensed, his ass tightened around Logan's shaft.

"Yeah, do it, come for me." Logan increased his fucking, his own climax threatening. His heart was beating so hard he was afraid it would explode; yet he continued thrusting. Like a wild animal who couldn't stop, he slammed against Shane's body.

"Yes, now...fuck!" he cried and exploded. A rush of pleasure blasted through him as a geyser of cum filled Shane's ass. His lover's body responded, sending a ribbon of cream across the towel beneath him. The spasms echoed each other, extending, expanding the pleasure each man felt until breathless, Shane collapsed and Logan covered him.

"Damn, that was..." Logan let the sentence fade, knowing it was incredible, but unable to find the words. He shifted, preparing to roll off Shane, but was stopped by the man's hand on his thigh.

"Don't move. Stay with me," Shane whispered.

Logan's heart lurched. He wanted to, more than anything in the world. He loved the man. Yet, Santino and his threats cast a shadow over his life, one he wasn't about to put Shane through.

"Not moving, but I'm squashing you." He wanted desperately to say more.

LIVIN' ON A PRAYER

"I'll feed you later," Shane mumbled.
That's all Logan heard. Sleep caught them both.

* * * *

Logan woke late the next day, to an empty bed. He reached across, feeling for the warmth of his lover's body, longing to feel him close. Last night had been amazing. He prayed it wouldn't be their last.

"Fuck," he mumbled and sank into frustrated anger. He had to do something about Santino and his threats. A beating he could handle, he'd been thrashed more than once in COR. But if his parole officer thought he was stealing again, he'd be screwed for sure. He couldn't chance it.

Looking at the clock on the bedside table, he cringed. It was almost noon. Nearly time to head to work. He'd decide during the day what he had to do.

Climbing out of bed, he shuffled into the bathroom and peed. After hopping into the shower, he shaved and examined his hair. It was finally beginning to look like he remembered it from before prison. A month made a big difference, in a lot of things.

Half an hour later, he kissed Shane goodbye and smiled when he realized Bon Jovi was playing again. *Living on a Prayer* had turned into 'their' song and as he left, he was humming it and fighting back tears.

If he hadn't been deep in thought about what to do about Santino, the black car following him as he walked down toward the restaurant would have registered. He'd pretty much decided he had to leave town, even though he hated to. He didn't realize he was in trouble, until something hit him on the back of the head.

The lights went out.

* * * *

Logan came to and groaned. Everything hurt. He couldn't move without agony tearing at some new area. His head felt as if someone had used it as a football. He couldn't see through one

eye. His face felt awful, bruised, maybe some bones broken. He tasted blood.

Reaching up, he groaned when his fingertips touched his cheek. At least one finger was broken. He coughed and grunted in agony. Some ribs were obviously broken, maybe worse.

He was lying on his back. It was dark. He had no idea where he was or what time it was. Hell, he wasn't even sure what day it was.

Noises behind him made him try to turn. A face suddenly appeared over him. Santino's.

"Be at work tomorrow. If you're not there, I'll be visiting your parole officer and Reverend Grayson. Seems I'm short some money, and you just happen to have it in your wallet."

Logan tried to sit up, tried to speak, but before he could manage either, a blinding pain in his head sent him back into unconsciousness.

Chapter Nine

His head throbbed abominably. Even thinking was painful. Hell, everything hurt. He moved his right hand and agony shot up his arm. He groaned, and prayed for unconsciousness. It felt as if an elephant had sat on his chest. It hurt to breathe; it hurt to groan.

Santino's face. That was his last memory. He opened his eye. Something was wrong with the other one. Everything was blurry, blinding bright. He groaned again and closed it.

"Logan," a soft whisper called. Shane's voice. "Logan, you have to wake up. Please."

Was that a sob he heard next? He couldn't bear to think of Shane crying. He grunted, hoping that would be enough to show him he was awake—enough to make him stop sobbing.

Another voice came next, a deep angry voice. "He's awake and I have to ask him some questions."

"He's barely conscious and after a beating like he's been through, he needs to rest, gain some strength before he answers any of your questions."

My hero, Logan thought and would have hugged Shane if he could have moved his arm. One seemed to be stuck to his side. The other hurt. He tried opening his eye again.

Bright light stabbing into his brain, forced him to close it, fast.

