



**Death or Life**

TA Chase

(c) 2009

## **Death or Life**

TA Chase

Published 2009

ISBN 978-1-59578-557-2

Published by Liquid Silver Books, imprint of Atlantic Bridge Publishing, 10509 Sedgegrass Dr, Indianapolis, Indiana 46235. Copyright © 2009, TA Chase. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Liquid Silver Books  
<http://LSbooks.com>

Email:  
[raven@LSbooks.com](mailto:raven@LSbooks.com)

Editor  
Ansley Blackstock

Cover Artist  
Anne Cain

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

## **Blurb**

Noah Wiltson wants nothing more than to be left alone. His father's candidacy for President forces him to have secrets. Imagine his surprise when a hired killer gives him the means to live his life without doubt or fear.

The killer knows this hit is going to be his last. Whether he chooses to walk away or whether they kill him. He's never been a team player, so he ends the game on his terms.

A few months later, Noah meets Cain Packert, a man who intrigues and excites him. Only one of them knows the truth. Can they find love amid secrets and threats?

Molten Silver: Warning: m/m loving, violence and graphic language

## Chapter One

### Wednesday night

Noah Wiltson sighed as he closed his apartment door. He hated going out on the campaign trail with his father. Loathed having to pretend they were a happy family when he couldn't stand being in the same room with his father, former Senator Charles Wiltson, soon-to-be the candidate of choice for President.

Without turning on the lights, Noah tossed his keys into the lopsided bowl his daughter had made him. A smile eased over his face at the thought of young Lindsey. Thank God no one knew he donated the sperm. No one but Lindsey's mothers—his best friend, Tabitha, and her partner, Rhoanna. At least they could avoid being hounded by reporters.

He tugged off his tie and threw it on the table next to the bowl. He made his way to the side bar, where he poured a glass of whiskey. He slugged it down and filled the shot glass again.

When he looked up in the mirror behind the bar, he noticed the silhouette standing in front of the blinds lowered over the large set of windows across the room.

"Fuck." He whirled, dropping the glass.

The whiskey stained his cream carpet.

"Sinful waste of good whiskey." The man didn't move.

"Who the hell are you?" Noah inched towards the phone at the end of the bar.

"What kind of hired killer would I be if I didn't disable the phones?"

The blinds opened slightly, allowing some light to filter in and shine on the gun in the man's hand.

"Killer? Why?"

Noah was confused. He couldn't think of anyone he'd pissed off enough to want him dead.

The gun wavered. "Pick up the glass. Pour us each a drink and we'll discuss this." The man's deep carefree laugh puzzled Noah. "I have plenty of time before the man waiting on the street starts to worry."

Noah did as he was told. His killer didn't seem to be in a hurry to kill him. Maybe he could figure out a way to escape.

He poured two glasses and carried them to the coffee table, where he set one down before he took a seat on the couch, holding his own glass. Following the stranger's movements with his gaze, Noah wasn't prepared for the speed with which the man bent, took the glass and sat down. It was all fluid motion and he would never have been able to counter it.

"Who are you?" Noah didn't know why it was so important to know his killer's name.

"You may call me Lord." An appreciative hum sounded from the stranger. "I do love good whiskey."

"Are you serious? Lord," Noah couldn't help but comment.

"While the irony of the situation hasn't escaped my attention, that really is my

name.” *Lord* set the glass down. “I’m thrilled they sent me on this hit. I usually get the beer guzzling, pretzel chewing ones.”

Unsure of how to respond, Noah didn’t say anything. What was the protocol of having drinks with your soon-to-be killer? Did one respond or just listen?

“It might have something to do with my upbringing. Very blue collar and crude.”

“Who wants me dead?” Noah’s voice squeaked at the end of the question.

“I asked myself the same thing when my handler gave me the assignment.” *Lord* gestured towards the rest of the apartment. “There’s nothing secret or special enough about you to cause anyone to panic.”

Should he feel insulted? “Thanks. I think.”

*Lord* chuckled. “I wasn’t putting you down. You’re not a terrorist or a spy. You’re a chemical engineer, but you work for a plastics plant. Hardly national security stuff.”

*True*. The only secret he had was *Lindsey*. Anyone who dug deep enough would know he was gay. He didn’t really hide that, though he was much more discrete about it.

“My one failing, I guess you could say, is an overwhelming sense of curiosity. When something doesn’t feel right, I have to dig and peel back the layers until it all makes sense to me.”

*Lord* settled deeper into the chair. Noah reached over, wanting to turn the lamp on.

“Don’t.”

He froze.

“There’s a man standing on the street outside, watching the windows. If he sees the light go on, he’ll know I haven’t killed you yet. The darkness will give us time.”

“Time for what?” Noah asked, tired of not getting any answers. “I think the least you can do is tell me why you’re going to kill me.”

“Kill you?” The frown was evident in *Lord*’s voice. “Who said anything about killing you?”

“That’s what you’re here for, isn’t it? I doubt you broke in to have a drink with me.” A thought struck him. “How did you get in?”

“Got the alarm codes. The person who hired me provided them. He really wants you dead.”

Noah bit his lip. The protest died in his throat. His father had recommended the company who installed Noah’s system. It wouldn’t have been difficult for him to get the alarm codes.

“Why would he do that?”

Sadness welled in his heart. He and his father had never been close, but he never realized how much the man hated him.

“He must really hate me,” he murmured.

“Hate has nothing to do with it, Noah. You’re an inconvenience for him, so he’s removing you like he would a piece of gum on the bottom of his shoe.”

“A person should be harder to get rid of. You shouldn’t be able to call someone up and order a killer. That’s not civilized or right,” he protested.

“You’re right, but it’s a fact of life and your father wants you gone. He can’t run the risk of someone finding out his only son is gay.”

*Lord* moved and Noah could tell *Lord* was shaking his head.

“He’s a jackass. It doesn’t matter anymore if he has a son who is gay. It might win him some points. Now if you ran around in drag, that might be an issue.”

Noah thought about those experimental months at college. He'd finally been free of his father's oppressive control. There were a few nights in drag before he figured out he didn't have enough style or flair to be a queen.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that," Lord pointed out. "Just for some reason, the voting public is less forgiving of that little quirk."

"My father honestly hired you to kill me?" He couldn't keep the shock out of his voice.

"I'm sorry." Lord sounded like he meant it. "I did a lot of investigating into this and your father has a few skeletons in his closet. You're the only one he can get rid of and still look like a sympathetic person afterwards."

"The pity vote."

Noah jumped to his feet, grabbing his empty glass before heading back to the bar. "Do you want another one?"

Lord didn't react to any of Noah's sudden movements. "No. I need to keep my wits about me. I still have my killer to avoid."

Swallowing down two shots, Noah thought getting drunk sounded like a great idea. "Who wants to kill you?"

"It's a long and varied list, but I think the decision has been made by the people who made me what I am. I've outlived my usefulness, plus, they might have heard a rumor or two about my research into your father."

A large hand came into view to take the bottle away from Noah. He protested with a small shiver of fear. He'd never heard Lord move.

"As much as drinking yourself blind must seem like a wonderful idea, kid, I can't let you do that."

Lord set the bottle down and led Noah back to the couch. Instead of sitting in the chair, Lord joined him on the couch. He realized he should be scared and trying to escape. He should be formulating some marvelous plan for saving his life. His mind wasn't cooperating. It was devoid of any thought except how warm Lord's hand felt on his thigh.

"I'd prefer to be drunk when you shoot me," he admitted, proud of himself for confronting his pending death out loud.

Lord cupped his cheek and ran a rough thumb over his bottom lip. "Dear Noah, I'm not going to shoot you."

"You're not?" Disbelief tainted his question.

His speaking allowed Lord to press his thumb inside Noah's mouth. He closed his lips around it. Lord groaned and Noah's cock twitched, interested by the taste of the man on Noah's tongue.

There had to be something wrong with him when he got turned on by the man who was sent to kill him.

"No. When I got this job and realized all the ramifications of my completing it successfully, I came to the rather easy choice of leaving. I have a problem killing someone to help his father get elected. If he's willing to get rid of you like this, what else would he be willing to do?"

Lord pulled his thumb out of Noah's mouth and slipped his hand into the curls at the base of Noah's neck. Noah knew he should push Lord away. He should struggle, but an odd need crawled inside him.

The other man whispered against his lips, "This is wrong. We don't have time. I want one kiss before I leave."

Noah made no attempt to escape. He reached up and grasped Lord's shoulders, holding tight as Lord plundered his mouth. Mutual moans filled the air as predator and prey feasted on each other.

Lord broke the kiss first, standing and moving towards the apartment door. Stunned, Noah remained on the couch.

"Wait for thirty minutes. That should be enough time for me to draw my killer away. Pack a suitcase. Take the briefcase I left you on the dining table and go to your grandfather. The information in it should help keep you and Lindsey safe."

By the time Noah's mind registered the fact Lord had mentioned Lindsey, Lord was gone.

\* \* \* \*

Standing in the dark doorway, he searched the street before stepping out. Maybe he shouldn't have shared that particular name with Noah Wiltson. It could end up coming back to bite him in the ass, but there was just something about Noah's story, and the man himself, that tugged at what little sense of compassion he still had. Of course, he was getting someone else in trouble by letting Noah live. He shrugged. He would deal with that when his actions came back to bite him in the ass.

He knew where his assassin was. Had spotted the man the moment he arrived. Pulling a cigarette out, he lit it, took two drags and flicked the smoke into the street. The pre-arranged signal that the job was done. He checked his coat pocket to make sure his gun was there. Another gun rested at the small of his back tucked into his waistband.

Damn if he was going to make any of this easy on whomever they sent for him.

"Fuck 'em," he muttered, striding down the sidewalk. He made sure to pause under a street light so his stalker would see it was him.

"Let's see how good you really are."

He gave one fleeting thought to Noah and how good the guy had felt in his arms before he cleared his mind of everything except luring the danger away.

\* \* \* \*

## **One day later**

Noah paced the length of the elegant living room. The butler left him to wait while the man fetched his grandfather. Nerves ensured he didn't pay attention to his surroundings.

"Noah, my dear boy. It's wonderful to see you."

He turned to see his grandfather stride into the room. Noah's mouth fell open as he was swept into a tight hug.

"Grandfather," he gasped, trying to get air into his lungs.

"Johnson, bring us some coffee." Grandfather Henry studied him for a moment.

"Have Mona make some sandwiches. Looks like you haven't eaten in a couple days."

Noah was tired and hungry. He'd done what Lord told him to do. Packed a bag. Grabbed the case the man left him and headed out to his grandfather's in the Cascades.

Leaving Los Angeles eased his fears, though he couldn't stop thinking about the fate of Lord.

"Thank you." He glanced down at his feet and back up at his grandfather. "I'm sorry it's been so long since we've seen each other."

"Don't apologize, son. I know what kind of bastard your father can be. When my daughter was alive, she exerted some influence over him. Once she died, he lost any softness he might have."

Noah shared a sad smile with his grandfather. His mother died when he was ten and any sense of his family had disappeared when she was buried. It was the last time he saw his grandfather as well.

"Father's the reason I'm here."

"Why am I not surprised?"

Grandfather waved at the couch. Noah sat with a sigh. He closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead.

"Ah, here's the coffee and sandwiches. Take a moment to eat and then you can tell me what's going on."

He did want his grandfather suggested. Half an hour later, he sat back, cradling his cup and staring at the scuffed black leather case sitting on the coffee table.

"Last night I came back to my apartment."

"That would be after your father's official announcement of candidacy, right?"

Henry rested his fingers on his chin, his eyes serious and understanding.

"Yes. I went for the family photo-op Father wanted." Noah shrugged. "If I make an appearance for him once in a while, he leaves me alone."

Henry nodded, but didn't comment.

"There was a man waiting for me. He said he was hired by my father to kill me."

He paused, seeing if his grandfather was going to say anything.

"Go on." Henry waved a hand.

"He left that case with me." He pointed to the briefcase. "Said it held all the information I needed to keep me safe."

"Did you look at it?"

"No. I waited for thirty minutes, then I packed and drove here." Noah blinked. Exhaustion was setting in. Somehow he knew he was safe and could relax.

"Why did he let you go?" Henry sounded puzzled.

Noah shook his head. "I don't know. Just said he wasn't going to kill me. His *handler*, I believe he called him that, was going to kill him after he shot me."

He yawned. Henry stood up.

"Go lay down for a while. You are safe here. Charles wouldn't dare risk making me angry. I'll go through the files. See what your killer left you."

Noah rose. He staggered as Henry slapped him on the shoulder.

"You were right in coming to me." Henry turned to face Johnson. "Take my grandson to his room, Johnson. He's going to be staying with us for a while."

"Yes, sir. I put your luggage in the Red Suite, Master Noah."

Noah followed the butler upstairs. He didn't explore his room. After Johnson left him alone, he stripped and crawled into bed. He fell asleep, wondering if Lord was safe.

\* \* \* \*



Henry LeClair growled in disgust as he turned the last page in the file over. He'd always had suspicions about his son-in-law, but to see them confirmed filled him with anger. He fought the temptation to call up an old reporter friend and give the man the scoop of a lifetime.

"Sir," Johnson interrupted his thoughts.

He set the file down. "Yes, Johnson?"

"There's a gentleman on the phone. He's asking about Master Noah."

His butler gestured to the phone on his desk.

"Thanks." He picked up the receiver. "This is Henry LeClair."

"Is Noah Wiltson there?"

The voice was distorted. The caller was being cautious.

"Who wants to know?" He could play the game as well.

"Have you read the files?"

Again no answer to his question, just another demand.

"I'll tell Noah you're alive."

The phone went dead. Frowning, Henry hung up. Had the man hung up because Henry guessed who it was, or because he had provided the caller with the information he wanted?

Henry shook his head. No point in worrying about any of that. He doubted they would ever see the assassin again.

## Chapter Two

### Two months later

“Make a wish, Grandpa.”

Smiling, Noah watched his grandfather blow out birthday candles with a little help from Lindsey. Henry and Lindsey had formed a tight bond from the instant they met. Henry’s delight in discovering he had a great-granddaughter touched Noah and eased his worry.

Lindsey’s mothers were more than thrilled to let their daughter get to know Henry since both sets of their parents were dead.

“Uncle Noah, Grandpa Henry blowed out all his candles.” Lindsey raced over to give him a hug around the knees.

He grinned down at her. “I saw that. Are you going to help him open his presents?”

At the word ‘presents’, Lindsey’s blue eyes lit up and she ran back to Henry.

“You have a beautiful little girl there.”

“She’s not mine.”

His automatic response shot from his mouth as he tensed from fear. He’d always protected Lindsey and would continue to do so, no matter how much his grandfather tried to reassure him that she would be safe. He glanced at the stranger standing beside him.

“She didn’t get those blue eyes from either of her mothers. Though I must say I like the grown-up male version of them better.”

Noah flushed. “U-m-m...”

“I’m sorry. I embarrassed you, and that truly isn’t what I meant to do.” The man held out a hand. “I’m Cain Packert, the new head of security for your grandfather’s lab.”

Noah shook Cain’s hand, cataloguing the firm grip and callused skin. Cain stood a couple inches taller than Noah’s six foot frame. The designer suit rested on broad shoulders like Cain had been born to wear it. His dark brown hair was cut short and thick black eyelashes framed unusual silver eyes.

“Noah Wiltson.” He flushed again when he realized he let his hand linger in Cain’s. “So Grandfather thinks you’re capable of taking over the security?”

“I just entered the private sector a couple of months ago after working for the government in a classified position for twenty years. I guess he figured I had enough experience to keep his interests safe.”

Nodding, Noah wasn’t sure what all of that meant, but he understood *classified* and he figured his grandfather knew what he was doing.

“Henry has told me a great deal about you. I’m pleased to finally meet you.” Cain’s silver gaze darted over to where Lindsey sat on Henry’s lap. “I promise not to tell.”

He knew what Cain was talking about, but he wasn’t willing to admit anything. “Tell about what?”

Cain laughed. “It’s none of my business anyway.”

The man’s deep rough chuckle rubbed over Noah’s skin, causing goose bumps and a shiver to track down his spine. His cock took notice of the man’s scent and heat. Cain’s subtle cologne danced on the warm night air, teasing Noah. It made him want to bury his

nose at the base of Cain's throat and breath deep. He needed a drink.

"Would you like a drink?"

He headed towards the tent where the temporary bar had been set up.

"I'd love a whiskey on the rocks."

Noah ordered the whiskey along with a gin and tonic for himself. He handed the glass to Cain, shuddering as their fingers slid against each other.

Cain sipped and nodded. "I do love good whiskey."

Frowning, Noah wondered why that statement sounded familiar. He couldn't figure out where he might have heard it before.

"Henry said you moved up here a month ago." Cain's gaze held interest and attraction.

Noah shifted. He was reading more into the man's interest than was there. "Yes. I work at the research lab Grandfather founded up here."

"What's your research on, if you don't mind me asking?"

Cain gestured to an out-of-the-way bench. Noah felt nervous as he sat down. Cain was simply being polite, but he couldn't help the suspicious thoughts racing through his head. He met Cain's eyes with a narrowed stare.

"Why do you want to know?" He knew it was rude, yet it didn't stop him from asking.

The man didn't seem the least insulted by the question.

"I have a severe case of curiosity. When I meet someone who intrigues me, I have to find out all I can about him." Cain smiled and there was something in the gesture that made Noah relax slightly.

"Just plastic. How to make it less destructive on the environment, and things like that."

"I'd love to hear more about it."

Noah snorted. "No, you wouldn't. You're just being polite."

Cain shifted on the bench and then grinned ruefully. "You got me. I really don't want to know about plastics, but I'd love to take you out to dinner. Consider it a welcome to the area dinner."

Biting his lip, Noah fought his first inclination, which was to decline. He'd always been discrete about being seen in public with another man. It had been easy to hide, but Cain would stand out in a crowd with his height and dark good looks. Cain exuded confidence in every inch of his body. Also, Noah had a feeling Cain didn't believe in hiding.

"It isn't that hard a decision." Cain winked at him. "Unless you don't want to go out with me and are trying to let me down easy."

For most of his life, Noah lived by rules his father made. No more. It was time to start living for himself. He'd escaped death, so it was time to get a life. "I'd love to have dinner with you."

Relief flashed in Cain's silver eyes. Noah realized the other man had been nervous.

"Great. How about next Thursday?" Cain stood, holding out his hand to help Noah to his feet.

"Thursday sounds wonderful."

Noah turned to see his grandfather approach. Henry studied the pair with narrowed eyes. Noah wondered what his grandfather really thought about his grandson being gay.

