

# THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

## Carolina Barbour

**MENAGE AMOUR** 



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#### A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Ménage Amour

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS Copyright © 2009 by Carolina Barbour E-book ISBN: 1-60601-425-0

First E-book Publication: August 2009

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#### **PUBLISHER**

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# THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

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### **Chapter One**

As the elevator car climbed past the sixty-first floor toward the penthouse, an outline of Carpathia's skyscrapers faded into dusky backdrop. The more the car ascended, the illusion of being able to reach out and touch the two moons and twinkle of yellow stars seemed possible, as if the obstacles were no more than an arm's length away.

The man stood looking out the glass-encased dome and watching the outline of buildings from the city below fade into the umbra as the car climbed higher. He stood erect, shoulders squared, stretching the black jacket comfortably over his broad shoulders. Breed Uonaidas concentrated on the rise toward where Senator Sparks's son, Jordon, currently resided. A niggling of unsettling thoughts absorbed his concentration.

The senator's son normally didn't reside in the penthouse, but due to an increase of threats against the father, the security level for the government official's family escalated to a level two. That meant tonight he and his partner, Aldie, would pay Jordon a visit and obtain intel under monitored security. But, that's not what bothered Breed.

What pissed him off was the assignment—period. When he joined the Elite Forces of a top government agency, he didn't think it would include going under as a mole to enact blackmail because the senator couldn't behave himself. The senator went too far this time, and the government wanted his shenanigans quieted.

Senator Sparks's continuous abuse of position and power had come to a cusp. The latest bill he worked hard to pass had the public in an uproar, and made other government officials, including the president, nervous.

The Abramson Bill, a billion-ducat buyout plan, would save the financier Todd Abramson from financial ruin. Senator Sparks lobbied heavily to get the bill passed, even though all knew it was unethical that he would have the audacity to openly attempt to save his friend from financial ruin. The money would not only keep the failing company afloat, but there were strong rumors the million-ducat proposal would provide the senator with a hefty sum. Money he needed to finance his illustrious campaign for the next presidential race.

Carpathia's current economy was faltering, citizens already financially strapped and barely making ends meet, would be left with an additional burden if left to support the bill. But Senator Sparks seemed oblivious to that, or unconcerned. Perhaps both, because he continued to push hard to get the bill passed even though his supporters were minimal amongst his constituents and fellow officials. The rumors within the political circle hinted the president herself would veto the bill should it pass the House, but Senator Sparks didn't seem concerned about this happening. At his last press conference, he boasted the president would not do such a thing. It almost seemed a dare and furthered the belief that, even though the president was the highest-ranking official, Senator Sparks had the power. There were rumors as to why, but nobody voiced them aloud for fear of the repercussions. Senator Sparks had something juicy on the president and made the woman dance to his tune.

The public outcry about the bailout increased daily. The citizens were angry. Renegade groups started popping up overnight making it clear they intended to stop the Abramson Bill from passing one way or another. Within the inner workings of the government—need-to-know only—and under the radar of the oversight committee, certain people of power were just as eager to stop the senator through any means necessary.

Breed observed the backdrop of the sky as the elevator climbed toward the penthouse. After reflecting a brief minute more, he turned toward his partner. Eyebrows slanted downward, jaws set, and a disgruntled expression on his face bespoke volumes. He wasn't happy and didn't intend to act otherwise. "This assignment is bullshit. Since when are agents sent on a blackmail mission? Coleson is a first-rate prick," Breed said.

His partner, Aldie McMahon, grinned, showing perfectly white teeth, a contagious smile that brightened his baby blues to sparkling. It was an expression Aldie wore regardless of his mood, and sometimes it piqued Breed that, no matter the situation, his partner seemed amused. His disposition never changed. Aldie called it his game face. Breed accused him of being on some powerful shit. That, too, made Aldie grin. It was damned irritating.

Aldie said, "Coleson's motive is suspect, and he is a prick, but he is also our lieutenant."

Breed looked at Aldie and scoffed, "So?"

Aldie touched Breed's arm with familiarity. "Come on, man. Coleson knows we are the best the agency has to offer. This mission is delicate, and not to mention critical. Besides, remember, we took an oath when we joined the force to follow orders without rancor or discrimination. Failure is unacceptable. Senator Sparks has to be stopped." He moved closer, invading Breed's personal space. "What's the problem? It's not as if we haven't done this sort of thing before." He squeezed Breed's arm affectionately. "Besides, it might be fun."