Groaning again, he realized he was thirsty. His tongue felt swollen. His lips did, too. God, he must be a sight.

He rolled to his side. A guttural groan of pain followed him, but he'd made it. He lay gasping, waiting for the agony to fade. His ribs were a torment.

"Look, he's awake," the deep, unfamiliar voice said, loudly.

"I don't fucking care," snarled Shane. "He's not talking to you until he's at least regained full consciousness and that's liable to be awhile. Now, get out!"

Damn, he's something! He wanted to hug the man, maybe kiss him. A tear trickled down his cheek.

He heard footsteps move away, a door opened and then closed.

"Logan, sweetheart, please," it was Shane urging him to wake up. A hand rested lightly on his shoulder, gently caressing him. "We need to talk."

"Water," croaked Logan, and hoped Shane would understand.

"Hold tight. I'll get some." And he was gone.

A moment later, Logan heard water running, filling a glass and then soft footsteps coming toward him. Shane gently helped him to lay back and then did something and his upper body rose. He tried opening his eyes again. This time he managed to keep his one good eye open. He recognized hospital furnishings.

"Here, try to drink this," Shane sat on the bed, careful not to wriggle it. In his hand, he held a tall plastic cup with a lid and a straw poking up. He placed the straw at Logan's mouth.

The nectar of the Gods couldn't have tasted any sweeter than those first sips of water. Shane held it for him until, satisfied, he pushed the straw away.

"Thank you. What happened?" he asked, and knew he'd have to fill in his part of it when Shane had finished. He hoped he'd have time to come up with something that sounded reasonable.

"I found you. Someone dumped you just outside the shelter. I thought you were dead." The man looked as if he was going to burst into tears.

"I'm okay. Honest," Logan tried to raise both arms and give his lover a hug. Only one worked and that one hurt. He glanced down and saw that one arm was in a cast, all the way up to his shoulder. While he was checking that out, he figured he might as well see what else had been done to him. The sheet covered most of his torso, but one leg had bandages from his ankle up past the knee. He saw bruised flesh all over, and knew his face had its share of those. Moving his free hand, he discovered two fingers

were heavily bandaged and remembered the pain when he tried moving them earlier. Broken, no doubt.

"I guess I look pretty bad." He tried to be cheerful, but by the look on Shane's face, he failed.

"You look like someone tried to kill you. What the hell happened, Logan?"

"Who was that in here before? Someone wanted to ask me questions?"

"A policeman. Detective Sykes is his name. I called them when I found you. I had to."

He stomach lurched. What had they found? He remembered Santino said he had money on him. Was it still there? Had the cops found it? *I can't go back to prison!*

"Listen babe, everything's going to be all right. I promise," Shane said in soft voice.

So naive, so innocent, he just had no idea the trouble I'm in. "Sweetie, I may have to take off for awhile—"

"What are you talking about?" Shane interrupted; his voice confused and filled with worry.

"Did the cops say anything about money?" He looked around as best he could for his clothing, but couldn't find any of it.

"You had some in your pocket. I took it out. It's here," he said, reaching into his jacket pocket.

"No! Never mind. We'll talk about it later." Relief was like a wave crashing over him. The cops didn't know about the money he was supposed to have stolen. *Just maybe...*

"Logan, I don't know what's going on, but you're too badly hurt to go anywhere and you're the victim here. The cops are on your side...and so am I." He leaned down and carefully kissed Logan's forehead and the tip of his nose. The nose hurt, the forehead didn't.

His heart felt close to bursting. He knew Shane was on his side, but Santino was no lightweight. He reminded Logan of that episode in prison and Felix Nelson. Like a bolt of lightning, he wondered if Felix had something to do with Santino and his goons roughing him up. The man had threatened to take care of business. It fit, but what did it matter? He was screwed no matter what. He was an ex-con, Santino was a respected businessman.

"I know you are. That might not help." His throat was dry again. "Drink, please, I'll try to explain. But, I really think my goose is cooked this time."

Shane held the glass for him and waited while he drank. His mind was in turmoil. How much to tell? Could he find a way out of this mess? When he pushed the glass away, he lay back and took a deep breath. "If I don't leave before the cops question me, or at least before Santino gets involved, I'm going to wind up back in Corcoran."