It had never been discussed.

“I see you’ve met my grandson.” Henry shook Cain’s hand.

“Yes, sir. We’re having dinner together next week.” Cain’s voice was cool.

Noah noticed how cold Cain’s gaze was now. It was in sharp contrast to the warmth in them when the man looked at Noah.

“Packert’s my new head of security at the lab.” Henry waved at Lindsey, who chased Tabitha around the garden.

“So he said. What happened to Bosely?”

“Too set in his ways. Didn’t think we needed to update the system. Plus, we’re getting more government contracts. Need to stay current protection-wise.”

His grandfather met his gaze with a serious expression. Noah knew it was also added protection for him, in case his father decided to try anything again.

Cain glanced at his watch. “I should be going. I’m meeting with some security companies tomorrow to talk about updating our systems.”

“Thank you for coming.” Noah smiled.

Cain’s eyes warmed as the man winked at him. “Thank you for agreeing to dinner.”

Noah watched Cain stride through the crowd and disappear into the shadows, heading towards the front of the house.

\* \* \* \*

“Noah, will you join me for a moment?”

Worry caused Noah’s palms to sweat. All the guests were gone and Lindsey was upstairs with Tabitha, getting ready for bed.

“Sure, Grandfather.” He sat down on the chair his grandfather pointed at. Rubbing his hands on his thigh, he waited.

Henry finished his drink and set the glass on the desk. “I’m not sure you should go out with Packert.”

Noah frowned. “Are you afraid your partners and friends will find out your grandson is gay?”

“Why would you think that matters to me?” Henry asked.

Shifting, Noah shrugged. “Father didn’t want any of his supporters to know about me. I figured that was what you wanted to talk about.”

His grandfather shook his head. “No. The reason I said you shouldn’t go out with him is because he’s dangerous.”

“Dangerous?” Noah laughed. “I knew that seconds after he introduced himself.”

“I chose him as my new security officer because he came highly recommended by people I respect, but his background is very shadowy.” Henry stood and walked over to Noah, resting a hand on Noah’s shoulder. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Noah swallowed around the sudden lump in his throat. He couldn’t remember the last time a member of his family showed concern for his welfare.

“It’s just dinner. I’m not going to fall in love with him.” He studied his hands for a second and took a deep breath. “He made me feel interesting and attractive. It’s been a long time since anyone’s done that.”

Henry squeezed his shoulder. “Be careful. That’s all I’m asking.”

Noah’s chuckle was bitter. “I’ve been careful all my life. Where has that gotten me?”

He stood and walked over to the window overlooking the garden. His gaze landed on

the bench where he and Cain sat earlier.

“I’m not stupid or reckless, but just once in my life, I want to do something that makes me feel good without worrying about what others think.”

Resting his hand on the cool surface of the window, Noah thought about Cain and how different the man made him feel. There was some fear mixed in with the attraction. Not fear of Cain, but of taking public chances.

“If this date is something you want to do, I won’t stop you.”

“Thank you.”

He left his grandfather’s study and made his way up to his bedroom.

\*

Lord stood in the shadows of the oak tree planted in LeClair’s garden. He’d made his way on to the grounds while the last guests were leaving.

He saw Noah move away from the window. The man was leaving the study. Lord scrubbed his hand over his face.

Why was he here? Two months ago should have been the last time he saw Noah Wiltson. Lord had evaded his own killer, taking a bullet in the process and should have headed to South America. He had enough money hidden in accounts all over the world to live like a king down there.

Instead he stood in the dark, keeping an eye on the only target he ever let live.

“He only thinks of you in his nightmares, man,” Lord whispered, his voice drifting softly on the breeze.

A light came on in a room one floor up and to the left of the old man’s study. Noah came to the window again. Lord remembered how it felt to taste Noah’s lips.

Waiting until Noah’s light went out proved torturous for Lord. All he could think about was what Noah would look like naked and spread out on his bed. Noah’s lean muscular body stretched out, his pale skin gleaming against dark sheets and begging for him to let him come.

Groaning, he walked away. *Should have gone to South America.*

## Chapter Three

### Thursday

Noah stared through the eyepiece of his microscope, but if anyone asked him what he was looking at, he wouldn't have been able to tell them. His mind was focused on the dinner he was having later that night with Cain.

It had been a long time since he'd looked forward to a date. Usually, he would be worrying about not being seen or his father's disapproval. For the first time, he didn't think about his father. His mind imagined Cain's thin lips pressed against his.

A soft groan escaped Noah's throat as his cock hardened. He shifted, glad he wore his lab coat to cover his groin.

"Dr. Wiltson, Mr. Packert needs to speak with you."

Noah closed his eyes and sighed silently at his lab assistant's words.

"He said he'd like you to meet in his office."

"Thanks, Martin."

He put the vials and slides away. By the time he was done, his erection had settled down. He hung up his coat and smiled at Martin. "When you're done with that test, head home. I'm calling it a day after I finish with Packert."

"Thank you, sir." Martin grinned and nodded.

Noah made his way four floors up to Cain's office. There wasn't anyone at the desk in the outer room. He knocked on the door.

"Come in."

Cain's anger came through in the clipped words.

Pushing the door open, Noah looked into Cain's office. The man stood, back to the door, a phone pressed to his ear. Noah's breath caught as his eyes ogled Cain's ass, framed perfectly by black linen pants. He wanted to reach out and squeeze it.

"I don't give a good Goddamn why it happened, Roscoe. It better not happen again or I'll fire your ass."

Cain slammed the phone down, causing Noah to jump.

"Jackass," Cain muttered.

"U-m-m-m...you wanted to talk to me?"

Cain's silver eyes met his and he watched desire replace the anger.

"Please come in and sit down, Noah." Cain stepped away from the desk, gesturing to the couch placed against one of the walls.

Noah rubbed his palms on his pants. *Damn*. His body responded to the emotion in Cain's eyes. He wanted to adjust his cock and find some room in his jeans. He sat instead.

Settling close to him, Cain pressed their thighs together. Fire flooded Noah's body and he tried not to move away. He didn't want Cain to know how much the man affected him.

"I wanted to ask you, would you be comfortable joining me at my house for dinner?" Cain's grin was rueful. "I had a few fires to put out this week and I didn't make reservations for us."

Noah thought about it. Having dinner out in public insured nothing would happen he wasn't ready for.

"If you don't feel you know me well enough, I'll see about finding a place for us to eat."

Cain's tone was neutral and Noah realized Cain wasn't going to pressure him. It was that knowledge that gave him the courage to step outside his boundaries.

"I'll be happy to visit your house for dinner."

Cain's shoulders relaxed. "Thank you."

He jumped when Cain touched his knee. He gave the other man a nervous smile. "I'm sorry. I'm not used to being so casual about touching," he explained.

Frowning, Cain said, "We're alone, Noah. No one's going to walk in on us."

Noah blushed and ducked his head. "I know, but I've been used to keeping my preferences in the closet or under the radar. I'm trying to break the habit."

"I understand. I know who your father is and, considering his running platform, I can see why you'd want to avoid having anything to do with him." Cain stood and offered Noah his hand. "Maybe it's a good thing I didn't get reservations anywhere."

Noah allowed Cain to help him up. They stood inches apart. He breathed in the minty scent surrounding Cain and grinned. "Actually, I'd worked up the nerve to be seen in public with you. I'm more nervous about going to your house."

Cain stuck his hand in his front pocket and pulled out two peppermints. He offered one to Noah before unwrapping his and popping it in his mouth. "You won't hurt my feelings if you change your mind. It's a sudden change of plans."

Noah watched Cain stroll over to where a coat rack stood and pulled a suit coat off. His gaze devoured the flex of Cain's muscles as the older man tugged the coat on. There was only a small voice in his head telling him not to risk it, but every other part of his body screamed for him to take a chance.

"Dinner at your place sounds great," he reassured Cain. "What's with the mints?"

Cain smiled. "I stopped smoking a couple of months ago. I find having something to suck on lessens the cravings."

"Makes sense." Noah checked his watch. "What time would you like me to show up?"

"Since it's so close to quitting time anyway, I thought you might want to follow me. That way, you can leave whenever you want."

Cain's thoughtfulness struck Noah, scaring him. So much about Cain intrigued and delighted Noah. It was too soon to be thinking of anything serious, but he had a feeling Cain could come to mean a lot to him.

"Okay. I'll follow you. Just let me call my grandfather and let him know where I'm going."

"You can use my phone." Cain pointed to his desk.

\* \* \* \*

Forty-five minutes later, Cain pulled up to the house he'd bought a month ago. He'd found it shortly after accepting the security position at LeClair's research facility.

Headlights flashed in his rearview mirror and he relaxed. Noah was still behind him. Cain grimaced.

It had been easy to get Noah to agree to a dinner at his house. Cain knew he should

feel terrible about manipulating the man, but he didn't. He wasn't ready to take Noah out in public. He understood Noah's reluctance to be seen on a date with a guy. Having grown up with that bastard senator as a father would turn anyone off any kind of relationship. That's why Cain was surprised when Noah agreed to go out with him.

Climbing out of his car, Cain waited for Noah to join him before heading to his house. He rested his hand on Noah's lower back, letting Noah get used to his touch.

Cain scanned the front of the house, checking for anything out of the ordinary. None of the simple early warning traps he'd set were tripped. He pushed open the front door.

"Welcome to my house." He ushered Noah in.

He took Noah's coat, hanging it up in the hall closet while keeping an eye on Noah's expression. It was weird how much he wanted Noah to like his house. Of course, it was the first home Cain had ever owned, so he was a little protective of it.

"The kitchen is back here. I'll give you a tour after dinner." He led the way down the long hallway to where the kitchen was. He hid his smile when he heard Noah's gasp.

His kitchen was huge. He'd replaced all the old appliances with modern ones. There was an island in the middle of the room where he prepared all of his meals. Copper pots and pans hung from a chrome grid above the counters. The room was painted a bright yellow with blue trim. It was inviting and warm. The bank of windows along one wall overlooked his back yard.

He pointed to the small table set in the breakfast nook. "Have a seat. I thought we'd have steaks." He laughed. "It's the one thing I know I have."

Noah's smile lit up his blue eyes. "Steak is fine. This is a great room, Cain."

"I think this room and the master bedroom sold me on this house." Cain reached into the refrigerator to pull out the steaks. *Along with the safe room in the basement and the open ground all around the house. No one can sneak up on me here.*

They chatted while Cain prepared the steaks, discussing how they liked the town, their respective jobs and general stuff. Cain stayed away from asking about family. He didn't want Noah to think about his father at all during their date.

He set their plates on the table and refilled Noah's wine glass. "Enjoy."

"I'm sure I will. Steak's sort of hard to get wrong."

Noah cut a piece and took a bite. The moan that emerged from Noah's throat made Cain shift in his chair, wondering how he was going to make it through dinner with an erection hard enough to cut glass. Cain took a large drink of wine.

"This is really good, Cain. Where did you learn to cook like this?" Noah took another bite.

Cain shrugged. "When you're on your own by the time you're sixteen, you have to learn how to survive. Cooking isn't that hard when your only other option is to starve."

Noah looked embarrassed and Cain figured the younger man was thinking that he'd never had to deal with surviving. Cain leaned over, touching Noah's hand.

"It's okay. I found that I liked doing it. Cooking relaxes me."

Standing, he took the empty plates over to the sink, rinsing them before sticking them in the dishwasher. "Why don't we take our drinks into the living room? We can see what's for dessert after our dinner settles."

Noah preceded him out of the kitchen and Cain's gaze fastened on Noah's ass as his date moved in front of him. Cain wanted to reach out and squeeze it, but he didn't think Noah was up to that level of touch yet.



He settled down on the couch facing the large bank of windows that made up the west side of his living room wall. He didn't bother turning on the lights. The darkness might make Noah relax more. The other man sat down between Cain and the arm of the couch. He was glad. He thought Noah would have chosen one of the chairs.

The silence that surrounded them was easy. It seemed like they were absorbing each other's presence. Cain wanted Noah to become familiar with him—whether it was his scent or how it sounded when he breathed. Since he planned on spending a great deal of time with Noah, Cain wanted the man used to him.

To that end, Cain reached out and stroked a finger along Noah's arm. Noah stiffened, but when Cain didn't move any further, his tension eased. *Just like gentling a wild animal. No sudden moves. No crossing the boundaries established.* Cain smiled to himself. It would only be a little while longer before he got Noah into his bed.

\*

Noah tried to keep from shivering as Cain trailed a finger over his arm. Desire made his skin tingle while a frisson of fear chilled him. He wanted to move closer to Cain's warmth, but Noah couldn't tell if he feared the man, or if it was the setting that scared him. A dark room and a stranger reminded him too much of that night two months ago when he came home to find a killer in his apartment. He trembled.

"Sh-h, Noah. I won't hurt you."

Cain's low voice rubbed over Noah's nerves like a cat, slow and sensual. He wanted to lean against Cain and accept what he could feel the man wanted to give him. Did he have the courage to do it?

His mind skittered around like a squirrel looking for a nut. He didn't have anything to fear from Cain. The man was his grandfather's head of security, for heaven's sake. If his grandfather trusted him, Noah should be able to, but the aura of danger Cain wore like an old familiar cloak put Noah on edge.

Cain cupped Noah's cheek with his large hand, turning his face to look at Cain. Noah met those unusual silver eyes and saw understanding in them along with patience. Cain brushed a thumb over Noah's bottom lip.

"LeClair told me you had some trouble a couple of months ago."

Noah stiffened. Would his grandfather really have told Cain all the family's dirty secrets? Before he could ask what Henry had said, Cain pressed a finger to Noah's lips.

"Nothing specific. Just that you had some trouble and LeClair wanted to make sure I knew to keep my eyes open, in case whatever it was started again." Cain's callused fingers inched around to cradle the back of Noah's head. "Whatever it was, I'm sure you're leery of strangers and their motives. I don't have any ulterior motives except to get to know you better, Noah. I'm not here to hurt you."

"Somehow I think you could end up hurting me far more than anyone else ever has." Noah winced at his breathless confession. He didn't want Cain to know how much he was affected by the man.

"No hurting unless you want me to." Cain's wink told Noah he was teasing.

Cain shifted closer, lowering his mouth to Noah's. Noah held his breath, waiting for the first touch of the lips that had fascinated him at his grandfather's birthday party. Soft and easy, the kiss was a quick caress. Cain seemed to be testing the waters, making sure Noah wasn't going to push him away. Noah found himself starving for his first real kiss in months.

The last kiss he'd gotten was from Lord and there was definitely something different between them. Lord's kiss was demanding and the man had been in command from the very instant their lips touched. Cain directed their kiss, but he didn't control it. There was consideration, and a willingness to let Noah show him what he liked with their kiss. He didn't want a peck or a tease. He wanted Cain to take his mouth. He whimpered and Cain chuckled.

"Put your arms around my waist, Noah," Cain commanded him.

Noah embraced the muscular body next to him, resting his hands on the small of Cain's back. He allowed Cain to tilt his head and waited.

Cain stared down at him for a second. "Stunning." The word wafted over his lips as Cain took his mouth.

This was what Noah wanted and needed. No asking. Only demanding. He opened his mouth to accept the onslaught. With this second kiss, Cain took him like he was the enemy he wanted to subdue. All Noah could do was hold on and weather the storm.

Cain nibbled and bit his lips, soothing them with swipes of his tongue. The little stings of pain caused heat to race down Noah's spine and pool in his groin. His moan encouraged Cain to move. Instead of lying Noah down, Cain leaned back and Noah found himself sprawled on top of Cain, his hands buried in Cain's short hair. Cain kept one hand buried in the curls at the nape of Noah's neck and he squeezed Noah's ass with his other hand.

Their erections bumped together and Noah gasped, rocking his hips to get more friction. Cain growled and thrust his tongue in Noah's mouth, tempting him to play. He took Cain up on the invitation. Sucking on Cain's tongue, he ground their cocks together, silently cursing the barrier of their clothes.

Soon he became caught up in the sensations of bodies pushing together; of mouths feeding from each other. He could feel his climax building up in his balls. Noah wanted to come. It had been several months since he'd had a body to rub against or kiss.

Cain pulled away, chest heaving. The desire and wildness in his eyes belied the suddenly gentle touch of his hands. Noah frowned. A soft smile played along Cain's kiss-swollen lips.

"I think we might be moving faster than I planned." Cain shifted so Noah was sitting on his lap. His arms wrapped around Noah, holding him close, but in a caring way instead of sexual.

"You want me. I know it." Noah wiggled over the hard bulge under his ass.

"I do want you, probably more than I've ever wanted anybody," Cain admitted. "But I don't think either of us is ready for this. I don't want to rush into something before we get to know each other."

Noah stared at Cain in confusion. He'd never had a date stop when it looked like sex was being offered. It intrigued him. Dropping his head, he rested his forehead against Cain's chest and breathed deeply. Silence filled the room, letting their pulses calm and their lust ease.

Cain stroked up and down Noah's back, soothing and not trying to arouse him. Noah sighed as tiredness began to sink in. Cain stood up, steadying Noah as he set his feet on the floor.

"You're tired. You've been working long hours at the lab. Go home and get some sleep, Noah. This thing between us isn't going to be over with any time soon. I'm patient

enough to wait until it feels right for both of us.”

Noah let Cain lead him to the front door and help him on with his coat. They stood just inside the house. Noah looked up at Cain and saw an emotion flash in the man’s eyes he couldn’t describe.

“Will you have lunch with me tomorrow?”

He nodded. Noah knew he should feel insulted or rejected by Cain’s putting a halt to their petting session, but somehow he trusted Cain was telling him the truth. For some reason, Cain wanted to go slow. He didn’t want Noah for just a one-night stand.

“Thank you. Now be careful driving home. Will you call me when you get back to LeClair’s? I’d like to know you made it back okay.” Cain dug through the drawers of the table in the hallway. He handed Noah a card. “It has my cell number on it. Keep it and use it whenever you feel like it.”

Cain stayed on the porch, watching Noah walk to his car. Noah got the feeling it was because if Cain escorted him out, the man wouldn’t have been able to resist kissing him again.

Starting the car, he looked through the windshield and a shiver traced down his spine. Cain was a shadow, backlit by the light shining out from the door. Noah’s mind flashed to Lord and for a brief moment, he wondered if the hired killer was still alive.

Cain lifted a hand and went back inside. Noah pulled out of the driveway, already looking forward to tomorrow and lunch.

\*

He watched the car drive away. That had been a smart move. *Send the guy home wanting more and guarantee he’d be willing to go a little farther the next time.* He moved away from the window and moved back toward the road. *Fuck, that kiss was hot.*

Seeing that embrace helped clear up why-or how Noah had survived the hit out on him and it might explain where those missing files had gone.