He shoved Aldie's arm away. "This is bullshit," Breed repeated intentionally to belabor a point.

Aldie put his hand back and leisurely moved it soothingly up and down Breed's arm. "Relax, man. This is a piece of cake compared to other assignments. Who knows? You might enjoy it."

Breed stood a head taller than Aldie. He glowered down at him. "Unlike you, I'm discriminate about where I put my cock. I assure you I'm not going to enjoy this assignment."

"We get in and out, download the digital stream to the federal database, and then we're done. So, we get to give Jordon the 'introduction' as an added bonus."

"Coleson is jerking our chains. He could have sent some eager rookies to do the same thing. Bastard."

The pressure against his arm increased. Fingertips fluttered over the defined muscles in his arm as Aldie firmed and increased the massage. He pressed forward. His expression was wicked. "I agree, but he had us over a

barrel, so to speak. Even if we wanted to refuse the assignment, we couldn't. After Coleson found that interesting scene of us in the locker room, you knew sooner or later this was bound to happen."

"Sitting in Coleson's office having to look at his triumphant smile as he played a visual of you going down on me is not my idea of a smart career move. What it did was allow Coleson to screw us and pin this dumbass assignment on me. Next time, I recommend you be a little more discreet. You know the agency has ears and eyes everywhere." Breed chastised Aldie to let him know what he thought.

Aldie chuckled, waving his hand dismissively, and Breed knew it was his partner's way of ignoring his comment.

"If you ask me, I think Coleson got off watching us. Who wouldn't, seeing that gorgeous cock of yours? My mouth is watering just thinking about it now," Aldie said. He casually ran his palm over the huge bulge between Breed's thighs that seemed more obvious with the formfitting slacks he wore. Aldie licked his lips suggestively. "You need to relax, man. I can help you with that and get you ready for Jordon."

Breed glanced at the display as the floor numbers rapidly changed as the elevator ascended. "We don't have time."

Aldie pressed the stop button. The car glided to a smooth halt. "I will make time. You need this, or you might scare the senator's son to death with your black mood."

Breed concentrated on the skyline, ignoring the whisper-soft sound his zipper made when Aldie pulled it down. He continued to focus on the bright stars and hazy clouds drifting by as hot fingers slipped into the opening of his pants and freed his penis.

Aldie murmured the word "gorgeous." He encircled his fingers around the thick shaft and started gliding to and fro, masturbating Breed's cock. Impulsively Breed responded, jutted out his hips, and pumped his penis repeatedly between Aldie's palm. He inhaled sharply, feeling the moist heat of Aldie's lips collapse around his crown. Bracing himself against the wall, he savored the expertise with which Aldie worked. He teased the eye slit, lapping up the dot of pre-cum, circled his tongue over the thick vein, and then started a vacuum motion.

Aldie was thorough. He deep-throated Breed's cock, pushing the length past his teeth and tongue, swallowing, he sucked on his cock with a parched frenzy.

Breed palmed Aldie's head, digging his fingers into the dusty-blond curls, held tight, and then rocked his hips forward. A guttural sound escaped, he shuddered and released, filling Aldie's mouth.

Before Aldie could stand, Breed zipped his pants, released the stop button, and settled back in the corner of the car as it started to climb.

Aldie stood up, facing Breed. "When you need some encouragement to fuck Jordon, think about that," he said.

Breed folded his arms over his chest, barely glanced at Aldie, definitely didn't acknowledge his statement, but instead focused on the passing scenery.

"You've been in a funk since this morning. Even before Coleson threw us for a loop. Is this about the case, or are you still pissed at me for what I said earlier about Pepper?"

"What does this have to do with Pepper?"

Aldie shrugged, lifting one shoulder. "You tell me. I just made a suggestion about you, me, and Pepper getting together, and all of a sudden you're acting like a jerk. Did you tell Pepper about us?"

Breed refused to confirm or deny.

"I didn't think so." Aldie sulked. Breed could hear the disappointment in his tone.

"I'm not the monogamous type, and I never kept that a secret from you or Pepper. She is aware of my extracurricular activities, and as far as I'm concerned, that is good enough for now. I don't think I need to validate anything with Pepper, Aldie. If she asks, I won't lie to her."

"You will just continue to hide the truth. Don't you think Pepper should know you are into men?"