"What the hell for? You haven't done anything," raged Shane.

"Shh, take a breath and listen to me, would you?"

"I'm sorry, but honestly, you're the victim. Even Sykes said so."

"That's because Santino hasn't been questioned yet."

"And that makes even less sense—"

"Shane, will you please let me talk?" Even talking was exhausting and if Shane continued to interrupt, he wasn't sure he'd have the strength to go on. He watched his lover stew for a moment and then nod. "Do you remember that guy I told you about? The one who was raped?"

Shane nodded but didn't say anything.

"Well, the guy who did it, I told you he was a pretty powerful man. He said he planned on taking care of business, which means he was going to make sure those responsible for getting him sent to solitary paid. There were four of us who tried to help Joe Magee, and it wouldn't have been difficult for him to find out where we were.

"Santino said something that makes me think Felix is somehow involved. I got called into his office the other day. It wasn't pretty. He referred to my getting out early because I was queer. Said something about regular guys getting butt fucked inside. Why would he bring that up? It just doesn't make sense unless Felix contacted him. Joe sure as hell wouldn't."

"But, you said Felix was in for life, how could he do anything, contact anyone?" Shane asked.

"He's got a lot of wolfpacks, guys who'll do pretty much whatever he tells them, both inside and out here. Santino may be one, or one of them contacted Santino. I don't know. I just know

he's got it in for me. Said, if I didn't show up for work and do the job for about half what I'm supposed to make, he'd go to my parole officer and tell him I stole money. That's the money you took off me."

"So why beat you up? That guarantees you won't be able to work." Shane looked confused.

"Yeah it does. But I'm guessing he had no intention of keeping me on anyway. Maybe he just likes to raise shit and make people sweat. He rides everyone pretty hard in the kitchen, but suddenly, yesterday, he came down on me like a ton of bricks. And I don't know exactly what he does in the basement, but he sure didn't like it when he saw me down there."

"Holy crap!" Shane rose to his feet and paced at the foot of Logan's hospital bed. He looked up and said, "You have to talk to Detective Sykes. He'll get this sorted out."

"Babe, he's a cop. I'm an ex-con. It's my word against Santino's. I've got no proof of anything. All I have are bruises and a broken bone or two," he held up his hand, showing off the bandages, "and some money I can't explain."

"I have the money. That doesn't even have to come into it."

"I can't ask you to cover for me," he said, but his heart melted just knowing he would.

"You didn't ask." Shane returned to his side and looked down at him, an adoring expression on his face. "Don't you get it yet? Logan, I love you."

His heart skipped a beat. What had he ever done to deserve such a man? "I love you too, Shane, but that doesn't alter anything. I have to go." He tried to rise.

Shane placed a hand on his chest and held him down. "You can't run. You can't even get out of bed without help. Please, I know it looks bad, but I'm with you all the way and will stand by you. No matter what happens."

"Santino, Felix, between them, they'll come after you, Shane. I can't let that happen."

Bending down, Shane kissed him lightly on the lips and asked, "You love me?"

Inhaling and holding the breath for as long as he could, Logan thought about his answer. "Yes, I love you." A great weight seemed to lift off his chest.

“Do you trust me?”

That was harder. He did, but he also knew how innocent Shane was when it concerned the ass end of society. He dealt with some of it through the shelter, but not the real horror of prison and what men did to each other.

“Come on, simple question: Do you trust me?” he repeated and stroked Logan’s face with the tips of his fingers.

“Yes, I trust you.” The words came hard, but as he said them, he knew they were true.

“Then, I’m going to call the detective in and we’re going to talk to him, together.”

He wanted to balk, to curse his luck, or scramble for his clothes, but he did none of those things. He simply laid there and nodded, defeated.

“Thank you, my love,” Shane said before going to the door and calling the cop into the room.

He was a big man, well over Logan’s six-two, he thought, and built like the proverbial brick shithouse. The pale tan shirt and dark slacks made up a uniform that fit him like a glove and the holster on his belt looked packed with equipment. Short dark hair rose in tiny spikes all over his head, and his vibrant brown eyes were alive with questions. A strong jaw and a bent nose spoke of a rough and ready cop who wasn’t afraid to mix it up a little, if need be.