He’d kept his ear open for rumors concerning him or the Wiltson job, but so far there was only silence, which was the way he wanted it. He’d built a reputation of never stopping once he took a job, but with a little encouragement, he had been convinced to walk away from this assignment.

Was it time to think about getting out of the game, and if people were talking about him, it would be that much harder to get out.

## Chapter Four

### Friday

Cain walked into the cafeteria at LeClair's Research Facility. He searched the crowd for Noah's blond hair. A group of lab assistants moved and he saw his date standing near the doors leading out to the patio, talking to a redhead. The woman threw back her head and laughed. Cain bit back the possessive growl threatening to burst from his lips. *Mine*, he snarled silently.

He stalked across the room, easing between Noah and the woman, making sure her hand dropped away from Noah's arm. Cupping Noah's elbow, he tugged the smaller man towards the doors. Cain's glare made the woman pale and step back.

"Slow down, Cain. Is there an emergency somewhere?" Noah's laugh was breathless.

Stopping next to the table he'd had set for their lunch, he looked down at Noah's sparkling blue eyes. Cain took a deep breath. *Shit*. He needed to get a grip on his emotions. He'd never dragged anyone off like that, proclaiming to everyone who saw that Noah was his and his alone. Dropping Noah's elbow, Cain jammed his hand through his hair.

"Sorry. Not sure what got into me there. Must be eager to have you all to myself." He winked.

Noah ducked his head and blushed. He caught sight of the elegant table settings. Cain chuckled as Noah shot him a wide-eyed glance.

"This is rather fancy for lunch." Noah nodded towards the china plates and crystal wine glasses.

Cain pulled out a chair for Noah, resisting the urge to bury his face in Noah's golden curls when Noah sat down in front of him. Taking his time, he made his way around to his chair. His back faced the wall, giving him an unobstructed view of Noah, and anyone else approaching the table.

Lifting the covers off the plates, he smiled. "We didn't have that romantic dinner I had planned when I asked you out. I thought I'd show you I could do something nicer than a quick steak."

Noah studied the grilled salmon on his plate before meeting Cain's eyes. "You don't have to go to all this trouble to impress me."

"Yes, I do." Cain poured some wine into Noah's glass, ignoring Noah's protest. "Just one glass. I won't get you drunk, I promise."

He set the bottle down and reached out to touch Noah's hand. "I told you this was more than just a one-night stand for me. Call me foolish or crazy, but I felt a connection to you the moment I met you at the party. I think we could end up meaning a lot to each other, but only if we take it slow."

Noah entwined his fingers with Cain's. "I've never had any sort of relationship before. I'm not sure how to go about having a boyfriend."

"Don't worry. I'll take care of you, Noah. I won't let anyone hurt you." Cain squeezed Noah's hand quickly before letting go. "Now eat up. I don't want the food to

get cold and I know you have an important meeting this afternoon.”

Noah nodded and picked up his fork. Cain kept an eye on his soon-to-be lover, making sure Noah ate enough and didn't drink too much wine. He meant what he said to Noah. Cain would never let anyone hurt the younger man, even if it meant keeping his own urges tightly under wraps.

\*

Noah set his fork down and pushed his plate away. He glanced at Cain, blushing when he caught the man staring at him. Their conversation throughout lunch had been light. They discussed their jobs and things they had done that day. Noah could tell Cain was trying not to make him nervous. If Noah was honest with himself, it wasn't nerves he felt.

His gaze slipped to Cain's thin lips, remembering how they felt pressed against his last night. His cock hardened. Shifting, he tried to find room in his pants. The corner of Cain's mouth tipped up and Noah realized the other man knew what he was thinking.

“Never play poker, Noah. Your face gives you away every time.” Cain stood, offering Noah his hand.

Taking Cain's hand, Noah laughed. “I never could get away with anything. My father's housekeeper always knew when I was lying. Of course, I didn't lie very often.”

Cain's hand settled at the small of Noah's back and Noah found the weight comforting. He wanted to slip closer to Cain's muscular body. He wanted those strong arms wrapped around him again, but he restrained himself. Work wasn't the appropriate place for anything more intimate than a quick kiss or hug.

As he reached for the door leading back into the building, he felt Cain stiffen beside him. Shooting a quizzical look up, he saw Cain frown and glance behind them. Cain stopped him from going inside. He studied the area surrounding the garden, but couldn't find anything that would make Cain tense.

He noticed how Cain moved to stand between him and whatever perceived threat might be out in the woods that formed the perimeter of the outside courtyard. Cain's protective stance secretly thrilled a part of Noah. There was also an irritated part of him that said he could take care of himself and didn't need anyone guarding him.

Cain relaxed and turned to gesture for him to go inside. “I'll walk you to your lab.”

“You don't have to do that. I can take care of myself and no one's going to try anything inside the facility.” Noah winced. He sounded like a little kid asserting his independence.

A confused look raced across Cain's face for a second before he winked at Noah. “I know you can take care of yourself, Noah. I'm hoping to get a kiss from you when we're somewhere more private.”

“Oh,” was all Noah could think to say. He licked his lips and Cain moaned softly.

“Don't tempt me, babe. I don't think you want any public displays of affection, so I'm trying to be good.”

Noah ducked his head to hide his satisfied smile. It was nice to know he could put a dent in the controlled façade Cain presented to the world. His steps were lighter as he made his way through the crowd to the elevators. Cain's presence loomed behind him like a cat stalking his prey. A shiver ran down Noah's spine. Not from fear, but from desire.

They entered the elevator and Cain's cold stare kept anyone else from joining them.

The minute the doors shut, Noah found himself pinned to the wall and Cain's lips devouring his.

"Cain," Noah moaned, wrapping his arms around the man's shoulders and caressing the nape of Cain's neck.

Cain growled and bit Noah's bottom lip, soothing the sting with a swipe of his tongue. Noah gasped when Cain gripped his ass and lifted to fit their groins together. They rocked and rubbed. Noah lost track of his surroundings; his focus solely on Cain and where the man's body met his. Tongues stroked. Teeth nibbled. Hearts raced and lust built.

His air ran out at the same time the elevator made it to his floor. Cain set Noah back on his feet, holding him while he caught his balance. Noah caught sight of his face in the mirrored wall of the car and cringed. It wouldn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what he and Cain had been doing on the ride up. His lips were swollen. His clothes were wrinkled and slightly askew. His pants were tented by the raging hard-on he had.

"Shit, I have a meeting in five minutes. I hope I left a lab coat in my office," he mumbled. "I hope you're proud of yourself." He glared at Cain.

Cain's chuckle sounded pleased. "I am. And I'm in the same boat as you, Dr. Wiltson, but I don't have a lab coat to cover my problem."

Noah's gaze dropped to where the bulge in Cain's pants spoke of Cain's predicament.

"Good."

The elevator doors opened and he stepped out, turning to head to his office. Cain put out a hand to stop it from closing. Leaning out, he called to Noah.

"Call me tonight. I have a dinner meeting, but I'll be home later."

Noah waved, letting Cain know he heard him. He tried to act nonchalant about the whole situation, but part of him was twirling in silly circles at the idea of having a boyfriend—not just a fuck-buddy. He waited for the ding as the elevator doors shut before he did a little fist pump of excitement.

Stepping into his office, he managed to push Cain to the back of his mind and focus on the upcoming meeting. When his office door clicked shut, another door down the hall closed as well.

\* \* \* \*

Cain tossed his phone on his desk. He'd finished his last conference call. Now he could focus his attention on the uneasy feeling he got earlier that day when he and Noah were leaving the garden after lunch.

All of his instincts had screamed that someone had been watching them. After leaving Noah on his floor and reaching his own office, he sent out two of his men. They reported not finding anything suspicious, but Cain still wasn't happy.

Standing, he clipped his phone and pager to his belt. He'd go check the garden out himself. Unlike the security guards who worked at the research facility, he'd spent most of his adult life hunting people. All those skills didn't disappear simply because he'd found a private sector job.

A thought crossed his mind. As he waited for the elevator, he dialed his phone.

"Burke," he asked, when the phone was answered.

"Yeah."

“Where are you?” He stepped into the elevator car and pushed the ground floor button.

“Doing what you hired me for. Sitting outside a day care center.” Burke sounded slightly annoyed.

“It’s not any different than you guarding the president’s grandkids.” Cain watched the numbers descend on the panel. “Is everything cool?”

“The same as this morning when I checked in. What’s up?” Burke’s voice was alert, like he could tell Cain was on edge.

“Not sure. Keep your eyes peeled for any strangers who look out of place.”

The elevator stopped and he stepped out, heading towards the doors to the garden.

“You think someone’s going to move against Wiltson or the kid?”

Cain heard a sound over the phone of a car door opening. He figured Burke was getting out to walk around the block where the day care was situated.

“All my nerve endings are shouting, Burke. Not sure what’s going to happen, but I have a feeling.” He paused by the doors.

“That’s good enough for me. More than once your instincts saved my ass. I’ll tighten the shifts and alert the guys. I’ll check in tomorrow morning and let you know if we see anything.”

“Thanks, Burke. I know you’ll take care of the kid and her moms. Be careful.”

Cain hung up and attached the phone on his belt. He pushed the doors opened, heading towards the corner where he and Noah ate earlier. With that table as his center point, he moved left to right, extending his search slowly.

There was a small grove of trees thirty yards away. Cain stepped among the trees and knew he’d found the spot. He stared down at the footprints. They were rather deep, so whoever the watcher was, the man had stood there for a while. Cain turned. The man had a direct line of sight to the table. If he had been looking to kill Noah, it would have been the perfect shot.

Cain shook his head. *No*. The watcher wasn’t interested in killing Noah. At least not at the moment. He was establishing patterns and seeing who Noah talked to and met with. If the shot was taken, it would be when Noah was alone, without any risk to the shooter. It was how Cain operated. He assumed this killer would be just as careful.

Pulling out his phone, he called the security center as he walked back to the building.

“It’s Packert. Where is Dr. Wiltson now?”

“He’s still in the conference room on the tenth floor, sir,” one of the security guards reported.

“Thank you.”

He hung up and decided to go check out Noah’s lab. He’d been working on updating the security procedures since he was hired. The watcher could have gotten into Noah’s lab and office. Cain wasn’t going to overlook that possibility. He would do whatever it took to keep Noah safe. More than Cain’s job was riding on it. Cain grinned. His pride wouldn’t be able to deal with losing Noah and he had the feeling his heart would take a hit as well.

\* \* \* \*

Noah shut the front door behind him with a sigh. Setting his briefcase down, he tugged off his coat and hung it up. The day had been busy and tiring. The only high

points had been lunch with Cain and getting a quick phone call from Cain letting Noah know Cain would call him later. He smiled. He was looking forward to that conversation.

“Noah, can you come in here before you go up to change for dinner?”

He frowned at the serious tone in his grandfather’s voice. “Sure, Grandfather.”

Johnson held open the door to Henry’s study. The butler nodded at Noah as he went past. Noah smiled back. He’d come to like Henry’s long-time employee.

“Would you like a drink?” Henry gestured to the decanters on the sideboard.

“Will I want one after you tell me what’s wrong?” Tension tightened his shoulders and he clenched his hands.

“Maybe.” Henry leaned against his desk and nodded to the chair in front of him. “Sit down, Noah.”

Noah sat on the edge of the chair. He didn’t like the look on his grandfather’s face. “Just tell me, Grandfather. Delaying it won’t make it sting anymore.”

“Cain thinks someone’s following or watching you.”

He sucked in a breath. Someone following him? Noah’s first thought was Lord. Had the assassin changed his mind and come back to finish the job? “How does he know that?”

“Packert doesn’t know for sure. His instincts are telling him something’s wrong.” Henry fidgeted, playing with a glass paperweight on the desk.

“Lindsey! Is she all right? Are she, Tabitha, and Rhoanna safe?” Noah reached for his phone. He had to call and warn them.

“They’re safe, Noah. Cain has some of his men keeping an eye on them. I have confidence those men will keep Lindsey and her mothers from harm.” Henry held a hand up to stop Noah from dialing. “Why don’t you call them tomorrow? We’ll arrange a meeting between Tabitha, Rhoanna and the head of their security detail.”

“I should warn them,” he murmured, his hands shaking.

“They are as safe as they can be for the moment. Let them have one more day of normality before we destroy their sense of security.”

Noah nodded slowly. “Okay, if you think it’s best.”

“It’s what Packert thought was best. He’ll be stopping by after his dinner meeting to discuss what we need to do to keep all of you safe.” Henry straightened. “Would you like that drink now?”

“Yes.”

He’d been naïve, he admitted silently. He allowed himself to believe he was safe. That the threat had disappeared and there was no reason to look over his shoulder or fear the shadows. A thought struck him.

“Grandfather, could the hired killer have lied?”

Henry handed him a glass of whiskey and frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Could he have lied? Said he wasn’t going to kill me, but really it was a ploy to get me to come here. Maybe he was hired to kill both of us and this was the easiest way to get us together.”

His grandfather shrugged. “It’s possible, I guess, but your father gains nothing from my death. Not even a sympathy vote. The public knows we’ve been estranged since your mother’s death. He can’t use you either. I informed him you were working for me now and that he should just leave you alone at the moment.”

Henry grasped Noah’s shoulder and squeezed. “Don’t panic, Noah. Between Packert,



you and me, we'll figure this out. Packert's not going to let anything happen to you. He's got a vested interest in you, plus the information in the briefcase you brought me has given us a little bit of leverage."

"Sure. I'm his boss's grandson. Doesn't look good to your employer if you let a family member get killed." His tone was bitter and he winced. "What was in that case?"

"I'm surprised you didn't read it."

"I didn't think it would be restful for my peace of mind to find out what was in it." Noah didn't regret not opening the briefcase.

"Probably not, but if you ever want to know, I'll tell you. As for Packert, I'm sure that's a small part of why he is going to bust his ass protecting you. The bigger part is the fact that he likes you, maybe as more than just a friend. If I'm right, then the kind of man Packert is means he'll take a bullet for you."

Noah shivered. "I don't want anyone to take a bullet for me. I'd prefer no one fired a bullet at me either."

"Of course not." Henry turned when Johnson stepped into the study. "Dinner, Johnson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on, son. Let's go have something to eat. Packert will be here before long and we'll figure this whole issue out." Henry walked away.

Noah glanced down at his wrinkled pants and shirt. "I should go change."

"Nonsense. It's just you and I tonight. No one to impress. I'm starving."

As odd as it seemed, Noah was hungry as well. Maybe the thought that Cain knew about the man watching Noah and had a plan on how to keep Noah safe gave him a sense of safety. No one was perfect and he knew Cain could make mistakes, but something told Noah his grandfather's words were true.

Cain would take a bullet for him if it came to that. Noah furtively wished it never would.

## Chapter Five

Cain stood on the front porch of LeClair's house, staring out into the darkness while he waited for someone to answer the door. Someone was out there, watching, and it annoyed him. He couldn't get a bead on whether it was him or Noah the watcher wanted.

His original assumption it was Noah was probably the right one, but he couldn't overlook the fact that it could be someone in his past coming for vengeance. Cain pinched the bridge of his nose and tried to ignore the pounding in his head. The only thing he could do was cover all the contingencies, hoping to keep Noah safe from any fall out.

"Mr. Packert." Johnson, LeClair's butler, opened the door and gestured for Cain to come in.

"Evening, Johnson."

"Master LeClair and Master Noah are in the living room."

He followed the older man to the back of the house where Noah and LeClair sat in a large room. He cringed when he saw the ceiling-to-floor windows dominating the architecture. Shaking his head, he stalked in.

"What the hell are you thinking?"

Henry stood slowly, offering his hand. "Packert, it's nice of you to drop by after your meeting."

Cain glared at his boss. "I told you someone was following Noah and what do you do? You have him on display in front of these windows."

Noah shifted, shooting a quick glance at the windows and then back at him. He could tell the younger man was worried. Good. Noah needed to be warned. Cain knew Noah was smart enough to figure out he should take precautions.

"Packert, do you really think I would risk my grandson's life like that?"

His boss' nonchalant attitude puzzled him. When Cain was hired, LeClair made sure to inform him of the trouble Noah had dealt with before coming to live with LeClair. Cain didn't think his employer had forgotten the dangers.

"I wouldn't think so, sir, but how do you explain this?" He gestured to the windows.

"One of my other research labs was under contract with the government. They wanted a stronger bullet-proof glass." Henry shrugged. "I guess they use it to protect the President or something. Anyway, when my scientists thought they'd perfected it, I had installed here. Then they tested it."

"Tested it?"

"Yes. They brought in the best snipers in the military and other agencies. They took shots from different distances. The glass would crack, but never broke. Not one bullet got through." Henry moved towards the side bar. "Would you like a drink?"

"Whiskey, straight up."

Sitting, he kissed Noah. Cain stroked a finger over Noah's cheek and smiled. "Did you have a good day?"

"Yes. Well, until I got home and Grandfather told me what you'd discovered."

Noah's blue eyes held a hint of fear and a lot of worry. "Are you sure Lindsey's safe?"

"I don't believe your daughter or her mothers are targets. First, I don't think anyone

has figured out you're related yet. Second, if they have, they're not interested in making a move on them. There's no true gain in it. Third, I have three of the best guys I know watching them. Nothing will happen to your friends, or your daughter." Cain picked up Noah's hand and pressed it to his chest. "I promise you. I won't let anything happen to your daughter."

He knew those were the words Noah had been waiting to hear by the way Noah's shoulders relaxed. Henry handed Cain his glass and Cain took it with his free hand. He wasn't going to let go of Noah. Cain met his boss' gaze. LeClair nodded.

"Noah, I'm tired. How about you, Packert and I meet tomorrow morning to discuss the security measures needed to keep you safe?" Henry winked at Packert.

Cain realized Noah's grandfather was leaving them alone. His mind began to race with thoughts. How far should he go? He had planned a slow seduction with several dates, lots of kissing and petting before taking Noah to his bed. The stalker forced Cain to reconsider the timetable. He wanted Noah to share his bed at night. His presence was the only absolute way he could keep Noah safe. He didn't trust any of his men to care as much about Noah's life as he did.

"That's fine with me. Good night, Grandfather." Noah smiled up at LeClair, but didn't let go of Cain's hand.

He didn't bother drinking his whiskey. He set it on the coffee table and waited until LeClair left the room. Wrapping his arm around Noah's waist, he pulled the smaller man onto his lap and took those plump lips. His decision had been made. Unless the watcher decided to make a move tonight, Cain would be sharing Noah's bed.