Breed eyed his partner. "I'm not hiding anything. Not confessing, but not intentionally trying to be deceptive either. Pepper is pretty astute. She knows something is going on. Not that it is any of your business, but she saw the lubricant in my nightstand. She asked me what it is for, and I was honest about it. I never touched Pepper's ass. She asked me if I was doing other women, and I said no. When she asked if I used the stuff before, I told

her yes. I think—no let me rephrase that. I know she is smart enough to figure out what that means. Give it a rest."

The door to the car slid open. Breed stepped out and left Aldie standing there with an irritated scowl on his face. He knew the comment didn't make his partner happy. Aldie could get over it, as far as he was concerned.

The plush carpet lining the corridor muffled the sound of their boots as he and Aldie walked toward the penthouse. As soon as they rounded the corner, a pair of Secret Service dicks stepped into their path.

One hard-assed, bulldog-faced man raised his hand in front of Breed's face, which didn't go over very well with him. He had a mind to break the idiot's wrist, but decided to let it go. The man, though stupid, was just doing his job.

"We are here to see Jordon Sparks," Breed said.

The bulldog glanced at Aldie, lifted a brow. "Why?"

"Business," Breed said, knowingly being noncommittal with his reply because it wasn't any of the man's concern.

He could tell the bulldog didn't like his response. Breed couldn't care less. The two faced off like two bulls ready to butt horns until Aldie stepped in to defuse the situation.

His partner was the bullshitter of the two, calmer and more patient than him. Breed settled down and let Aldie do what he did best. Breed smirked as Aldie turned on the charm. He gave both men his million-ducat smile, which Breed had seen put the most suspicious perp at ease.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Sparks is expecting us. I think if you inquire with him, Mr. Sparks will validate our appointment."

The bulldog hesitated. Breed let his agitation show. "Time is money," he said.

He stood there as the lackey went inside. He ignored the other agent, who kept staring at him as if he expected Breed to try to pick his pocket.

A few minutes passed before the bulldog returned. He opened the door, stepped aside, and motioned for him and Aldie to enter.

"Thank you, gentlemen," Aldie said politely. He stepped over the threshold into the room.

Breed pushed past the men and entered the suite.

*Great, let the game begin,* he thought.

## **Chapter Two**

Jordon Sparks was standing facing the panoramic window of his suite when they entered. Breed assumed he was entranced by the skyline, or ignoring that he and Aldie were there, purposely. Maybe the man had a pretentious attitude, rightfully inherited from his father, and making them wait to be acknowledged was how he got his kicks. Either way, what little patience Breed had was waning.

Finally, Jordon turned around. Pale blue eyes, somber, roved appreciatively between each man. Then he offered a semblance of a smile, slightly lifting his lips in a one-sided curve.

The action softened his features and made Jordon appear younger than Breed considered he might be. He didn't favor the senator in the least. His father had a lanky, slender frame, close-knit eyes, a long, hawkish nose, and reed-thin lips. His son was an exact opposite. Curly dark hair that fell on his shoulders, round, inquisitive eyes, oval face, and cherub cheeks made the senator's son look like jailbait.

Breed noticed how Jordon was dressed in easy slacks that hung low on his waist, and an oversized shirt that hid his lithe frame. He didn't dress like a senator's son, or mature, but more like most of the teenagers these days. He sagged and bagged, getting lost in his clothing. That furthered Breed's impression that Jordon was younger than he first thought.

If Coleson sent him to do a teenager, he was so out of there.

Normally, he took the lead when they handled assignments, but he wasn't feeling this. Aldie must have sensed it because he stepped forward and took the reins. As usual, he turned on the charisma, something he was capable of doing like a faucet. Breed called Aldie "The Chameleon" because he comfortably morphed into character with an ease that sometimes frightened him.

Breed did his fair share of morphing when the situation called for it, but he wasn't comfortable acting outside his true persona. In his line of work, being able to get into character saved his butt more than once when he worked undercover. That didn't mean it was easy, because "fronting," as he referred to it, went against the innate grain of his true nature. Breed had to work harder than Aldie to pull it off.

Aldie smiled, stepping forward, intentionally invading Jordon's personal space. "Mr. Sparks, may we call you Jordon?"

Breed knew what his partner was doing. Aldie wanted to give Jordon the impression he was in control. Though that was the furthest thing from the truth, Breed let Aldie run with it because he knew Jordon lost control from the first moment he stepped over the threshold.

"Sure," Jordon said.