He held his right hand out toward Logan, and carefully shook his. “I’m sorry to have to bother you right now, but we need to know what happened. I’m Detective Matt Sykes. I’ve been assigned your case.”

Logan cringed, his fingers taking a beating with the handshake. “Yeah, it’s okay. I’ll try to answer your questions.” Inside he was praying he’d pass out.

Behind the cop came a young nurse. She melted between the two men and stopped at Logan’s bedside. “You’ve taken quite a beating, sir. If you’d rather wait, I’ll okay it.”

Logan looked at her, tempted. “It’s all right, I’ll be fine.”

She checked his temperature with her wrist and then winked and said, “Just push the call button if you need to.”

“Thank you,” he mouthed.

She left and the cop pulled out his notepad. "Logan Samuel White, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Recently released from Corcoran State Prison?"

"Yes, a month ago. I've been staying at Reverend Shane Grayson's for most of the time since I was released."

The cop jotted something down and then asked, "And you work for, Rocco Santino, at his restaurant Zarah's, as a dishwasher?"

"Yes, sir," he almost growled.

Sykes looked at him over his notepad and nodded, "We got a call from your boss a little earlier this evening. You wouldn't happen to know what that might have been about, would you?"

"Why don't you tell me, Detective?" Logan felt the walls closing in. Here it was. His ticket back to COR.

"Well, it seems Mr. Santino is missing some money. The restaurant was broken into and some cash was taken." He kept his eyes on Logan, obviously wanting to see if he showed any signs of guilt or fear.

All Logan felt was defeat and anger for what might have been. If only he could have escaped the night before. He should never have gone home. He should have simply hopped a bus and headed...where?

"Why would you think Logan knows anything about that, sir?" Shane asked. He'd moved to the other side of Logan's bed and stood with his arms crossed, a stern look on his handsome face.

"Well, you do realize Logan was in prison for breaking and entering. There was a murder involved in that case. From his records, it shows he wasn't tried on the murder charge, but the B and E sure fits."

"He has no reason to get back into anything like that. He's got a steady job and he's happy staying at the shelter."

"Ah, and you would be Reverend Grayson, I take it?" Sykes again wrote something on his notepad and then asked, "You're the gay Methodist who was shipped out here so you'd be less likely to 'pervert' any of the faithful back east. Am I correct?"

Logan glanced up at Shane and wasn't surprised to see his face reddening—not from embarrassment, but from anger. An anger he hoped his lover could control.

"I see you've had time to do some homework, Detective. Yes, I'm the 'black sheep' as it were. But, again, what does that have to do with Logan being beaten, almost to death?"

Sykes lowered the notepad and looked both Shane and Logan over closely before apparently making his mind up. "Let's just say, Rocco Santino is under scrutiny."

Logan's heart leaped. *What the hell?*

"I need to know everything that's happened to you while you were in his employ."

"I don't rat," Logan said, but knew it wouldn't take much for him to change his mind. It was a code kept in prison, but he was no longer behind bars.

"I'm not asking you to. I'm simply asking you to explain to me, what you've experienced and seen while in Rocco Santino's employ," Detective Sykes said, and then he smiled. "Off the record. You're our first break. If you can tell us what we need, we can send Rocco away for a very long time. But, we need information."

"Can you guarantee Reverend Grayson's safety?" Logan didn't look at Shane, but he heard the sharp intake of breath.

"I'm sure something can be arranged. We didn't realize he was in danger."

"He could be with what I have to say. I want him protected."

"You got it," the detective assured him. He pulled one of the chairs away from the wall and sat down facing Logan. "You could be helping out a lot of people here, Logan. Mind if I tape this?"

Shane sat on the bed beside Logan and leaning down whispered, "I'm with you, all the way."

Logan looked up at him and replied, "You better be." He smiled, and then groaned when pain gripped his face. He mouthed, "I love you."

Turning back to Sykes, Logan said, "Tape away." He waited while the detective placed a small recorder on the bed and

switched it on. "Have you ever heard of a man named Felix Nelson?"

"Not off the top of my head, no. Why?" Sykes replied.

"I have a feeling he might be at the bottom of why I was beaten, but I don't have any proof."

"Why don't you just tell me what you do know?"