Noah's gasp allowed Cain to take the kiss deeper. He thrust his tongue in, stroking and teasing Noah's into playing with him. Cain cradled Noah's ass in his hands and massaged the firm flesh.

It was his turn to moan as Noah wiggled, rubbing their groins together. Cain rocked and searched for more pressure. Noah gripped his shoulders and they moved, finding a rhythm that built the pleasure.

A noise in the hallway caused them to freeze. Noah's passion-glazed eyes met his and Cain couldn't help but laugh. He didn't plan on getting caught making out on the couch like teenagers.

"Take me to your bed."

It wasn't the most forceful order he'd ever given. He was still trying to calm his breathing and hoping he would be able to stand straight with the erection he sported.

Noah's flushed cheeks turned a brighter shade of red, but the younger man climbed off his lap and held out a hand. "Come on. There's no need to shock my grandfather or the help."

Cain let Noah steady him as he stood. He wrapped an arm around Noah's waist, pinning his lover to his side. Nuzzling Noah's curls, he whispered, "I want to feel you around me."

The shudder wracking Noah's body made Cain smile. He didn't want Noah to think. He wanted the handsome man thinking only about him and the climax he was going to give Noah. By doing that, Cain accomplished several of his goals. Fucking Noah was top of the list, but being with the man to keep him safe was close to the top as well. The best way to keep his lover safe was to invade every aspect of Noah's life. As Noah's lover, Cain would have access to Noah's private life as well as his work environment.

“Going to bed, Master Noah?”

Johnson’s question made Noah jump. Cain realized Noah hadn’t known the butler was in the hallway. He was going to have to teach Noah some simple observation skills. It would make it a little harder for people to sneak up on the man.

“Yes, Johnson.” Noah sounded embarrassed.

“You’ll be staying the night, Mr. Packert?”

“Yes, Johnson. Set the alarm and lock up.” He steered Noah towards the stairs.

“Very good, sir. Have a good night.”

Cain heard the smile in Johnson’s voice, but knew if he looked at the butler, there wouldn’t be a hint of it on the older man’s face. He figured he’d gotten Johnson’s approval, which was good since he planned on being around the house as much as possible.

He waited to hear Johnson’s footsteps heading down the hallway towards the front of the house before he bent down and picked Noah up. Noah squeaked.

“I think I can make it upstairs on my own,” Noah protested.

“I know you can, but I thought it would be more romantic and quicker if I carried you.” He winked. “I’m impatient.”

Noah blushed, but a slight frown marred his forehead.

“What’s wrong?” He made it to the top of the stairs and hesitated, not wanting Noah to know he knew exactly which room was the younger man’s.

“You weren’t impatient last night.” Noah nodded towards the first door on the right.

“Oh sure, now you’re questioning my attempt at being noble.” Cain nudged open the door and kicked it shut behind him. He let Noah slide down his body, making sure Noah felt the hard-on he still had.

“No. It’s not that.” Noah pressed his hands to Cain’s chest, staring up at him in earnest. “I guess I’m just a little unsure.”

He took a hard quick kiss, leaving Noah blinking up at him in surprise. “Don’t be unsure, honey. I wanted you badly last night, but I was trying to prove I didn’t just want sex. That I wanted all of you, not just your body.”

“Okay.” Noah blinked again.

Cain knew the guy’s mind was muddled from the kiss and that’s what he wanted. “Let’s discuss this later. Right now, I want us naked and in your bed.”

He gave Noah a little push towards the bed on the other side of the room. He could see Noah shut off the questions and lock them up somewhere in his mind for the night. Cain gave a silent sigh. It wasn’t going to be easy to continue hiding anything from Noah. Keeping secrets was an occupational hazard, but Cain had a feeling Noah was going to demand everything from him and he wasn’t going to be able to resist for long.

Cain started unbuttoning his shirt. “Do you have stuff?”

Noah unzipped his pants and stopped. “Stuff?”

“You can’t be that innocent. A stud like you has to have had sex before.”

A surprised but pleased expression came and went on Noah’s face. “Oh, that kind of stuff.” Going to the bedside table, Noah opened the drawer. “I have lube. No condoms though.” Disappointment colored Noah’s voice.

“Good thing I was a Boy Scout then.” Cain pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and removed the condom packet he’d tugged in there earlier that day. “Always be prepared.” He tossed it to Noah.

"That sure of me?" Noah smiled.

"Not sure. Just hopeful." Cain finished undressing and prowled towards Noah.

"You're not naked yet."

Noah's eyes were riveted to Cain's groin. Cain groaned as he felt the heat of Noah's stare. His cock twitched and swelled. He invaded the younger man's personal space. Taking Noah's hand, he wrapped it around his cock and showed Noah how he liked to be stroked.

Being able to compartmentalize helped. He focused on getting Noah stripped and on the bed while Noah played with his prick. The lube had been tossed on top of the covers along with the condom. When Noah was naked, Cain eased the blond onto his hands and knees in the middle of the bed.

"Enough of that for now. I'll come and I want to be inside you when I do," he murmured.

Cain trailed one hand over the smooth expanse of back and ass he'd been presented with. Noah's skin was soft and flushed with desire. Cain ripped open the foil packaging and pulled the rubber out. He rolled it on his cock with a moan. The touch of his own hand almost drove him over the edge.

With protection taken care of, he picked up the tube and set out to make sure Noah was ready for him. He spread Noah's firm ass cheeks and squeezed the slick out. When he had enough, he set the tube to the side. He coated his fingers and started massaging Noah's opening, easing one finger in slowly, an inch at a time.

"Cain," Noah mumbled, face pressed into his pillows.

The way Noah was pushing back told Cain he wasn't hurting his lover. Soon one became two and Noah was fucking himself on Cain's fingers. Cain did his best to nail Noah's gland every chance he got. Sweat began to cover Noah's skin and Cain felt it bead on his own chest.

"Soon, Cain. You need to be in me now." Noah braced his body on one hand and reached back, unerringly finding Cain's cock.

Cain let the younger man guide him. When the blunt head of his prick rested at the puckered opening of Noah's body, Cain stilled.

"Are you sure, Noah?" It killed him to ask, but he had a momentary attack of conscience. Cain needed to know this was what Noah wanted, not something he was unknowingly forcing on the man.

"Jesus, Cain. Fuck me already."

Noah's exasperated tone made Cain chuckle.

"All right."

With one hard fast thrust, he buried himself balls deep in Noah's ass. Their cries mingled together as their bodies learned the feel of each other. Noah's inner muscles gripped Cain's cock like the tightest vice and Cain felt his control shatter.

"Sorry," he whispered, before pulling out and slamming back in.

He didn't know if Noah heard his apology or not, but his lover moved, welcoming each thrust with moans and little pleas of his own. Cain's climax moved from his nerve endings to his groin in a flash flood of pleasure. He peeled one hand off Noah's hip to reach around and take Noah's cock in a firm grasp.

"Come," he ordered, his voice harsh.

"Yes."

Noah's shout was accompanied by wet heat splashing over Cain's hand. Noah's climax caused his ass to clamp down on Cain's prick, milking Cain's own pleasure from him.

"Fuck," Cain grunted, as he filled the condom.

As the last wave of passion drifted away, Noah collapsed on the bed and Cain fell, covering the smaller man with his own body. Safe, Cain thought.

"Stay," Noah murmured, as Cain started to roll off him.

"Let me clean us up." He ran his hand over Noah's shoulder before climbing out of the bed and locating the bathroom.

He took care of the condom and washed up. Wetting a cloth, he went back to Noah and wiped him down. Cain took the washcloth back to the bathroom. When he came back, Noah had pulled the comforter to the foot of the bed and lay under a couple of blankets. Slipping in beside Noah, Cain wrapped his arm around Noah's waist and snuggled up against the younger man, chest to back.

He brushed a kiss over the nape of Noah's neck. "Sweet dreams, Noah."

Noah patted his hand where it rested on Noah's stomach. "You too, Cain."

A wry smile drifted over Cain's face. His dreams were never sweet. They tended to be nightmares more often than not. He'd grab what sleep he could and then go out to look over LeClair's grounds. He had to familiarize himself with the layout, finding all the likely spots where a sniper might lie in wait. Every instinct he'd gained during his years as a government agent warned him that Senator Wiltson wasn't going to give up without a fight. A man with the kind of secrets he had to hide couldn't risk being discovered.

Noah's soft breathing lulled him. Cain closed his eyes. Might as well take advantage of his exhaustion for some sort of rest.

\* \* \* \*

Noah rolled over, reaching out for Cain. When his hand touched empty sheets, he opened his eyes. He sat up and searched the room with his gaze. Cain was nowhere to be found. Noah rubbed his hand over his face while he thought.

Cain had told Johnson he was staying the night, so the man wouldn't have gone home. Would he? Noah wasn't sure. A voice in his head asked him what he knew about the man. Just because Grandfather vouched for him didn't mean Cain was completely innocent.

The way Cain moved and made decisions reminded Noah of the Secret Service agents who guarded his father. They were always looking beyond the person beside them. Ready for any emergency, they never completely relaxed. Cain had that same in-grained readiness. Noah wondered where Cain got his experience from.

"You're thinking too hard for so late at night."

He jumped when Cain's voice drifted over from the windows. He looked up and saw a silhouette. Noah gasped, his mind shooting back two months to the night his life changed.

Cain knelt on the bed and took Noah's hand. "Are you all right?"

"Y-y-es," Noah stuttered.

"Take a deep breath. Close your eyes for a second." Cain's other hand cradled Noah's face, warm and strong.

He did what his lover told him. His heartbeat slowed and his shaking eased. Looking

into Cain's silver eyes, he saw concern dancing along the surface, but hidden beneath that emotion was the steady stare of a predator. A shiver crawled down his spine. Was he the prey or did Cain look at everyone the same way—like a lion watching a gazelle?

"Better?"

Noah nodded.

Cain brushed a thumb over Noah's bottom lip. "I didn't mean to startle you. I couldn't sleep, so I got up to get a drink and got caught up watching the moonlight move across the fountain."

He had the feeling Cain wasn't telling him everything, but at the moment, he didn't want to know if there had been someone outside. He would ask in the morning when the sunshine burned away the shadows.

"It's okay. You just jogged a memory." He nuzzled into Cain's hand, enjoying the feeling of rough skin against his.

"Must have been one hell of a memory if it freaked you out that badly."

Noah knew Cain wouldn't push him if he said he didn't want to talk about it. Of course, by now his grandfather probably told Cain all about the would-be assassin when he hired the man. That had to be the reason why Cain's men were watching over Lindsey.

"Two months ago, I came home late one night to find a man in my apartment. He was there to kill me." He shuddered.

Staying silent, Cain wrapped his arms around Noah and pulled him onto his lap. Noah leaned his head against Cain's chest, allowing Cain to make him feel safe.

"Obviously he didn't."

Noah heard the smile in Cain's voice.

"You're right. He didn't. For some reason, he decided he wasn't going to kill me. I don't know if he wanted to show his handlers he wasn't their pet killer anymore or if he didn't like my father's brand of politics." Noah shrugged. "I guess it doesn't matter why he chose not to do it. He left me a folder and said the information in it would keep Lindsey and me safe from any more threats. I never looked at the stuff. None of this makes sense, except my father wants the sympathy vote."

Cain shifted. "I've seen the file, Noah. I know what's in it and he was right—to a certain extent."

"What do you mean?" He pushed away a few inches so he could look up into Cain's eyes.

"As long as your father isn't feeling desperate, those papers might keep you safe. The minute he starts feeling the heat, or fears losing this election, he'll come after you. I don't have any doubt about that." Cain's jaw tightened. "A man who would kill his own son won't let blackmail stop him."

"Oh God, Lindsey." Noah tensed, ready to jump from the bed and call Tabitha to warn her.

"Hush, baby. Your daughter is fine. My best men are looking after her and if they think there's a threat, they'll pick them all up and bring them here." Cain stroked Noah's back. "Your grandfather's house is a fortress disguised as a showplace. I don't know of many men who would break in here."

"How many are out there who could?" Noah wasn't sure he wanted to know the answer.

"Besides me?"

He didn't know if Cain was teasing him or not, so he stayed quiet.

"Two. Maybe three." Cain's gaze wandered over to the window. "They're really expensive though. I'm not sure your father would spend the kind of money needed to buy them. There was one. He was the best at everything. Nothing stopped him once he got the assignment. He was a legend in the business."

"Was? And how do you know all of this?"

"I wasn't always the head of security at a research facility, Noah. I needed to know where the danger was coming from and who to look for. I won't apologize for that because those very skills will keep you safe."

Noah pressed his ear to Cain's chest, listening to the man's steady heartbeat as he thought. Cain was right. Whatever he was or did before he came into Noah's life didn't matter. That life served to make him a man Noah could respect and like. Though Noah had a feeling his emotions were stronger than simply liking Cain.

"Was a legend because he dropped out of sight about six months ago. No one's heard even a hint of where he might be or what he's doing. It's possible he's dead now."

There was a hint of sadness in Cain's words. Almost like Cain missed the man he was talking about. Noah wanted to ask more about that, but Cain tilted his chin up and kissed him, driving all thoughts and questions out of his head.

Cain broke the kiss off right when Noah's lungs started to burn from lack of air. Reeling from desire, Noah didn't protest as Cain tugged him down on the bed. Cain curled up behind him. Noah's back to Cain's chest and Cain's arm rested heavy around Noah's waist.

"But?"

"Hush. It's late and you've had a shock. Rest now and I'll wake you up properly in the morning." Cain brushed a kiss over the nape of Noah's neck. "Besides, anticipation will make it sweeter."

Noah sighed. He didn't like waiting. He rather liked instant gratification, but he knew he wouldn't be able to change Cain's mind. He stifled a yawn.

"Sleep well, love."

He smiled at the endearment and settled into the mattress, trusting Cain to keep him safe.

\*

A figure emerged from the shadows of the large oak guarding the edge of the garden. He stared up at the window he'd already established was Noah's. He was happy to see Packert with Wiltson. He'd been a little surprised to see the man look out into the night, right at the oak, like he knew the watcher stood there.

He shrugged. Maybe the man did know. Cain Packert was the best at what he did, or used to do. He'd been surprised when he got the information that Cain had resigned and came to work for LeClair. A research facility in the Cascade Mountains of Washington didn't seem like the best use of Packert's talent. The security officer could command a seven figure payment if he'd chosen to go freelance. Was it possible that Packert had anything to do with the files missing from his apartment all those months ago?

The information he'd compiled on Packert told him very little about the man actually. Seems the man's past was as dark and shady as his own. Yet all his informants told him Packert could be trusted to keep Noah safe and he admitted to himself that it was the most important thing because he wasn't ready to refund any payment he received



regarding the Wiltson case.

The watcher shifted, wincing at the pull of his newly healed side. The stitches had come out two days ago, but there was still some weakness in the muscles there. It wouldn't stop him from doing his job. It was just another factor he would have to take into account if anything happened.

He slid through the darkness. There was no sign of his passing. A feeling or instinct tugged at him. Something was building. He could almost taste the tension in the air. There was someone else watching Noah. He had to figure out who it was and stop them before they made a move. It was time. He'd come in from the cold and let Packert know he was around.

Glancing back one final time, he saw a shape standing at Noah's window again. He couldn't say later on why he did it. He took a step into the moonlight, letting the silver beam wash over his face. Raising a hand, he acknowledged Packert. Packert straightened, but didn't move except to raise a hand in return.

The game had begun.

## Chapter Six

### Next morning

Cain nodded at LeClair as the older man joined Noah and him at the breakfast table.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” Henry greeted them.

“Sir.” Cain sipped his coffee.

Noah’s cheeks turned slightly pink, but he smiled. “Grandfather.”

“I’m glad we could meet before we went to the facility.” Cain gestured for LeClair to take a seat. “I have what may sound like a strange question, Noah, but did the man sent to kill you tell you his name?”

Frowning, Noah eyed him. “Yes. He said it was Lord.”

A quick shock of excitement chased through Cain.

“Why do you want to know, Packert?” LeClair’s blue eyes were faded versions of Noah’s.

“Noah, remember last night I told you that there were may be two or three men who could break into your grandfather’s house?”

Noah nodded.

“How one of them dropped off the radar about six months ago?”

Again Noah nodded. LeClair ate calmly, waiting for Cain to explain.

“That man’s name was Lord. He was the man hired to kill you.”

“It doesn’t make sense. If he dropped ‘off the radar’, why or how did he show up in my apartment two months ago?” Noah ran a finger around the lip of his mug.

Cain stood and moved to the window, his gaze drawn to the spot where he’d seen the man standing the night before.

“All my informers and contacts say Lord accepted a huge contract a couple of days before he disappeared. No one could or would tell whether that disappearance was voluntary or not.” He tried to keep his emotions out of his voice.

“Why should it matter?” LeClair looked puzzled. “This Lord man was hired to kill my grandson. For some reason, he chose not to, which I’m grateful for, but what does that have to do with us?”

“He’s back, isn’t he?”

Noah’s soft question caught Cain’s attention. He turned to look at his lover. He wouldn’t lie to Noah, not about this. “Yes.”

A loud clatter drew their eyes to Henry. Cain’s employer seemed flustered.

“He didn’t kill Noah. He walked away. Why would he come back?”

Cain studied LeClair. There was something else lurking behind the man’s eyes besides fear for Noah. Cain made a mental note to send one of his men digging deeper into the old man’s past.

“Once this guy is contracted, nothing can tear him from the job. He’ll keep working on it until it’s complete.” Cain shrugged. “I don’t know why he chose not to complete his original assignment, but I don’t think his reappearance is an imminent threat to Noah.”

“But he was hired to kill me,” Noah pointed out.

“I know and he walked away from you. That tells me there’s something else in play

here that we don't know about." He rubbed the back of his neck, debating whether to break his oath or not. What the hell? It didn't matter anymore. "In the file Lord gave you, there was information on another murder that your father hired done. The victim was the son of a federal judge and I'd bet everything I owned that the killer was Lord."

Noah's face paled. "He killed a judge's son?"

"Yes. He made it look like an accident, which really isn't his M.O., but it was what the client wanted." Cain walked to Noah and sat down next to him. He took the younger man's hand. "I think that we need to look beyond your father. Lord is here and he isn't a threat to you. Trust me on that. We've been missing an important clue, but I plan on finding it and taking out the danger to you."

"How do you know he's not a danger to me?" Noah's fingers closed tight around Cain's hand. "He's a killer. He obviously doesn't have any ethics or morals."

Cain stroked his thumb over Noah's white knuckles. "I saw him last night."