Breed noticed how Jordon continuously stared down at his feet as if he was reluctant and/or too shy to meet their gaze. Jordon's manner was definitely reticent, leaving Breed to wonder why. Under the cover of his lashes, he scrutinized the senator's son more closely.

Fuck. Just how old is he?

He couldn't tell if Aldie was concerned about Jordon's age or not. He continued to role-play, speaking in a low, placating tone, as if he was talking to a young boy. "The escort service said you requested two men. I hope you aren't disappointed," Aldie said.

For god's sake, the man actually blushed.

Breed noticed Jordon gave him and Aldie the once-over, scanning them from head to toe before looking at their faces. His tone, almost giddy, sounded excited. "I was trying to catch my breath. You are both attractive men and far exceeded my expectations. I like how you contrast one another, dark and mysterious coupled with pretty-boy charm. The service is to be commended. So...wh-what happens next?"

Good cop, bad cop is how the normally played it. As usual, Aldie would play the good guy, and Breed would be himself—bad boy.

"We begin your introduction," Aldie said.

"Introduction?" Jordon repeated.

A feral grin curved Breed's lips. "That means we fuck you silly," he said.

Jordon stared at Breed for a long moment, meeting his intense gaze without faltering. Breed thought that was interesting. For someone who acted shy, Jordon's action was telling.

Maybe Jordon wasn't as bashful as he pretended. He could tell his rough manner turned Jordon on. Damn, did that mean he had to take the lead?

Breed struggled with the notion of playing up to Jordon because something about the entire matter smelled like a skunk. This niggled at Breed's conscience. Jordon appeared nervous about what was about to happen, but he also had a sixth sense that things weren't what they seemed.

He pushed the thought to the back of his mind. Even if he believed the assignment was bullshit, he understood the seriousness of the matter and couldn't afford to botch the mission because of his doubt.

Aldie played his nurturing role like an Oscar-worthy performance. He stepped up to Jordon and caressed his cheek with his fingertips. "An introduction isn't an easy thing, especially when two men are involved, but you can relax. We know what we're doing."

Jordon looked at Breed and Aldie nervously. "I-I thought this was what I wanted, but now I'm not so sure."

The last thing he needed was for Jordon to renege. Breed put on the dominant hat he preferred, and took control of the situation. He moved up behind Jordon, gathered the hem of his shirt, and lifted it over Jordon's head. He tossed it aside and then started working on the belt buckle. Leaning forward, he whispered in Jordon's ear. His tone rough, raspy, for the effect he set things into motion.

Breed said, "It's not what you want, but a craving." He slipped his hand down Jordon's pants, cupping his penis, massaging it between his fingers. "I know because your body is hot, and your cock is hard. You are dying to be fucked, Jordon."

Before Jordon could respond, Breed shoved his pants down past his thighs and around his ankles, pooling the material on the floor around Jordon's bare feet. Aldie helped, working the trousers off until Jordon stepped free.

Breed gave Jordon's ass a firm pat. "Nice," he said. He reached around and grasped the slender, long cock and started stroking. "Nice, indeed."

When Jordon didn't move toward Aldie, who was on his knees, mouth open, Breed gave him a little nudge.

He felt Jordon tremble when Aldie's lips suffocated the entire length of his cock. Breed locked his arms on him to keep Jordon steady and to keep his knees from buckling when Aldie took his penis and swallowed.

#### **Chapter Three**

Confident that Aldie had control of the situation, Breed stepped back to undress. He removed two tubes from his jacket pocket, tossed them on a nearby chair, and finished taking off his clothes.

He coated his cock with a gel that solidified on contact and then used the other cream to moisten his penis. He put both containers on the table and moved up behind Jordon, creating a sandwich effect.

He pressed Jordon back against his frame and raked his fingertips roughly over Jordon's chest, occasionally pinching his nipples. He slipped his hand down between their bodies, cupped Jordon's ass, and slickened his tunnel with the remainder of the lubricant on his fingers.

Without giving a warning, he pushed past the sphincter entrance and invaded Jordon with two fingers. He buried his hand up to the knuckles and paused, feeling Jordon's muscles had clenched.

"Ouch." Jordon groaned.

"A little pain before pleasure," Breed said.

Jordon gasped and clutched Breed's hand in a motion that said stop.

Breed didn't quit, but slowed down. He whispered in Jordon's ear. "Preparation is everything when virgin territory is involved. It's going to be a little uncomfortable at first, but worth it to get this ass ready. You want to be fucked, don't you, Jordon?" He massaged, flexed, scissoring, widening the opening, before penetrating deeper.