"Okay," he said and tried to stretch out to get more comfortable. His legs seemed fine, but everything else hurt to some degree. "Even before I started working for Santino, he made sure I understood that whatever happened in Zarah's stayed in Zarah's. That was part of the job interview. When he said it, I knew he meant more than simply mind your own business. He had the look of a shark when he said it. Definitely got my attention and of course I agreed. I was desperate for work and seeing as the reverend sent me there, I assumed it was all right.

"Everything went fine for a week or so, but then I realized there seemed to be way more cash floating around than the restaurant could possibly make. He didn't open until noon and the place was never full. Yet, he always had money for the best of everything: the best dinnerware, the best products. Even when it came to décor, he just seemed to get what he wanted without worrying about where the money was coming from to pay for it.

"And the office downstairs. The people he saw down there, well, they weren't on the up and up, if you get my meaning. I don't know the names, but I know the type. Prison teaches you things about people, and I recognized the breed."

Sykes leaned forward, elbows on his knees and asked, "What breed? Did you see anything out of the ordinary going on in this office?"

Thinking back, Logan remembered the times he'd seen people go in and fewer come out. "Yeah, a couple of times more people went in than came out. It's like people vanished."

"Interesting," Sykes mused, his head back he looked deep in thought. "What about money? Did you ever see people taking in suitcases or gym bags and not bringing them out?"

"Yeah, that happened two or three times a week." His voice sounded shaky and he was exhausted.

Shane seemed to realize that, saying, "Detective, can we carry this on later? Logan's about ready to drop off again. He's been through one hell of a lot."

"Yeah, I can see that." The detective got to his feet and turned toward the door. "Don't try to go anywhere. I'll be back in the morning to continue this, all right?"

Nodding, Logan suddenly felt as if he was fading away. His vision blurred and all he heard was Shane whispering, "I'll be here before the cops are. Rest, sleep well, my love."

Blackness crashed down on him.

Chapter Ten

The squeal of curtains being dragged open woke Logan the next day. Brilliant sunlight glaring in the window caused a groan and then he moved. Pain tore at his mid-section. His ribs felt as if they were digging into his lungs. He tried to raise one arm, remembered that he couldn't lift that one and tried the other. That one came up, but was almost useless, the fingers bandaged as they were.

"Sorry lover, I wanted to give you time to wake up before Detective Sykes showed up." Shane's voice sounded rough, as if he hadn't gotten a great deal of sleep.

Logan looked up at him and the circles under his eyes confirmed it. "Hey," he croaked. "Water, please."

Shane reached for his water glass and held it out for him. That was a mistake. He then realized he had to pee. After sipping just enough to insure he'd be able to talk, he pushed the straw out and said, "Pee. I need to pee or I'll burst."

Chuckling, Shane asked, "You want to try to get up, or use this?" He held up a white plastic bottle.

Groaning, Logan hated it, but knew he'd never make the bathroom in time. "That," he growled and suffered through Shane's manhandling his prick into the opening. After a moment of embarrassment, he emptied his bladder into the bottle.

"Thanks," he said and waited while Shane took it away. When he returned and bent to give him a kiss, Logan grabbed him with his one usable hand. Holding him, he pressed his tongue firmly against the man's lips and sighed when the kiss deepened. Finally, pulling his face away, he murmured, "I do love you. If I get out of this mess, we've got to talk. I want to be with you."

Shane smiled, and the tiredness seemed to leave his face. "Yes, we will. And, I'm sure you're going to get out of this. Your parole officer, Frank Skinner, will be here any minute."

"What?" Logan blinked.

"Hang on, you'll see," Shane smiled at him and pulled away. He fluffed Logan's pillow and helped him get into a more comfortable position. He'd just sat down when there was a light tapping on the door.

"Come," called Shane.

Logan looked at him, apprehension tugging at him.

A tired looking Frank Skinner, tall, gangly, and balding, entered the room, followed by Detective Sykes. Sykes looked as if he hadn't got any sleep either and Logan wondered what the hell was going on.

"Good morning, Logan," Sykes said and pulled up a chair.

Frank grabbed one from the hall and set it beside the detective. Once they were sitting, Frank said, "You've been busy."

Logan wasn't sure what to say, and decided silence might indeed be golden, until he at least knew what the two men were up to. He simply nodded and said, "Good morning."