Both Noah and LeClair stiffened.

"He was in the garden. I saw him from Noah's window. He wanted me to see him. Not as a warning. If he was going to hurt you, Noah, he would never have let me see him."

"Why do you know so much about him?" LeClair stared at him with suspicion.

This was something he wasn't willing to tell them. The truth was far more complicated than they needed to know. "He's the best in his field. I am—or was—the best in mine. It pays to know the competition."

He brought Noah's hand to his mouth. A lifetime of lies and truths were hidden by those words and nothing short of death would ever get him to reveal them.

Noah shivered as Cain's lips caressed his hand. He stared into those silver eyes and realized he didn't know anything about this man. His instincts said Cain wasn't out to hurt him, but how much should he trust those? Heck, he never expected his father would try to have him killed or that his father would have anyone killed.

In a way, it was too late. He'd already slept with Cain once and his body—at least—wanted another round or twelve. No matter what happened. Whether he chose to back away or continue the relationship, he was going to be hurt. His heart was involved in a frightening way. He mentally shook his head. Just because his grandfather trusted the man to work for him didn't mean Cain was entirely trustworthy.

Noah got the feeling his grandfather knew more about the whole situation than the older man was telling. Noah didn't know how to deal with it. He wasn't in a position at the moment to demand the truth from either man.

Standing, he tugged his hand free of Cain's and headed out of the room.

"Where are you going?" Cain followed.

"I have to get to the lab. I have some important tests I need to start today." He pulled on his coat and picked up his briefcase.

"I'll drive you in." Cain nodded his thanks to Johnson as the butler handed him his overcoat.

"You don't have to do that." He really didn't want to share a vehicle with the man until he figured things out in his mind. He sighed. Why couldn't he ever have an uncomplicated relationship? Noah was sure there were people somewhere in the world that didn't have so much baggage in their lives.

"I know I don't, but I'd like to. Besides, it affords you more protection."

Cain joined him on the front steps of the house. He turned, put his hand on Cain's chest and pushed the bigger man away.

"No. I'm capable of getting to the labs without a bodyguard. I think we need to take a day away from each other, Cain."

Frowning, Cain studied him with a narrowed silver gaze. "What happened?"

"Nothing, except I suddenly realized I don't know anything about you. You've been given unlimited access into my life, but all I know about you comes from my grandfather and the little you've chosen to tell me." He moved, taking the steps two at a time and stalking to his car.

"Noah?" Cain's question held confusion.

He sighed and looked back at Cain. "If we chose to make this more than a short sex fling, then we can't keep secrets from each other and you're full of secrets, Cain. I can tell from the darkness in your eyes. I've always accepted what was given to me. Never asked for more because I didn't think I deserved it, but no more. I'm not taking the little bits and pieces you're handing out like candy. I want it all or nothing." He rubbed his chest where his heartbeat raced. "It won't hurt any less now than if I discovered the truth two years from now, but it'll insure I don't waste my time on a relationship that's not going to last."

"You want promises?" Cain glared at him. "I won't do it. There are things I can't tell you, Noah, and things I won't tell you. Simply because you don't need to know them or they'll hurt others besides me. The possibility that I could come to love you is real, but you have to trust me. I know what's best for you."

Noah laughed. "I'm not a child. I'm the only one who knows what's best for me. You don't have any right to make that decision. Even if we were partners, you still wouldn't have that right."

"There are things in my past that have no bearing on you or where my life is at this point in time. I can't break oaths or promises I made. Would I be a man you'd want to see if you knew I broke them because of some piece of ass I wanted at the moment?"

He cringed at the harsh words. "Fine. I suggest we take a day or two to think about where we want this thing between us to go. I wouldn't want you to ruin your morals or ethics over some piece of ass."

Climbing in his car, he ignored Cain's yell. His eyes welled with tears, but he managed to get the vehicle started and drove away. *Damn*. That entire conversation had hurt, but he was glad he did it. For too long, he'd let people walk over him and drifted on whatever current seemed easiest. No longer. Even if it meant he had to let Cain go, he wouldn't accept anything less than everything the man had.

\* \* \* \*

"Dr. Wiltson, there's someone here to see you."

Noah sighed as his lab assistant interrupted his measuring. "Ivan, I told you not to interrupt me. This experiment is very important."

"I know, sir, but he insisted." There was a hint of fear in Ivan's voice.

Frowning, Noah set the glass on the table and turned to look at the younger man. "Who is it?"

"I can't say."

"Is it Mr. Packert?" He wouldn't put it past Cain to intimidate his workers.

Ivan shrugged. Noah was puzzled. It didn't make sense. Noah asked Cain to back off and for most of the day, he hadn't heard anything from the man. It seemed strange that Cain would start playing games with him.

"All right. Finish getting this experiment going and I'll go talk to him."

He stripped off his goggles and gloves, tossing them on a table as he headed for his office. He pushed open the door and saw Cain standing by the window, back towards the room.

"Look, Cain, I told you I didn't want to see you for a while. We need to have some space for you to figure out whether you're going to trust me or not."

Cain turned and Noah froze, eyes wide and heart beating fast. *Shit*. It wasn't Cain. Same dark hair and silver eyes, but where Cain had a golden tan, this man's skin was pale like he'd been sick. Scars crisscrossed the man's face and neck. The man took a step towards him and Noah's knees buckled.

The stranger caught him by the arms and helped him to a chair. "I'm not Packert."

Noah jumped to his feet. "I know who you are."

"How?"

"I recognize your voice. You're Lord."

Lord nodded. "You're right."

"Are you here to kill me?"

Why was he talking instead of running? Where was Cain or the security guards? How had Lord gotten into the facility? Questions raced around his head like scared rabbits.

"No. If I was going to kill you, I would have done it by now and saved myself a lot of trouble and pain." Lord gestured to the chair. "Will you sit down before you fall over? I'm not really up to catching you."

"Um-m-m...okay." He sat on the edge of his seat. "Why are you here then?"

Lord shoved a hand through his long dark curls. One difference between them, Noah thought. Cain's hair was cut military short while Lord looked like he'd skipped a couple haircuts.

"How is it that you and Cain look so much alike? How can I be sure you're not here to finish what you started?" His hands trembled and he stuffed them under his thighs. "How did you get in here?"

Lord shot him a patronizing glance. "I'm the best at what I do. The kind of security you have here isn't tough enough to stop me when I'm determined to get where I want to go. As to why Packert and I look alike?" The assassin shrugged. "I don't know. That's a question I'd like to ask him."

"I don't get it. Why do you care? And what made you walk away from killing me?"

Lord rested a hip on the corner of Noah's desk and crossed his arms. He scowled at Noah. "Trust me. I didn't suddenly grow morals. There's only one thing that could have changed my mind about killing you and never came back to complete what I'd been paid for. The only reason I do this job period. You getting away the first time wasn't my idea actually."

A light bulb went off in Noah's head. "Money."

Lord grinned. "Got it in one."

"Someone paid you more money to not kill me than you were getting for killing me."

He watched Lord press a hand to his side and grimace.

“Who?”

“Don’t know and didn’t ask. What’s the point of hiring a hired gun if you’re going to tell him your name? The client contacted me on the side. Didn’t go through my handler, which made me happy. No commission for the bastard.” Lord dug through his coat pocket, pulling out a pill bottle and tapping one out in his hand. “You got anything to drink around here?”

“There’s water in the mini refrigerator.” He pointed to the small brown fridge in the corner, hating how his hands shook

Lord wandered over and pulled out a bottle of water. Noah watched in silence as the man swallowed the pill.

“What do we do now?”

Setting the bottle down on the desk, Lord picked up the phone and held it out to Noah. “Now you call Packert and get him in here. We need to talk.”

All hell was going to break loose when Cain realized Lord was in Noah’s office.

\*

“Mr. Packert, Dr. Wiltson is on the phone for you.”

Cain frowned at the intercom. He couldn’t have heard his secretary right. “Dr. Wiltson wants to talk to me?”

“Yes, sir. Should I tell him you’re busy?”

“No. I’ll take it.” He felt a frisson of worry. The way Noah acted this morning, Cain figured he wouldn’t hear from the man for several days. Lindsey and her moms were fine. Cain had talked to Burke earlier in the day to check. *Pick up the phone, coward. You’ll never know unless you talk to the man.*

“Packert,” he barked into the phone, irritated that Noah could make him this insecure.

“Mr. Packert, I was wondering if you could come to my office. I’d like to talk to you about something.”

Noah’s tone was formal. Cain had never heard him talk like that. All of Cain’s warning signals were firing.

“Certainly, Dr. Wiltson. Should I bring anything?”

The pause before Noah spoke again told Cain that someone was in the room with Noah.

“No. It’s a private meeting about what we discussed earlier this morning.”

Cain opened the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled out the 9mm he kept there. The clip was fully loaded. He tucked it at the small of his back before pulling on his coat.

“I’ll be right there.”

“Thank you.” Noah hung up.

He dropped the phone in the cradle and headed out of his office. They talked about two things that morning—Lord and Noah’s needing time to figure out where their relationship would go. Cain didn’t think Noah would be so formal and reserved if the man was just going to dump Cain. That meant it was Lord.

Rage swelled in him. *Fuck!* He kicked a trashcan as he passed. People scurried out of the way which was fine with him. He didn’t wait for the elevator. Taking the stairs down two at a time, he managed to stop from screaming. No matter how good Lord was, the killer shouldn’t have been able to make it inside the actual labs. Starting tomorrow, he would implement an entire overhaul of the security system at the facility.

When he got to the hallway where Noah's office was, he stopped and took several deep breaths. Bursting in like a bull in a china shop would only get him killed. He had no doubt that Lord really wasn't interested in hurting Noah. Hell, if he was, the man could have done it a hundred times before this, but Cain didn't have any illusions about the man killing him.

His pulse evened out and he tamped his anger down until all that was left was icy control. He would need that control more than ever in the next few moments. He knocked on the door.

"Come in," Noah called.

Pushing open the door, he stepped inside. He heard Noah's gasp, but his eyes fastened on the man leaning against Noah's desk.

Silver eyes met his. Cain knew that his carefully constructed world was going to shatter within minutes. All the lies and truths he'd discovered over the years and then buried under more lies had come home to roost. He fought the urge to turn and walk out of the room. He was caught between the need to keep Noah safe and the obsession to bury his secrets in the dark.

"Seems we have more in common than just our chosen professions."

Guilt welled up in Cain's soul at those words. He turned from the quiet speculation in Lord's eyes to the hurtful accusations in Noah's. Shaking his head, he moved towards the side bar all the offices at the facility had.

"Would you like a drink?" He really just wanted to drown himself in liquor until he passed out.

Both men shook their heads. He poured a shot of whiskey and tossed it back. As much as he wanted another one, he put the glass down and turned to face them.

"Most of the pictures I have of you were blurry, so I never noticed the resemblance. Who are you?" Lord sounded a little confused, but it didn't show on the killer's passive face.

He laughed harshly. "That's a good question. I've known who I was all my life, but I have the feeling you are far more in touch with your true self than I will ever be."

"Cain, what's going on?"

Shifting, he looked at Noah and shrugged. "I'm a little off balance here. I didn't expect Lord to walk in here and want to talk. I have to readjust my plan."

"Maybe you should start at the beginning."

Lord's suggestion was a good one, but Cain didn't want to tell either of them that particular story. Scrubbing a hand over his face, he realized he had no choice. Whether he was ready or not, it was time to talk about the past.

"Why don't you sit down next to Noah, Lord?" He gestured the empty chair. "I'm going to tell you a story."

Lord grimaced, pressing his hand to his side while he sat down. "I'm not sure we have time for stories, Packert. They're going to be coming for Noah."

He bristled at the concern in Lord's voice. *Oh no.* He wasn't going to be sharing Noah with anyone, much less the man hired to kill him.

"I think we have time for this." He paced in front of them, forming sentences in his head and discarding them.

"Why do you two look so much alike?" Noah's question gave him the opening he needed.

“I’ll explain.”

He stared in Lord’s eyes and thought that it had been thirty-one years since he’d seen those eyes outside of surveillance photos.



## Chapter Seven

Cain sorted through his thoughts, trying to figure out what he was going to say and how. If he was honest with himself, he never believed this moment would come. He had given up all hope of ever meeting Lord face-to-face.

“Cain?”

Noah spoke his name softly, drawing him out of his thoughts.

“My uncle adopted me when I was six. Unfortunately, I was forced to leave my younger brother behind at the foster home. See, my father never believed the boy was his, even though we both look exactly like him and my uncle developed the same irrational hatred towards the child.” He caught the quick glance Noah shot Lord. “Yes, Lord is my younger brother. Only when we were split up, his name was Jimmy.”

Lord’s facial expression didn’t change, but Cain saw the slight stiffening of the man’s shoulders. Would Lord blame him for the life the younger man had to live? He knew he felt guilty as soon as he realized what Lord had become.

“I tried running away. I decided I wasn’t staying with Uncle. My place was with Jimmy. I had promised my mother I would take care of him and I’d never broken a promise to her.” He paced in front of them.

“What happened to your parents?”

Again Noah’s question forced the issue. Time dulled much of the pain for Cain, but it still ached when he thought about that day.

“I don’t remember them.”

Lord’s admission shouldn’t have made Cain sad, but it did. Lord was only two when their parents died and most of those two years had been spent with Cain and a nanny as his only friends. Their father’s jealousy of the younger Packert child drove the man to ridiculous lengths to stay away from Lord. Father had forced their mother to abandon her son to the care of her oldest and Cain had only been four years old himself.

“Not surprising. It was a murder-suicide. Father wasn’t stable. He had violent mood swings. He never believed you were his son and to save you from his jealous rages, Mother gave you to a nanny. She told me I had to take care of you because I was your big brother. I rarely saw her after that and Father knew I was his. No one ever explained what set him off that day, but by noon, we were orphans.” He closed his eyes.

Maybe it had been the fact that day was Jimmy’s birthday. Cain never found out. He had discovered the bodies when he went searching for his mother. He wanted Cook to bake a cake, but needed his mother’s permission to ask. His mother had been shot in the back of the head, execution-style, and his father had swallowed the end of the pistol. Blood coated the walls and floors. He’d had nightmares for years, until his uncle had beaten them out of him and he learned not to cry.

“Uncle was on assignment overseas and they couldn’t get a hold of him right away. We spent two years in foster care until he came to get me. He believed Father’s rants about Jimmy, so he refused to take him. I tried to get back to find you. I couldn’t. Under Uncle’s rule, his word was law and I suffered the consequences until I learned how to play the game.”

More beatings until he paid lip service to the fact that he wasn’t supposed to look for

Jimmy. When he turned eighteen and entered the Marines, he spent every free moment looking for his brother. The foster system lost track of Jimmy when the child turned ten. He was told his younger brother ran away from the foster home and disappeared on the streets. Cain refused to believe the young man was dead. After he joined the CIA, he used the contacts he acquired to gather more information and the file he had on Lord broke his heart.

"I'm sorry," he apologized to Lord. "I should have tried harder to find you."

Noah stood, coming to him and placed his hand on Cain's arm. "You were so young, Cain. What could you have done?"

Logic told Cain he wouldn't have been able to do anything for Lord, but his heart told him he failed in his duty to keep his younger brother safe.

Lord frowned. "Sorry for what?"

He shot the other man an incredulous glance. "For not giving you a better life than you had. You must have had to endure terrible things to become what you are."

Lord burst out laughing and Cain wondered if his brother might not be a little crazy. Wiping the tears from his eyes, Lord shook his head.

"To be honest, I think I got the better part of the deal. At least, the guy I ended up with didn't beat me when I broke his rules. He taught me to use skills I already had and he helped me survive, but he didn't make me a killer. That was my choice." Lord winced and pressed a hand to his side again.

"Tell us your story," Noah demanded.

Lord shrugged. "Nothing exciting about it. Maybe you should sit down now, Packert, and I'll tell you about my life."

\*

Noah was in shock. How had all of this happened? The man hired to kill him was the brother of the man he wanted to love the rest of his life. He watched Lord stand with a grimace. He bit back the urge to ask if the man was all right. Lord could take care of himself.

"You seem more upset by this than I am." Lord shook his head. "And you knew about me all along."

Taking a look at Cain, Noah had to agree. Cain was pale and looked dazed. Noah wondered about that. If Cain knew what Lord did for a living, why did he look shocked? It didn't matter at the moment. He took Cain's hand, leading him to the chair Lord just left.

"Sit down. I'll get you a drink." He trailed his hand over Cain's shoulder before heading over to the side bar. He glanced at Lord, asking silently if the other man wanted a drink.

Lord shook his head. "I don't usually pass up good whiskey, Dr. Wiltson, but alcohol and pain meds don't mix. Besides I promised Mars I wouldn't drink."

"Mars?"

"A friend."

The smile racing across Lord's face told Noah Mars just might be more than a friend. He handed Cain his glass and sat down on the arm of the chair close to his lover.

"Go on with your story, Lord."

"I'm impressed with your composure, Wiltson. You're scared, but you're really holding it together." Lord's silver eyes studied him like he was a bug under a microscope.

The coldness in Lord seemed natural rather than created. Noah didn't have a problem believing Lord chose to become a hired killer instead of being forced into it.

"Why did you run away from the foster home you were in?" Cain's voice was low.

Lord thought for a moment before smiling. "I didn't fit in there. I think they were nice people."

"You think?" Noah couldn't help but interject.

"Sure. They didn't make much of an impression on me one way or the other. I ran away because I didn't want to be there and didn't see any reason why I should stay."

"You were a kid. Don't you think you should have been scared?" Cain's knuckles turned white as he gripped his glass.

Lord frowned. "I probably should have been, but I think that's the difference between you and me, Packert. I don't understand fear. I've never been afraid to die or to kill someone. I've always seen life as expendable. Mine or anyone else's. We all die at some point. There's no use in fighting that fact."

A soft groan hit Noah's ear and he looked to see Cain tense. Lord's words had hurt his brother somehow. Noah was tempted to tell Lord to leave, but he knew he couldn't protect Cain anymore than he could help Lord. The brothers needed to talk, even though there didn't seem to be any anger on Lord's part. There was a load of guilt weighing Cain down and Noah wanted it lightened in some way, but what did all of this new information mean for their relationship? Was it a real connection or had Cain initiated the contact because he knew that Lord would show up at some point?

He would discuss it with Cain after this situation got resolved.

"I lived on the streets until I was about fifteen. I did whatever I had to do to survive. No point in having morals or principals when you're starving." Lord stretched and walked around the office. "My boss found me one night just as winter set in. I'd pulled off a major robbery. Electronic goods too high-tech to fence, but I wanted to get them off my hands. I didn't have a place to store them and I never kept my haul more than a couple hours after the job."