"I-I...think so."

"Yeah, you do. Max," Aldie said, using Breed's undercover name, "he wants it because I could feel his cock twitch when you breeched his ass." Aldie worked a finger inside Jordon, joining Breed's two, and both started finger-fucking the snug orifice, commanding it to loosen up.

Jordon started taking short, quick breaths. A blast of air escaped as Breed and Aldie quickened the pace, plundering greedily, distending the hole.

When Jordon's head fell back against Breed's shoulder, his eyelids fluttered, he returned to what he was doing.

"Aldie likes his mouth fucked. Don't hold back." Breed raked his teeth over Jordon's shoulder. His fingers went deeper, moved faster, working with a hedonistic beat inside Jordon's ass as Aldie sucked with the same intensity.

"Ahhh—" Short burst released. Jordon started panting. His hips started rocking, pumping, harder and faster.

"That's it, Jordon, fuck that sweet mouth," Breed said. "Come for me."

As if on cue, sparred by Breed's heated instructions and his finger hitting the male G-spot, Jordon let go.

Jordon grunted, bowled over, and came in a rush.

Breed stepped back, picked up Jordon before the man crumpled, and carried him over to the bed. He tossed him down and landed on top of him, pinning Jordon to the mattress.

"Customer satisfaction. That's what I like. What do you like, Jordon?" Breed asked. He really didn't care but wanted to know where his head was at.

He noticed the mirror positioned on the wall facing the bed. Breed couldn't know for sure if someone put it there for a reason or if it was solely for decoration, but regardless, he intended to use it.

"I like to watch," Jordon said.

Breed's smile was wolfish. "Really? That's not half as fun as participating, but it's your time." He turned to Aldie. "Jordon wants to watch."

Aldie quickly stripped out of his clothing. He blinked to activate the recorder implant behind his eyelids and then joined Breed on the bed.

Breed wasn't into voyeurism, but he reminded himself this was an assignment. He rested his butt on his heels, stretched his arms behind him, locked his elbows, and watched Aldie go down on him.

Jordon raised up, shifted, so he could see. "Wow, you're huge. How does he take it all without gagging?"

"Practice makes perfect," Breed said.

Jordon seemed to be enthralled watching Aldie suck his cock, so Breed let him enjoy the show. But, after a minute, he decided to change things up because the idea was to get intel on Jordon, not show how great Aldie gave head.

Breed removed Jordon's hand that was busy between his thighs.

"What?" Jordon asked. He looked up at Breed, puzzled.

Breed didn't bother to respond. He caught Jordon around the waist, lifted him effortlessly, and turned until he was in the desired position. He raised Jordon to his knees, stretched his thighs by putting his hips between the slender thighs, and then bent him slightly forward.

Jordon's voice quivered. "Is this going to hurt?"

"Yes." Breed captured Jordon's throat and forced him to look into the mirror. He dropped his tone an octave, murmuring, "Look, Jordon...I want you to see who's fucking your ass."

Jordon stared at Breed's reflection, then his eyelids closed, a low groan emitted before he whimpered.

"Watch me. See how good you can take it," Breed said. He waited until Jordon opened his eyes. Then he gripped his hips, pressed forward, rotated against the tight portal until he felt it had slackened sufficiently.

"A little burn..." Breed rocked his hips forward, burying the head of his cock in Jordon's reluctant ass. He waited a scant second and then forged ahead, thrusting deep, sending his cock riding high.

"Ouch—that did hurt."

"That's because you're thinking too much," Aldie said. He positioned himself in front of Jordon and went down on his knees. "What you need is a distraction." Aldie licked his tongue along Jordon's penis, teased the head, nibbled at the thick ridge until the cock stiffened. He took him to the back of his throat and started rubbing the crown back and forth against the roof of his mouth.

Jordon started squirming, wiggling about, making it difficult for Breed to keep his hold. His cock slipped out, but Breed eased back inside Jordon, penetrating again. He held Jordon still, worked the full length of his penis in and out of the snug fit, plunging...continuously riding the tight ass.

When he thought Jordon might bolt, he gave Aldie a look that he knew his partner would understand. Assignment or not, he wanted things over and done.

Aldie lay on his back, spread his legs, and locked them around Jordon's waist when Breed moved him forward. As if Jordon was clueless what he needed to do, Breed held his cock and pushed it inside Aldie.