"All right, it's been a long night and I want my bed, so let's just get this done," Sykes said and pulled out his notepad. "Logan, yesterday you mentioned a lifer in COR named Felix Nelson, right?"

Perking up, Logan replied, "Yes, sir."

"It seems your parole officer, Mr. Skinner here, has some news about this guy. You know a Daniel, or Dan, Radisson?"

"Yeah, kind of. He was a guy I knew in prison, slightly. What's he got to do with this?"

Sykes held up his hand, stopping any further questions.

His parole officer sat forward and said, "Logan, a few days ago, I was contacted by Dan's parole officer. Felix Nelson tried to have Dan implicated in a murder. He wanted me to warn you that he might try something similar with you. It seems he has. We have the phone records of him contacting Santino. We'll have his statement within hours. Nelson's got nothing to gain by shielding the man."

Logan was outraged, "What the fuck! He's in prison, how can he have such power?"

"He does. If you'd run, we'd have had to assume you were guilty of both the B and E and theft. You'd have been back in Corcoran before the ink was dry on the arrest warrant."

Logan looked up at Shane and smiled, "He's the one who wouldn't let me run. Well, that and I'm pretty beat up."

Detective Sykes said, "We've got a warrant out for Rocco Santino." He looked at his watched and smiled. "In fact, he might be in custody by now."

Logan's mouth dropped open. He groaned at the pain in his jaw, but didn't close his mouth. His mind reeled. *Santino arrested? Nelson responsible?* It all seemed too big, too much to get his mind around.

Sykes continued, "We've had our eyes on Santino's place for awhile. He's dirty, we just couldn't figure out how he was getting away with it. If you'll testify, I'm sure we can put him away for one hell of a long time. A lot of what you have is what's called circumstantial evidence, but with what we have, he'll be playing pushy-pushy with Felix for a very long time."

Beside him, Shane let out a cheer that made the other three men jump. "You'll do it, won't you, Logan? Of course, you will. You'll be cleared and once you're out of here we'll—"

"Shane!" Logan said, his voice not nearly as loud, but clear enough to shut his lover up. "Yes, I'll testify. You know I will. Santino needs to be put away. Besides that, if I don't, he'll more than likely come after me again." He reached up, gritting his teeth against the sharp pain in his fingers when he gripped his lover's arm. Pulling him down, he whispered, "Thank you. I love you, you crazy man. And I'm out of a job. Got any ideas?"

"Yes, you can be my kept man. You'll need time to recover from this. We'll talk. Maybe I'll just keep you hidden somewhere."

Ignoring the two men seated at the side of his bed, he pulled Shane closer and pressed their lips together. The soft kiss turned into a deep, soul searing, tongue-lashing. They didn't stop until either Sykes or Skinner cleared his throat.

Shane pulled away and Logan looked over at the two men.

“I think we’ll clear out of here now,” Sykes said, and both men got to their feet. “When you’re out of here would you come downtown and fill out some papers? We’ll need a statement—”

“Detective, I’ll be down as soon as I’m released from here. Thank you.”

Sykes offered his hand and Logan shook it, carefully. As the two men left, Logan watched Shane close the door and walk back to the side of the bed. They made eye contact and neither seemed to want to break it.

Logan squirmed. “Any idea how long the hospital is going to keep me?”

“At least a couple of days. Until you can do for yourself. Of course, whatever you can’t do, I’ll help you with. I’m not going to let you out of my sight for a very long time.” Shane’s blue eyes twinkled.

Warmth settled in Logan’s stomach, a sensation more powerful than all his injuries put together. Suddenly, the future looked brighter than anything he could ever have envisioned. He smiled. “The feeling is mutual, Reverend.”

About the Author

Jude Mason's imagination frequently leads her astray, and she eagerly follows while trying to keep out of trouble, or at least not get caught. For those of you who know her, you'll know that's not always easy. A picture, a smell, an unexpected glimpse of flesh, or a load of soil in the back of a pick-up, are all fodder for her writing. Her male characters run the gamut from the dominant male ruling his women with an iron fist, to a simpering purple-clad boy-toy, whose only desire is to please. As diverse and as richly depicted, her women find themselves in a myriad of exotic and erotic situations.

If you'd like to keep up to date on what she's up to, visit her website at www.my-haven2001.com. To join her mailing list, please send an email to jude.mason@yahoo.ca.