*I'm out of my league*, Noah thought. Never in his life had he dreamed he would be in a room with a hired killer and... He glanced at Cain, not sure what Cain had been before he came to work for his grandfather.

"Boss grabbed me after the third time I tried to get rid of the stuff. He told me he'd give me a good price for the electronics, but he wanted to talk to me about doing some other jobs for him. He gave me a good price for them and I was intrigued. He told me he ran a service company."

Lord's chuckle caused cold shivers to run down Noah's spine.

"I was a street-wise kid. I knew 'service company' was a code word for sex ring. I wasn't having any of that. I wouldn't sell my body..."

"At least you drew the line somewhere," Cain snarled.

"I wouldn't sell my body and give that money to anyone else," Lord finished, like Cain never spoke. "So I said thanks but no thanks. The Boss laughed. He knew what I was thinking. He slapped my back and told that while I was a good looking kid, I wasn't friendly enough for his clients. He had something else in mind for me."

"Turning you into a killer?" Cain glared at his younger brother.

Two pairs of silver eyes clashed. Cain looked away first.

"How do you know I wasn't already one by the time he found me? It didn't matter. I

was bound to get caught eventually. He was offering me a way to make serious coin with less of a risk to my freedom.” Lord met Noah’s gaze. “I’m not stupid. I said yes.”

“Jimmy Packert no longer existed.” Noah felt sad for the young child who never seemed to have a chance to be normal.

“The child Packert knew never did exist, Wiltson. My older brother has created a fantasy of what kind of child I was and how I would have turned out if he had only saved me.” Lord faced Cain with a strange compassion in his cold eyes. “I’m sorry for disappointing you, but this is who I am and who I would have been anyway, even if you had been around all the time. The only difference is I would have been like you and been a sanctioned killer for the government instead of a contractor.”

Cain winced. A dim light went off in Noah’s brain. So Cain had been trained by the CIA to kill people and the man had the nerve to judge his brother for doing the same thing.

“It’s not the same thing,” Cain protested, in a strange way mirroring Noah’s thoughts. “You killed innocent people for money. I killed men who posed a threat to our country’s safety.”

“You choose to believe whatever lie lets you sleep at night, Packert. I don’t lie to myself. Not all the people I’ve killed deserved to die. I know that. I accept it and understand that if there is a hell, I’m going there.” Lord turned to face the window. “I’m not sure you’re the right one to judge me.”

“Was a killer what the Boss planned for you to train as?” Noah wanted the conversation to end. His head pounded. Too much information about these men danced in his head.

“No. Contract killers make the most money and that’s what I was interested in.”

“Money? I put your half of our inheritance in the bank. It’s waiting there for you to claim it. You don’t need money anymore.” Cain’s rushed statement seemed to be a desperate grasp to pull Lord off the path he was walking.

Shaking his head, Lord chuckled. “As we speak, money from hundreds of false accounts is filtering into one central account in Switzerland. I don’t need your money, Packert. You should have gone freelance. You would have made a ton of money with your talents.”

As much as Noah wanted to know who paid Lord not to kill him, he’d had enough. He pushed to his feet. Both men turned to watch him leave.

“Noah.”

“Wiltson.”

He stopped at the door and glanced back. The family resemblance was painfully obvious. Same dark hair. Same silver eyes, but Cain’s were filled with emotion—whether it was anger or caring, Noah couldn’t tell. Lord’s eyes were filled with unemotional curiosity. Both men were marked by their life. Cruel understanding marred Lord’s and Noah knew he would have picked Lord out as a killer the moment he laid eyes on him. At the moment, Cain looked like a man who’d been beaten by a terrible shock.

“You guys discuss the rest of this between you. I need time to think about it. I’m a chemical engineer. I’ve never had to deal with killers or men who value life so little, they don’t think twice before taking it.”

Cain took a step towards him. He held up a hand, stopping him.

“I explained why I didn’t want to see you earlier and that hasn’t changed either.”

“Be careful and keep your eyes open, Dr. Wiltson.” Lord wasn’t going to stop him. The killer seemed to understand what was going on in Noah’s mind. “Don’t go anywhere alone. It doesn’t have to be Packert or me. Just make sure other people are with you for now.”

He nodded and left. All he really wanted was to go back to his grandfather’s, crawl into bed and pull the covers over his head. He didn’t want to have to think about his lover being an assassin, even if it had been for the government. He made his way back towards his lab.

Opening the door, he stepped in and reached for the lab coat he’d left hanging to the door.

“Interesting set of friends you’re hanging out with, Son. Are they all fags like you?”

He whirled to see his father standing in the middle of his lab. He barely took in the destruction of glass and papers before two men grabbed his arms in vice grips. His father gestured for them to follow him and Noah was hauled along.

## Chapter Eight

Cain stared at his younger brother. What should he do now? He'd never had a situation like this. His first inclination was to follow Noah and shake him. Didn't the man understand the danger he was in?

"Why did you let him go?"

Lord raised an eyebrow. "Watch the tone you use with me, Packert."

"Tone?" Cain pointed at the door. "That man has no idea what he's up against. Like Noah said, he's a chemical engineer. He has no experience with killers or people like you and me."

"Sounds like it's your problem, not mine." Lord folded his arms over his chest.

"Why are you here then if you don't care what happens to him?"

"I never said I didn't care what happened to him. I just said it's your problem, meaning you're the one who has to convince him about the danger. I don't really care if he figures out what could happen to him or not. I'm here to find the person who wants to hurt him. After that, I'm leaving. You're the one who has to deal with him every day." Lord shifted slightly.

"So you don't care if he dies?"

Cain clenched his hands into fists. Anger welled in him.

"I guess since you're my brother and you care for the good doctor, I should care."

Lord shrugged. "I'm not given to lying as I've proven before. I'm here because someone tried to kill me. I've already taken care of my handler."

Cain moved to the window, staring out over the garden area of the facility. "You killed the man who saved your life from the street and turned you into a killer."

"You're having problems understanding that I would have been a killer either way. The Boss gave me a chance to hone my skills and make money from it."

There was a hint of sadness in Lord's voice. Maybe Lord did regret what he did for a living.

"The Boss tried to have me killed and if it wasn't for Mars, I would be dead. Any loyalty I owed him was destroyed the moment he sent someone after me. So he's out of the picture." A determined expression came over Lord's face. "I plan on finding the man who hired the killing done. When that happens, Noah will be safe. For me, it's all about revenge. I can't let others think they can get away with this, Packert."

"So basically, you're using Noah to draw his father out. How are you going to get away with killing a former U.S. senator and potentially the next President of the United States?"

As much as he wanted to throw a fit and scream that Noah wasn't a means to an end, he grabbed control of his worry, anger and frustration. Lord was right. Cain knew his reactions were based on his caring for Noah. He wouldn't have reacted this way if Noah was a simple client.

"Don't tell me you've never used someone as bait?" Disbelief colored Lord's words.

Cain scrubbed his hand through his hair. "You're asking me to be logical about this. I'm not sure I can be."

Lord touched his shoulder. "Then I will be and you have to trust me not to get Noah

killed.”

Cain turned and met silver eyes just like his. He saw the sincerity lurking under the cool exterior.

“I don’t have a choice. I only have two men here with me. The rest are in Los Angeles, keeping an eye on Noah’s daughter. I need whatever help you can give me.”

“After today, you probably won’t see me. If his father sees the two of us together, he might not make a move. I’ll be around, plus I have Mars, who is almost as good as one of your men.”

“Will I get to meet this man of yours?” He tried to keep his tone light.

Lord grinned and for the first time, Cain saw the human inside the cold killer. “You might get a chance after all of this is over, before he and I leave the country.”

“Are you hungry?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s go to the cafeteria and grab something to eat. We can work out a plan to keep Noah safe while drawing his father out.” He opened the door and glanced at Lord.

“Leaving the country is your solution to our problem?”

“We’ll figure out a way to ruin his career, which is worse than death for him. Did you think that since I’m a killer, that’s my solution to any trouble I get into?” Lord shook his head. “Sometimes killing isn’t the worse thing you can do to a man. The reason I’m leaving the country is to keep Mars safe.”

They made their way down the hall to the elevator. Before they got on, Lord’s phone rang.

“What’s wrong,” Lord asked.

Cain watched his brother’s face shut down, turning hard and cold, chilling Cain to the marrow.

“Did he follow them?”

A cold shiver chased down Cain’s spine. Something had happened to Noah.

“Thanks. We’ll meet him outside the facility.”

Lord shut his phone and stuffed it in his pocket. Turning to face Cain, he grimaced.

“Senator Wiltson waltzed in here and took Noah.”

Fear like he had never felt before skated over Cain’s nerves. He’d promised to keep Noah safe and the first chance the man’s father had, he took Noah without a fight. He moaned softly.

Lord’s nostrils flared. “Don’t fall apart on me now, Packert. Mars saw them leave. He followed them as far as a small private airport close by. The Senator had a jet waiting. They took off and Mars came back here. So we’re ahead of the game already. We know Noah’s gone and we know who has him. It won’t take long to find out where the jet landed. We’ll get him back, Cain.”

The confidence in Lord’s voice focused him. His brother was right. They would retrieve Noah and neutralize the threat his father posed, if the man hadn’t already killed Noah.

As they headed towards the front of the facility, Cain called the guards, ordering them to meet him in the lobby. When all of them converged, he started organizing them.

Cain sent two of them back to the security office to check the tapes. There wouldn’t be anything caught in Noah’s lab since cameras weren’t allowed in there, but the hallways and entrances should have been covered. The possibility of catching the Senator

entering or leaving the building was strong. He dispatched two guards to keep Noah's lab from being disturbed by anyone.

He called the police, informing them they had a kidnapping. He wanted there to be a paper trail leading to the Senator. Cain didn't care if the man was about to become the President or not, there was no way he'd allow him to get away with terrorizing, kidnapping and who knows what else he was doing to Noah.

Taking a few steps away from Lord, he dialed Henry LeClair.

Johnson answered. "LeClair residence."

"Hey Johnson, it's Packert. I need to talk to LeClair."

"Is it an emergency, sir?"

"Yes. Wiltson's taken Noah." He paced, eager to start looking for his lover, but knowing following procedures was the best way to ensure Noah got back in one piece.

"I'll get him." Johnson dropped the phone.

A minute passed before LeClair picked up the phone. "What the hell happened, Packert? You were supposed to take care of Noah. Now that bastard father of his has him?"

"I know. I completely dropped the ball on this one. You can punish me or fire me or whatever the hell you want to do to me later. We need to find him. I need you to come down here with the file Lord gave Noah."

A pause. "Why?"

He held the phone away from his head and stared at it for a second. "Why," he said into it. "If we had done this right from the beginning, the FBI would have been investigating Wiltson and this probably would have never happened."

LeClair's voice held tension. "I had my reasons for not going to the authorities."

"I don't care what your reasons were and they aren't important anymore. The most important thing is getting Noah back before anything happens to him." Cain shoved a hand through his hair. "I screwed this up from the beginning. I let my attraction to Noah cloud my judgment, but no more. I won't risk his life."

Lord touched his shoulder. Cain glanced at him and his brother nodded towards the front door, where two detectives and a thin young man were entering.

"Just get down here, LeClair. The detectives are here and I'll be contacting the Bureau next."

He slammed his phone shut and stuck it in his pocket. He turned to greet the detectives. The young man headed right to Lord and ran his hands over Lord's side like he was reassuring himself Lord was okay.

"Detective Henderson, and this is my partner, Detective Schwan. You called in a kidnapping?"

Cain shook Henderson's hand. "Cain Packert, head of security. Yes, one of the scientists here at the facility was kidnapped earlier today."

"How long has he been missing?"

He checked his watch and then looked at Lord. "An hour or so."

"How do you know it was a kidnapping?" Henderson stared at him.

Schwan wandered over to where Lord and Mars—at least that's who Cain assumed the younger man was—stood.

"Dr. Wiltson would never have left the compound in the company of the men who took him. Trust me."



“Wiltson? Any relation to the candidate?” The detective scribbled notes down.

“Funny you should ask, considering that’s who took him.”

Shock and disbelief warred in Henderson’s eyes. “You’re joking, right? Why would the Senator kidnap his own son?”

“You’ll have to ask him that, along with why he tried to have his son killed two months ago.”

“Whoa. Those are serious allegations, Mr. Packert. You can’t accuse someone like Wiltson without proof.”

Lord joined them, Mars attached to his hip like a limpet. Cain saw the file his brother was carrying.

“This might spread some light on the subject, Detective.”

Henderson took the file and waved for Schwan. “I need to talk to my partner and I guess we should contact the local FBI office.”

Cain dug a card out of his wallet. “Call this number and ask for Stevens. Tell him Packert needs help.”

Schwan took the card and the policemen walked over to the front desk. Cain turned to see Lord settle his hand at the small of Mars’ spine. Cain cataloged his brother’s lover. Mostly to take his mind off the need to run off and try to save Noah himself.

Mars was the kind of skinny that came from not having enough food to eat and his dark brown eyes held suspicion and fear in them. This man had spent a lot of years on the street and it had marked him. Bright blond hair cut short and spiky. His t-shirt was faded, but clean and barely covering his pale stomach. His jeans were tight and low slung, held up by Mars’ prominent hipbones.

“Why didn’t he call as soon as he saw them leave the compound?” His question was filled with anger.

Mars cowered, burying his face in Lord’s chest. The man barely made it to Lord’s shoulder. Lord cradled the back of Mars’ head and growled at Cain.

“You can talk to me like that because I understand what you’re going through, but don’t ever take that tone with Mars again or I’ll make you pay.”

Cain blinked. He wasn’t foolish enough to think that because he was Lord’s brother, the man didn’t mean what he said. The cold killer in Lord never said anything he didn’t mean and the posture Lord took with Mars told Cain Lord would protect the younger man no matter what.

He took a breath, trying to get a handle on his anger, fear and impatience. “I’m sorry, Mars. I’m simply afraid for Noah. That isn’t an excuse to talk to you like that.”

Mars peeked out from Lord’s chest and nodded. Long elegant fingers stroked over Lord’s shirt. His brother looked down at the small man and some sort of communication passed between them. Mars stepped away from Lord’s embrace, pulled a notebook out of his back pocket and started scribbling something down. A trembling hand held the notebook out to him.

“It’s hard to find someone who will talk to you and make a phone call for you,” he read.

He shot a surprised glance at Lord and back at Mars. “You can’t talk?”

Mars shrugged and grimaced.

“He can talk, but it’s difficult and painful for him to do it. That’s why he has the notebook.” Lord touched Mars’ shoulder. “Show him.”

The younger man tilted back his head and Cain saw the vicious scar running across Mars' throat. It was red, puckered and deep. He didn't think he'd ever seen a more brutal wound.

He winced. "Sorry."

Mars shrugged again with a slight shake of his head.

"So you had to find someone who would read your note and call Lord?"

A quick nod.

"You recognized Noah?"

A short negative tilt of his head.

"The Senator?"

*Yes.*

"Lord explain any of this to you?" He wondered how much the boy knew about what his brother did or used to do for a living.

Mars nodded, moved close to Lord and snuggled tight to his brother.

"Would you be willing to write down what you saw for the detectives?" Cain gestured to Henderson and Schwan.

A flare of fear shot through Mars' eyes. Lord wrapped an arm around Mars' shoulder.

"I'll stay with you," Lord promised Mars.

Their gazes met and for a moment, Cain felt like he no longer existed. Mars nodded reluctantly.

"Thank you. I think you and Noah would get along great. You'll have to meet him when we get him back." He cleared his throat, some strange emotion choking him. He looked at Lord. "I'll keep your previous profession out of it if I can."

"Don't worry about me. I'll take care of myself. Focus on getting Noah back. All the rest will work out."

A commotion at the front doors heralded the arrival of Noah's grandfather.

## Chapter Nine

### Maybe twenty-four hours later

Noah sat on the cold cement floor, his forehead resting on his upraised knees. How long had he been in the small room? His father's thugs had taken his watch and cell phone before they threw him in there. He chuckled. Like his watch would have helped him. It was a cheap thing he'd gotten at Macy's on sale. It wasn't like a James Bond watch with a butane torch he could use to cut his way through the steel door.

Shivers wracked his body. His clothes were ripped and bloody. The men beat him up a little before they left. He should be glad they didn't break anything important. Just a rib or two at the moment. He had a feeling things would get worse when they got back.

Why was his father doing this? That was the question racing through Noah's mind. He didn't think about escaping or rescue. First of all, he had no idea where he was, so escaping at the moment wouldn't do him any good. He could end up dying outside as easily as inside. As for rescue, he knew Cain would do everything in his power to find him and he had to trust in that belief.

Strange how yesterday he walked away from the man because of his secrets and what he did before coming to work for Noah's grandfather. Now it was that very past that made Noah confident his lover would find him. It might take a little while, but Cain wouldn't give up and Noah held on to that fact.

His father would call him foolish and sentimental. Noah didn't think his certainty about Cain's coming was sentimental. Cain was a professional, first and foremost. The man wasn't going to sit back and take Noah's kidnapping lightly. Grandfather had hired Cain to keep Noah safe and he failed. Noah had a feeling Cain wasn't familiar with failure.

He shifted and pain shot over his nerve endings from his right side. He had to be careful. He didn't know how damaged the broken ribs were and he didn't want to puncture a lung. His father would never offer any help.

The dark seemed to close in and his breathing sped up. Noah found himself wishing he had the nightlight he'd bought for Lindsey a few weeks ago. *Lindsey*. Panic welled up in him. He prayed his father still had no idea that she was his daughter. He didn't know what he'd do if anything happened to that sweet child.

*Breathe*, a voice that sounded a lot like Cain's echoed through his head. *Nothing you can do about her from here. Concentrate on surviving. Other people will have to take care of your daughter.*

As much as he hated admitting it, the voice was right. Panicking did nothing but cloud his brain. He needed to keep clear headed and try to live long enough for Cain to rescue him.

God, he needed sleep. Unfortunately, his prison cell didn't come with a blanket. Maybe he'd ask for one the next time the goon squad showed up. He laughed quietly. Yeah, like they were interested in making him comfortable.

A scrap sounded outside the door. He pushed to his feet, staring at the door. Whoever or whatever was on the other side, he'd face it the best he could. No matter how

much he wanted it to be Cain on the other side.

He blinked as the door slide open and a light shined in his eyes. He didn't flinch or try to dodge the hand reaching out of the shadows to grab his arm.

"Come on, fag."

Not Cain. He'd known it had been wishful thinking anyway. It was too soon for Cain to come. Stumbling, he let them drag him from his cell. He was pushed into another room where two other men stood. When his vision cleared enough for him to see, he studied the three men.

Noah fought the smile threatening to break through. Okay, so his plight wasn't funny, but could his father have picked three more stereotypical looking thugs? He felt like he'd been dropped onto the set of *The Sopranos*. They wore ill fitting suits and all of them would have fit in better working on the docks.

"Where is it?" The one who seemed in charge asked him.

He shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about."

A large hand hit him in the face. His head snapped back and he heard his neck crack. One way to save on chiropractic bills, he thought fleetingly. Pain exploded throughout his body.

Wrapping an arm around his ribs, he held up his hand. "Wait. Seriously, I have no clue what you want. All you've done is beat the shit out of me. You never once told me what you're looking for. I might be many things, but a mind reader isn't one of them."

"A smart ass, are you?" Scarface, the man in charge, snarled at him.

Another punch. This time to his kidneys and he dropped to his knees. Somehow he had a feeling he'd be pissing blood for the next week or so. His head fell forward and he focused on the small pool of red liquid forming in front of him. *Shit*. Noah touched his face with a trembling hand and drew it back to see the blood covering his fingers. The thug had broken his nose and split his lip.

"Listen to me. I'm not being a smart ass. Why would I when you'd just hit me some more? I'm being fucking honest with you. I don't know what you're talking about. All I know is that two months ago, my father tried to have me killed. Someone else paid the killer more money to let me live."

"Right, and that asshole left you something. Where is it?"

Noah laughed weakly. "You've got to be kidding me. My father had me kidnapped for the folder the man gave me?"

A voice in his head warned him to keep Lord's name out of the conversation. He didn't want the assassin to get into any more trouble. Not that the man couldn't handle whatever happened.

"Right. Where is it?"

Scarface sounded like a robot with a one-track mind. Noah rocked back on his heels and looked up at the man.

"I gave it to my grandfather when I got here. I'm not stupid. If it was just me and some hired killer who knew about the folder, nothing would stop my father from trying to kill me again. No, it was better for as many people as possible to know about it." He braced his hand against the cold concrete floor and pushed to his feet. "So by now, probably the police, the FBI, the Secret Service and the head of my grandfather's security branch know what's in that folder."

Worry scurried across the other two thugs' faces. Scarface remained calm.

“So there’s no reason why we shouldn’t kill you now and get it over with. Then we’d only have to go find that rent boy and take care of him.”

While it was true Noah had resigned himself to taking whatever kind of beating these men had in mind, he didn’t plan on them killing him anytime soon. Then the man’s words hit him.

“Rent boy? What rent boy? Are you saying my father’s gay?”

Shock and surprise tore through him, followed closely by anger. How dare the man judge him for being gay when the senator himself was deep in the closet?

Scarface shook his head. “Nah, not gay. He likes to play really rough. The whores couldn’t take it. The dear Senator found that the rent boys took a beating better and longer than the girls. So he’d hire them for the whippings and the whores for the fucking.”

Bile churned in Noah’s stomach. How could he have never seen that kind of twisted urge in his father before? Another thought hit him.

“I don’t think there’s anything like that is in the folder I got. The information in that one is just about a couple other hits my father hired done.”

One of the other thugs drilled Noah in the stomach. Pain rolled over his nerve endings and he sank to the floor, retching as he fought against the blackness threatening to take him over. He couldn’t pass out now.

“Stay down.” Scarface gestured for the other two to move closer to him. “Maybe the fag’s right. Maybe he don’t know nothing about the rent boys. My neck’s itching though. Something’s going on. My contact in L.A. says that one little queer the Senator cut a couple years ago has disappeared. Can’t find him anywhere.”

Noah remained on the ground, his eyes closed and breathing slowly, trying to control the pain enough to pay attention to what Scarface was saying.

“I talked to Candy,” one of the other guys said. “She says the last time she saw the cocksucker was a couple months ago. He was hanging around with some big scary dude with silver eyes.”

*Shit. Lord?* There couldn’t be more than two people in the entire world with silver eyes and Noah didn’t think Cain would have been hanging out on the streets of L.A.

“Shit.” Scarface scrubbed the back of his neck and glared at Noah. “Put him back in the room. I’m going to talk to the Senator. We need to start communicating better.”

The toe of a boot drove into Noah’s back and he screamed. This time there was no escaping the swell of darkness filling his mind. The last thought before he lost consciousness was what kind of trouble had Lord involved him in?

\* \* \* \*

Henry LeClair asked Cain, “Where is the agent in charge?”

“That would be me.” Michael Stevens, one of Cain’s friends and an agent in the FBI, joined them, holding his hand out to LeClair.

“I have a file to give you. It might not be as detailed and extensive as the one Packert’s friend gave you, but my investigator did what he could.”

“Your investigator?”

“Do you think I would have left my daughter date—much less marry—some ambitious corporate lawyer without knowing everything I could about him?” The older man eyed Cain with disdain. “I had his background and activities checked.”

“Well, I think your investigator missed some rather important facts,” Cain couldn’t help but mention.

LeClair glared at him. “Either Wiltson was really good at covering his tracks or he hadn’t gotten to the point where he was hiring killers to do his dirty work.”

“Why did you give your consent to allow your daughter to marry Wiltson?” Stevens broke in.

“He had a few unsavory associates that I told him to get rid of. He did and my daughter loved him, so I figured she could keep him in line.”

Stevens snapped the file he’d been reading closed. “I’m inclined to believe your son-in-law mostly kept his nose clean while your daughter was alive, Mr. LeClair, but after she died, whatever restraining influence she had on him disappeared.”

Cain frowned. “Are you saying her death made him snap?” He didn’t want to hear that the senator loved his wife so much, that losing her made him crazy.

Both Stevens and LeClair shook their heads.

The agent spoke first. “No, Wiltson was psychotic before Mrs. Wiltson died, but I really do think he loved her, so he controlled his tendencies until she died. After that, there was no one to stop him or act like his conscience.”

“When Noah gave me the other file and I read what was in it, I knew Wiltson hadn’t really changed.”

“After you got the file, what did you do with it?” Cain wondered about LeClair’s actions. Had Noah’s grandfather done anything to prevent Wiltson from going after Noah again?

“I locked it in my safe at home, figuring it was the safest place. Then I called Wiltson and warned him that if anything ever happened to me or my grandson, his name would be splashed all over the papers and TV. All of his secrets revealed.” LeClair shook his head. “I guess he didn’t believe me.”

“What are you going to do?” Cain wasn’t willing to risk Noah’s life by letting LeClair make a point.

“Once Noah is safe and sound, I’m going to contact a friend of mine at a major cable news network and plaster the bastard’s secrets all over the world.”

Stevens stiffened. “We can’t let you jeopardize this case with revenge, Mr. LeClair.”

Noah’s grandfather flapped his hands at the FBI agent. “Don’t worry. It’ll be rumors and hints. I’ll promise him an exclusive for when the whole thing breaks wide open.”

Cain saw Stevens’ frown deepening and he knew his friend wasn’t happy about LeClair’s plan, but there would be time to work that all out later. At the moment, he was more concerned about getting Noah back unharmed.

“Agent Stevens, can we talk to you?” another agent called out.

“I’m going up to my office, Packert. Call me when the plans are finalized,” LeClair ordered him.

“Yes, sir.”

Cain stood, watching the FBI agents and U.S. Marshalls swarming around Stevens, Cain’s friend. He waited until the man finished briefing the others before he moved to officially greet Stevens.

“I should have known you were involved in this.” Stevens slapped him on the shoulder. “How’d you come to be part of this fucked-up situation?”

“I’m head of security for LeClair Research and Dr. Wiltson is a close friend of

mine.”

He saw understanding form on Stevens’ face.

“Okay. The other question I have is—who the hell is that man?” Stevens nodded towards Lord.

“He’s my younger brother, James.” Cain gestured for Lord to come join them.

Lord frowned, but walked over with Mars in tow. Mars stayed close to Lord, seeming to be slightly overwhelmed by all the police clogging the lobby. Cain was intrigued by the way his brother protected the smaller man from being bumped into or touched in any way.

“James, this is an old friend of mine, Michael Stevens. We were in the Marines together. When I went to the CIA, Stevens here headed to the FBI.”

“Nice to meet you, Packert. I didn’t realize Cain had a brother.” Stevens shot Cain a ‘we’ll talk later’ look.

“We haven’t been close for several years. Decided to reestablish family ties.” Lord shook Stevens’ hand, but didn’t introduce Mars.

An agent handed Stevens a paper. Cain felt confident his friend would find Noah and rescue him before too long. Of course, believing in his friend wouldn’t stop Cain from being there when they went to save Noah.

“Thanks.” Stevens looked up from reading the fax. “Here’s the deal. The Secret Service says that Wiltson was out of their handling for about twenty-four hours. He requested they pull their agents and they did. They resumed protection at around four this afternoon when Wiltson arrived in Detroit for a campaign appearance.”

“Did any of them ask where he was?” Cain wasn’t happy about the lapse in attention by the Secret Service.

“No. My contact there said Wiltson has the right at the moment to refuse protection. Until he is actually the Presidential nominee or the President, the Secret Service protection is simply an option. It seems Wiltson has his own security team. Three of whom are not accounted for at this point.”

Stevens studied Lord. “One of the detectives told me you gave him a folder detailing two murders the former Senator hired done for him. How did you come to have that information?”

Lord shrugged. “I have my ways, Agent, and I won’t be telling you what they are.”

Mars tugged on Lord’s sleeve, handing him a piece of paper when he turned to look at the blond. Lord read it and smiled.

“We have the call numbers for the plane Wiltson used to transport Noah out of here.”

Cain smiled at Mars. After meeting the man, Cain realized Mars was doing all he could to help them find Noah. He hoped there was time after all of this to get to know Mars.

“Great.” Stevens flagged down a passing agent. “Get me all the information we can find on this plane and the flight plan they filed today. I need to know every place it landed today.”

“Yes, sir.”

Stevens turned to glare at Lord. “If you do anything to impede or sabotage my case, you’ll find yourself in jail.”

“He’s here to support me, Michael. Just happened to be in the right place at the right time, I guess.”

He wasn't interested in territorial struggles. He didn't care who lead the operation. Cain wanted Noah back unharmed and as soon as possible.



## Chapter Ten

“Got him.” Stevens slammed his phone shut and gestured to Cain.

Cain rushed over to his friend. Lord and Mars joined them. They waited for the agent to finish barking orders to his people.

“What’s going on, Michael?” He resisted the urge to shake the man.

“First, we have a contingent of FBI agents and U.S. Marshalls picking Wiltson up. The video of Wiltson kidnapping his son and your brother’s folder provides us with enough doubt to bring the man in. He can protest all he wants. I guarantee when we retrieve Dr. Wiltson, the former Senator will find he has a lot of explaining to do.”

“What are you going to do about Noah?” He was glad to hear they were arresting Wiltson, but his main concern was Noah.

“Secondly, we found a small airport in Idaho where the plane landed and stayed for at least an hour. We think they’re holding Dr. Wiltson somewhere close to it. The local police are heading to the airport to question people and they’ll start searching the area.” Stevens strolled towards the door.

Cain turned to Lord. “Did you want to come with us to get Noah?”

Lord looked at Mars and back to Cain. “No. I think this is where we need to disappear.”

“I thought you wanted to be there when Wiltson’s life is ruined.” He frowned.

“I did and we will be there, but you don’t need us to help save Noah. You can do it and we’ll just be in the way.” Lord looked over where Stevens stood. “In addition, your friend might believe I’m your brother, but he’s not buying the whole ‘reconnecting’ bit.”

“Are you coming, Packert,” Stevens yelled.

“Just a second.” He flipped open his phone and dialed LeClair’s number.

“LeClair,” the older man barked.

“We think we’ve found Noah. We’re heading out there now.”

“Bring him home, Packert. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“I will, Mr. LeClair.”

After shutting his phone and tucking it in his pocket, Cain offered his hand to Lord. “I hope to see both of you again.”

Lord didn’t take his hand. “You will. There’ll be some more information turning up to help the FBI’s case against Wiltson. That folder wasn’t all I had.”

“I appreciate all you’ve done for Noah. Thank you as well, Mars.”

Mars nodded. Cain jogged over to Stevens and they climbed in one of the sedans used by the FBI. He looked back to see Lord and Mars slip into a truck parked at the edge of the lot.

“Your brother not coming with us?” Stevens’ question sounded causal, but Cain wasn’t fooled.

“No. They have somewhere they need to be.”

“Like out of the country?”

He kept his face expression. “I wouldn’t know. I didn’t ask.”

“Yeah, right. I have to wonder what the head of Interpol would say if I called him up and told him that the most wanted man in the international community was in

Washington.”

“Call him.” He wasn’t worried. “Even if he did believe you, they’ll be out of the country before he can do anything about it.”

“You’re not going to deny who that man is?” Stevens sounded a little shocked.

“Michael, we’ve known each other for a long time. Why would I lie to you when you know the truth? James is my brother and we did just reconnect after being apart for most of our lives. Who he is now and what he’s done is none of my business.” Cain studied the landscape as they drove to the airport. “We’ve all killed. I was told by the government who to kill and I got paid for it. He was told by private individuals and got paid a hell of a lot more money than me. I realized I couldn’t condemn him for the same things I did.”

“Lord is one of the most wanted men in the world. The bounty on him is enormous. You arrest him, you’ll make more than you’ve ever made in your life.”

“I won’t do it and I won’t help you. I’m out of it.”

His friend remained silent for a few minutes before sighing. “I never saw Lord here. My main focus is rescuing Dr. Wiltson and bringing his kidnappers to justice.”

“I knew you were a good man, Michael.” He smiled.

“I must be crazy to allow him to get away, but you’ve helped me with stupid shit. Good deed and all that.”

“Thanks.”

They rode the rest of the way in silence. Cain organized his thoughts and calmed his nerves. He had to be ready for anything. Noah would have men watching him. Cain knew better than to expect this rescue would be easy.

\* \* \* \*

Noah spit blood onto the floor. *Fuck*. He hated the metallic taste coating his tongue. He worried one of his teeth with a finger. Scarface had loosened one of his teeth.

Lying on his side, he stared at the door and noticed the crack of light coming from it. He pushed up onto his hands and knees, crawling over to the door. One of his captors had forgotten to shut it all the way. He climbed the wall, bracing his hand on the cool concrete while he caught his balance.

He pulled open the door a little, hoping the hinges were well-oiled and he wouldn’t be announcing his escape attempt to whoever might be in the hallway. The door swung open as smooth as silk and he sighed.

Noah thought about his options. He could stay in the room, hope the thugs didn’t come back and Cain came to rescue him soon. Or he could head out into the building and see if he could save himself. Maybe it was time to take control of his own life again.

Cain was coming. Noah didn’t doubt that, but he wasn’t sure he had time to wait for his lover to find him. Some instinct told him his life expectancy was starting to be measured in hours instead of years.

Pain was making it hard to think and plan, but he slid out into the hallway, blinking at the brightness. *Okay. So far. So good*. Now he had to find the nearest exit.

Noah reached out and braced his hand on wall, hoping his vision cleared before he ran into anyone. When his eyes adjusted, he glanced to his right. The door at the end of the hall was slightly ajar and he heard voices coming from beyond it. Definitely wasn’t going to go that way.

Left it was then. He inched his way along, trying to find another door or hallway. He

wrapped one arm around his ribs and took shallow breaths. He was screwed if he had to run. There was no way he'd make it very far before one of the thugs tackled him or shot him.

The end of the hallway seemed to be getting farther away. His vision darkened and he started to lean against the wall except it wasn't there.

"What the..."

His whispered curse was cut off as a hand covered his mouth and jerked him off his feet, dragging him into a narrow corridor. Lightning bolts of pain shot over his nerve endings and all he focused on was not passing out.

"Noah, it's me."

Lips pressed tight to his ear and Cain's voice filled his mind. A band of steel encircled his chest, squeezing all air out of his lungs. Noah whimpered, clawing at the arm.

"Stop. Don't say anything. We have to be quiet."

Quiet? He couldn't breathe. He slapped at Cain's arm. His head swam and his knees weakened.

"Noah? Love? Are you okay?"

Cain pulled back, loosening his grip. Noah dropped to his knees, panting as quietly as he could, bringing the pain under control before he looked up. Cain was dressed all in black with his face covered by paint. His lover knelt next to him, resting a hand on his shoulder.

"What's wrong?"

"Broken ribs," he managed to say. "Along with various other injuries."

"Fuck. I'll kill them."

He shook his head. "No. Can we go? I need to talk to you and Lord."

Clasping him under his arms, Cain lifted him to his feet. He let his head fall forward and rest against Cain's chest for a second. Cain's gloved hands stroked over his hair.

"I'm sorry," Cain murmured.

"Sorry about what?" He tilted his body, so he could meet Cain's silver gaze.

"Sorry we didn't get here sooner. I'm sorry you were hurt. I'm sorry your father is such a bastard that he could do something like this to his son." Sorrow tainted Cain's words.

"You have no idea what my father's capable of, Cain. You need to tell Lord that my father is looking for him."

Noah was desperate to make Cain understand the danger to Lord. He didn't care that Cain's brother was a hired killer. None of that mattered. He didn't want his father to get away with killing another person or hurting anyone else.

"Don't worry. Lord knows all about your father, baby. My brother took his man and they're probably heading out of the country as we speak." Cain held up his hand, pressing his fingertips to his ear. "The FBI's about to crash this little party."

"Should we leave?"

"No. I think we'll stay right here. Best to stay out of their way."

Cain moved him back farther into the shadows of the corridor. Noah couldn't stand any longer. He put his back to the wall and collapsed down to the floor. Closing his eyes, he sighed.

"I knew you were coming. I took a chance by trying to escape, but I wasn't sure I

could wait until you got here. I had a feeling it might be my only shot at it.” He settled into Cain’s embrace as the other man sat next to him and put an arm around him. “If I got away, you wouldn’t have to worry about them using me as a hostage.”

He felt the brush of Cain’s lips over his cheek. Turning, he kissed his lover, pouring all of his joy and relief into the gesture. He didn’t doubt things would get worse before they got any better, but at least, he would have Cain beside him to give him strength to see his father punished for his crimes.

Their kiss was interrupted as noises came from the other hallway. Noah pressed back against the wall, hoping no one tried to escape in their direction. He didn’t want to be involved in any more violence.

Yelling and gunfire echoed, followed closely by footsteps running towards them. He glanced at Cain whose head was tilted like he was listening to something other than the footsteps.

“I’ve got him, Stevens. Do what you need to do. We’re moving out of the building. He’s injured, but can move under his own power.”

Curious, Noah looked closer at Cain and noticed Cain wore something around his neck with a piece leading to his ear. *Must be some sort of communication device*, he thought.

“We need to leave now,” Cain informed Noah.

He nodded, accepting Cain’s help to climb to his feet. It was definitely time to get out before Cain got hurt. Noah concentrated on making his way down the corridor Cain pointed him at. Footsteps getting closer broke his focus and his breathing left him in a rush as Cain shoved him. He stumbled, caught himself on the wall and turned.

Cain stood in the dim light, gun drawn. Scarface hesitated in the hall, seeming to be shocked to find anyone with Noah. The click of Cain’s gun being cocked sounded like a shot in the silence.

“You should give up.” Cain’s tone was causal.

“Why? The Senator’s not going to let me swing. I know too much about him.” Scarface sneered.

Noah saw Cain shake his head.

“I wouldn’t count on that. The FBI and Marshals picked up the former Senator in Detroit earlier tonight. There’s too much evidence against your boss. He won’t be able to use his influence to keep you out of jail. Wiltson will be fighting for his own life.”

Scarface grimaced. “All this shit because the man couldn’t keep his dick in his pants and doesn’t understand the importance of not leaving witnesses.” The thug stared at Noah. “Never thought a fag could stand up to the beating we gave you. No hard feelings, man?”

*What was the protocol for talking to a man who tried to turn your insides into mush?* Noah wasn’t sure. “Um-m-m...I guess not. You were just doing your job, right?”

“Yeah.” Scarface met Cain’s glare. “Okay. I’ll go without a fight. No point in getting myself killed for that arrogant bastard, but I want immunity and I’ll tell you all I know about those rent boys the Senator killed.”

Cain shrugged. “I can’t give you a deal. I’m not an agent. I’m just here for him.” Cain gestured back towards Noah before touching the mic on his throat. “Stevens, I’ve got one of them.”

“Rent boys? Killed?” Noah moved to one side of Cain, making sure to stay out of

Cain's line of fire and far enough away from Scarface to keep the thug from grabbing him.

"Sure. There's been two whose bodies I've taken care of because Wiltson plays too rough sometimes. Hurts the little queers to the point where they've taken too much damage and bleed out or shit like that. That's why he hired me. I took care of the loose ends." Scarface's chuckle was cruel. "Unfortunately, one of the cocksuckers survived. Senator slit his throat and somehow the kid lived. Wiltson was worried that the folder you got told about the rent boys. He would have never been able to rescue his career if that news got out."

Cain jerked and Noah wondered what caused that reaction.

"Of course, the boss would have been fine if the kid hadn't disappeared a couple months ago. Wonder if the scary grey-eyed dude gave him a better offer."

Noah heard Cain swear softly and he knew his lover understood the significance of that statement. He didn't have time to ask before Kevlar-clad men charged down the hallway and arrested Scarface. One of them detached from the crowd, approaching them with his hand out.

"Thanks, Packert. I'll have a couple of agents escort your guy to the hospital." The agent smiled at Noah. "You'll have protection twenty-four/seven until all of this gets worked out."

Cain grunted.

The agent's brown eyes twinkled. "I meant from the FBI, Packert. I know you'll be Dr. Wiltson's personal bodyguard as well."

Noah felt his cheeks warm. "Thank you, Agent..."

"Stevens. Packert and I have been friends for a long time. Glad to see he's finally found someone to give him a run for his money." Stevens shook Noah's hand, slapped Cain on the shoulder and turned to head after Scarface. "I'll get the henchmen settled before I come to debrief you, Doctor."

Cain holstered his gun while Noah waited until Stevens disappeared around the corner before facing his lover.

"Did you know about the rent boys?"

The other man sighed. "How would I know about them?"

"Lord could have told you." He wasn't sure why he was acting like Cain knew anything more than he did about his father's activities.

"My brother doesn't tell me anything more than he deems necessary for the moment." Cain didn't sound happy. "I can guess who that big thug was talking about and I have an idea who that rent boy might be."

"But he must have had something to do with that one kid disappearing. I hope nothing bad has happened to him." Noah couldn't help worrying about the unknown rent boy his father had hurt. He hoped Lord hadn't been hired to kill the kid.

A sly knowing smile skated across Cain's face. "I don't think you have to worry about the kid, love. He's probably safer than all of us."

"What do you know?"

Cain wrapped a careful arm around Noah's waist and nuzzled against his cheek. Noah winced when he felt the roughness of the paint on Cain's face scraped over a bruise.

"I can't say at the moment, but trust me, the kid's fine."

Noah turned to face Cain. He cupped his lover's chin in his hand and studied that black streaked face. He did trust Cain and as sudden as it might seem to anyone else, he loved Cain. All his questions were simply his mind saying he couldn't have fallen so quickly, but his heart had no doubt about the truth of the situation. Cain held his soul, for better or worse.

## Chapter Eleven

### Two days later at Noah's Grandfather's house

A rustle disturbed Noah. If it was his private nurse, she would have announced herself. Cain had left a few minutes earlier to talk to Stevens and he would have let Noah know he'd come back. No one should have been there. Noah had managed to convince his grandfather to go lie down for a while. Grandfather had been hovering ever since Noah had returned from the hospital.

Peeking through his eyelashes, he saw a slender bleach blond man standing next to his bed. Nothing about the kid suggested he was dangerous.

Noah gave a mental snort. He wasn't the best judge of danger. His lover used to be a sanctioned killer for the government and his father turned out to be some twisted sociopath.

"Noah."

He turned his head and saw Lord standing by the door. He jerked in surprise.

"What are you doing here?" He sat up in his bed.

The blond tucked a pillow behind his back.

"Want some water?" Lord asked.

He nodded and the kid poured him a glass. After taking a sip, he glanced between Lord and the blond.

"How the hell did you get in here? You didn't hurt the agent, did you?"

Cain's brother chuckled and shook his head. "While I don't have a problem with killing people, I try not to do it unless I'm being paid."

Was he supposed to find that funny? The silent kid patted his arm reassuringly.

"Mars is trying to tell you not to worry. Though you might want to talk to my brother about the agent. He went downstairs for lunch. None of your personal guards saw us come in." Lord kept his voice low.

"Mars? You're Mars?" Noah studied the thin man next to his bed.

Mars nodded. Bleached blond spiky hair. Deep brown eyes holding fear, pain and a strange sort of courage. Thin to the point of starvation. Everything about the kid told Noah it hadn't been very long ago that Mars was struggling for survival. He held out his hand to Lord's lover.

"It's nice to meet you, Mars."

Mars stared at his hand and looked at Lord. The killer nodded.

"Don't worry, love. He's cool."

Noah wasn't sure what to think when Mars scrubbed his hand over the faded jeans before shaking Noah's hand. The grip was firm.

"Lord, if they find you in here, I don't think Cain will be able to keep them from arresting you," he warned.

"I know. Don't worry. They won't see us. I wanted you to meet Mars and to give you this." Lord laid another plain file folder on the table next to Noah's bed.

He glared at it and poked it with his finger. "The last folder I got from you ended up getting me kidnapped and beaten. I'm not sure I want this one. Couldn't you mail it to

Agent Stevens?”

“Yeah, well, giving you the first folder wasn’t my idea. I wasn’t even there when you got it.” Lord pointed at the innocent looking file. “This is the information your father was looking for to begin with. Names. Pictures. Dates.”

“The rent boys he hurt?”

Mars whimpered. Lord encircled the skinny kid’s waist, pulling him tight to his side.

“Where did you get this?” He gestured to the file.

Lord didn’t say anything, but his jaw tightened. Noah’s gaze skipped from Lord’s grim face to Mars. The expression on the younger man’s face told Noah all he needed to know.

“You were the one they were looking for? The one who lived?” He wasn’t looking for answers from them. He could see the truth in their eyes. “I’m so sorry, Mars.”

Tears welled in his eyes. He couldn’t imagine anyone hurting someone like his father had hurt this young man. Mars reached out and caught one of the tears from the corner of Noah’s eye on his fingertip. He brought it to his lips and tasted it. Breaking away from Lord, Mars leaned forward, pressing a kiss to Noah’s mouth.

“He doesn’t blame you, Noah.” Lord smoothed his hand over Mars’ back. A quick glance at his watch made Lord grunt. “We need to get going. Have to catch a flight out of the country.”

Mars gave Noah another kiss and moved towards the door. Lord bent and kissed Noah as well.

Before straightening up, Lord whispered, “Take care of Cain for me, Noah. He doesn’t need to feel guilty. He paid back any debt he owed me months ago.”

He reached up and cupped Lord’s cheek. “Be safe.”

Lord’s grin was cocky and slightly cruel as the man moved to join Mars. “You know we will be. Tell Cain I’ll contact him once we’re settled.”

“Thank you both.”

Closing his eyes, he didn’t see them slip from the room. When he opened them a second later, he was alone. The folder caught his attention, but he knew there was no way he would read it. His mind was already contaminated by the filth he’d found out about his father.

Noah thought about the kiss Lord gave him. *Nothing*. No fireworks or anything. It was so unlike the first kiss they’d shared. Of course, a lot of his attraction had to have been because of adrenaline. He didn’t know if Lord was going to kill him or not. This most recent kiss was also nothing like the first kiss Noah shared with Cain. Those two first kisses were explosive and overwhelming.

Exhaustion swamped him. He should have stayed in the hospital, but he didn’t want to and the FBI felt they could guard him better at his grandfather’s. Well, Lord’s visit shot that theory down. He’d have to talk to Cain about it.

Before sleep overtook him, the door opened and Cain entered. Slipping off his shoes, Cain joined Noah in bed. Noah snuggled close with a sigh. He’d talk to Cain after he had a nap.

\* \* \* \*

Rolling over, Cain opened his eyes to see Noah leaning on his elbow and staring down at him. He reached up, sketching a caress over the bruises on Noah’s jaw.



“I never felt true fear until I found out that your father had taken you,” he murmured.

Noah didn't speak as he leaned over, brushing a kiss over Cain's lips. Cain slid his hand around, cradling the back of Noah's head and not letting his lover move away. Studying Noah's blue eyes, he saw emotions race across the surface. Each one came and went without staying long enough for him to figure them out. There was one underlying emotion that made him catch his breath.

Love made Noah's eyes shine and his face glow. Love made Cain shiver. He started to say something, anything to defuse the moment. It was too big to deal with all at once.

“Lord and Mars were here.” Noah's words were soft.

Cain grinned. Noah must have seen the panic in his face and wanted to ease him. Then he thought about what the younger man said.

“How did they get past all the guards?”

He wanted to be angry, but couldn't work up the energy. Not when he was snuggled close to Noah and the room was dark. He'd chew the agents out later.

Noah shrugged. “He's your brother. I'm sure you can figure out how he did it.” Noah nodded towards a folder lying on the bedside table. “He left you a folder.”

“Did you read it?”

Shaking his head, Noah grimaced. “The last folder I got from him opened a huge can of worms and nearly got me killed. I thought I'd leave this one for you.”

He didn't reach for it. He had a pretty good idea what was in there and didn't want to have his knowledge verified. Smoothing his hand down Noah's back to rest it on his lover's ass, he nuzzled Noah's throat.

“Mars was with him?”

“Y-yes,” Noah stuttered, pushing back into Cain's hand.

“Kind of cute, isn't he? A little skinny though.” He licked a line along Noah's collarbone.

Noah trembled. “Uh, yeah. He's cute. Lord really seems to like him.”

Cain knew Noah wasn't interested in talking about Lord or Mars, but he wasn't done teasing his lover. He reversed their positions, placing Noah on his back. He was careful not to put too much pressure on Noah's ribs.

He kept his touch gentle as he slid his fingers down over Noah's sides. Nibbling, he followed along the line of Noah's neck to the pulse beating at the base. Cain sucked there, raising a small dark mark. Noah moaned, shifting underneath Cain.

“Don't you think I have enough bruises,” Noah joked breathlessly.

“None of them are mine. This one is.”

Pulling back, Cain rubbed his thumb over the mark and Noah cried out. Cain eased lower, to pay attention the dark brown nipples on Noah's chest.

“What about the guards?” Noah's hands clasped Cain's shoulders.

“They're downstairs. They can't hear us.” He met Noah's gaze. “I'm here and I promise no one will ever hurt you again.”

Noah brought their mouths together in a quick hard kiss. “I know that. I was more afraid of them hearing me and knowing what we're doing.”

He chuckled. “Don't worry. They would be discrete and not mention anything they heard.”

Blushing, Noah ducked his head. Cain raised Noah's chin and winked.

“I don't want you thinking about anything except what I'm doing to you.”

“You’re not doing anything right now,” Noah reminded him.

“Right. I’ll get back to it then.”

He licked one of Noah’s nipples, lashing it with his tongue. Latching on to the hard nub, he sucked, causing Noah to cry out again. Cain pinched the other nipple so it didn’t feel left out. Tugging and twisting with fingers and teeth. He drove Noah closer and closer to the edge.

Wrapping a hand around Noah’s erection, he gripped the hot flesh firmly and pumped. While he distracted his lover with the hand job, he slipped farther down Noah’s flat stomach, dipping into his belly button before following the thin trail of hair to the pot of gold.

Cain settled between Noah’s legs and looked at the swollen purple head of Noah’s cock pulsing before his mouth. Clear drops of pre-cum oozed from the slit in the crown. He wanted to taste that. The need to feel the heavy weight of Noah on his tongue made Cain’s own prick throb. He pressed it into the mattress under him.

A swipe of the tongue gathered some of the liquid and he savored the taste before taking just the head of Noah’s cock into his mouth.

“Cain,” Noah whimpered.

He worked the spongy crown, teasing Noah with licks, nibbles and suction. Cain continued to stroke the throbbing shaft in his hand as well. Using both to bring his lover to the brink of climax. The way Noah was babbling told Cain he was close.

Grabbing Noah’s hand, he wrapped it around the man’s cock and rolled away, searching for the lube.

“No,” Noah protested.

“Don’t come. I want to be inside you. I want to feel you climax on my cock.”

A huge body shudder shook Noah. The younger man bit his lip and his knuckles whitened as he tightened his grip on his cock. “Okay, but hurry.”

“I have to stretch you, love. I don’t want you to hurt.”

Noah shook his head. “I’ll come if you do that. Take me, Cain. I’ll deal with the burn.”

As much as Cain wanted to say no, he found he couldn’t deny Noah. Not even on this. He found the lube and squirted some slick into his palm. Coating his cock, he moved back between Noah’s thighs and placed the blunt head of his cock at Noah’s opening. He took a second to take some extra lube, rubbing it on and into Noah’s ass.

“Now, Cain.” Noah’s voice was strangled and demanding.

Cain rested Noah’s legs on his arms and pushed in. Noah hissed and tilted his hips, not protesting as Cain thrust in. Cain hesitated, causing Noah to shake his head.

“Don’t stop until you’re all the way in, love. It’s okay,” Noah reassured him through gritted teeth.

He did as he was told, burying himself deep in Noah’s inner passage. Once there, he stopped, muscles shaking with the effort to keep from moving until Noah said he was all right. Cain didn’t know how long it was before Noah clenched his ass, massaging Cain’s cock.

“Move.”

The word Cain was waiting for. He pulled out and slammed back in. The strength of his thrust pushed Noah back towards the headboard. Noah raised his arms, bracing his hands on the wood to keep from being driven into it. It also gave him the leverage needed

to meet Cain with a thrust of his own.

The room filled with the scent of sweat and sex. Grunts and the sound of flesh slapping against flesh echoed through the darkness. Noah worked Cain's cock like a pro, milking his flesh with each squeeze.

Tingling traveled along Cain's spine, pooling at the base and in his groin. His balls drew tight to his body and he knew it wouldn't be long.

"Gonna come, Noah."

Noah nodded. "Please."

His orgasm exploded from him and he shoved in as deep as he could, flooding Noah with his cum. Hot liquid splashed between him and Noah and Noah's climax rippled over Cain's shaft, drawing his own pleasure out more.

When his pleasure eased, his arms trembled, warning him of his eminent collapse. Cain managed to shift to the side before he fell to the bed, face first.

Noah grunted softly as Cain slid out. A thought hit Cain.

"Fuck. I didn't use a condom."

Turning slowly onto his side, Noah flung an arm over Cain's stomach and buried his nose against Cain's neck. "Doesn't matter. You're clean, right?"

"Well, yeah, but still..."

"I'm clean as well. I trust you. After everything we've gone through, I think we're in this relationship for the long term. We can get rid of the condoms."

Long term? Cain stared up at the ceiling and thought about everything that had happened in the three months since he'd known Noah. The night they met, something about the younger man spoke to him and he realized his heart had known then that Noah was someone he could spend the rest of his life with.

"Okay, no condoms. You all right?"

Noah nodded. "I'm sore everywhere, but nothing worse than normal."

"You moving in with me?" He couldn't resist asking.

"As soon as the trial is done, you can help me get my stuff from my apartment in L.A." Noah cuddled closer.

The trial would take several months, if not a year or more. He wasn't sure he wanted to wait that long, but they could discuss that later. He sighed.

Noah brushed a kiss over his chest. "Go to sleep, Cain. It can all wait until the morning."

Stroking his hand up and down Noah's back, he closed his eyes. Before he closed his eyes, he thought about Lord. Would he and Mars be able to find happiness? With a soft sigh, he realized he couldn't guarantee his brother a good life. All Cain could do was take the love Noah gave him and never regret the past.

## **The End**

### **About the Author:**

T.A. Chase lives a life without boundaries. Being fascinated by life and how different we all are, he writes about the things that make us unique. He finds beauty in all kinds of love and enjoys sharing those insights. He lives in the Midwest with his partner

of nine years. When he isn't writing, he's watching movies, reading and living life to the fullest.

**Meet Lsb Authors At The House Of Sin**  
**Lsbooks.Net**

**We invite you to visit Liquid Silver Books**

LSbooks.com  
for other exciting erotic romances.

**2007: Terran Realm**

Urban fantasy world: TerranRealm.com

**Featured Series:**

**The Zodiac Series: 12 books, 24 stories and authors**  
Two hot stories for each sign, 12 signs

**The Coven of the Wolf by Rae Morgan**  
Benevolent lusty witches keep evil forces at bay

**Fallen: by Tiffany Aaron**  
Fallen angels in hot flight to redeem their wings

**The Max Series by JB Skully**  
Meet Max, her not-absent dead husband, sexy detective Witt, his mother...

And many, many more!