"Oh," Jordon moaned as Aldie lifted his legs and arched into him.

"It only gets better. Trust me, there's nothing like feeling a cock in your ass while you screw one," Breed said. "Kind of takes your mind off everything else."

"Do me, man. Take what you paid for. Fuck me, Jordon," Aldie said. He raised up, forcing Jordon to do the damned thing.

Breed wasn't sure what happened to the reluctant prey. An uncontained wildness seem to unleash, and the senator's son became the aggressor. That was fine by him. Engrossed in fucking Aldie like there was no tomorrow made his ass give and ease against his cock until he could easily slip and slide inside the channel.

If getting off got Jordon off, then that was fine by him. He picked up the tempo of erratic forges he felt each time he took Aldie's ass and went with the rocky wave of rolling Jordon's butt created as he continuously bucked.

"I'm there—oh, God." Jordon groaned.

Breed felt like, for whatever reason, he was so there, but held back.

"That's not good enough, Jordon. I need you to come." He slammed his hips freely, beating the same path as Jordon, who fucked as if he found a new purpose in life, as if there was no tomorrow, and Breed went with the flow because he felt on edge feeling the release racing up the stalk, threatening to explode even though he knew it wasn't going to happen. He did what he had to do, but he'd never been able to separate business and pleasure. This was business.

"Come for us." When he didn't, Breed gave him some encouragement. He wasn't sure, but went with instinct. Something told him for all his reticence earlier, Jordon didn't mind playing rough. He ran his fingers through the curly hair, twisting, and then yanked Jordon's head back. His voice raspy, a lash of heat, he demanded, "Come on, Jordon, fuck that ass, and give it to him and blast."

A strangled cry ripped from Jordon's throat. He tensed, straining to hold back. Breed wasn't having it. He gripped his hips and rocked forward with a driving need until a hoarse shout erupted from Jordon's mouth at the same time he imagined Jordon's seed spilled free in Aldie's ass.

By the time Jordon recovered, Breed was sitting on the edge of the bed. He looked over his shoulder and saw Jordon was trying to catch his breath, wheezing, sounding asthmatic. He turned away, standing, he went to retrieve his clothes. As far as he was concerned, mission completed.

"You are still hard," Jordon blurted out.

Breed could see Aldie's cum smeared on Jordon's stomach, so he knew the senator's son referred to his cock, which was still standing like a soldier. He shrugged, bent to reach for his pants. "This was all about you, Jordon."

Jordon pouted, clearly disappointed.

Breed didn't try to placate him.

On the other hand, Aldie played the "pleaser" role and walked over to Breed. They exchanged glances; Aldie looked amused while Breed was pissed. For a brief second, Breed considered turning Aldie down when he reached for him, but the thought of riding home sporting a hard-on was silly when Aldie was there, willing and wanting to do him.

Jordon didn't turn him on because he wasn't into the whiny type. But, he learned to rise to the occasion, if necessary. He was hard because it was necessary to fuck Jordon. Why not let Aldie take advantage of it? Breed thought.

He didn't protest when Aldie tugged on the latex, pulling it free. He stood rigid and let his partner take his cock into his mouth. He put his fingers in Aldie's hair, guiding his movements, commanding what he wanted. Not that Aldie needed any instructions, but sometimes the control factor inside him was uncontrollable. He liked taking charge.

A carnal, lust-filled expression crossed Jordon's face as he watched Aldie go down on Breed. Breed held Jordon's stare, never flinching, not even batting an eye. Not even when he felt Aldie take it to the max, licking and slurping on his cock, good enough he felt woozy, did he lose eye contact with Jordon.

He ejaculated within seconds, sending a spurt of cum down Aldie's throat.

Jordon yelped, clapped his hands, giving Aldie praise, acting like a damned cheerleader. It was all Breed could do not to puke.

"I swear you two are the best," Jordon said.

"We aim to please," Aldie said.

Breed just counted the minutes before he was out of there.

## **Chapter Four**

Breed waited until Jordon left the room with the excuse he needed to piss before he turned to Aldie. "He's been fucked before. If you ask my opinion, more than once. It has probably been a while. He was tight at first, but eventually he spread like warm butter. Why do you think he faked it?"

Aldie gave Breed his normal one-sided shoulder shrug. "Maybe he gets off reliving his first time. Role-play? Come on, Breed, you know it's not unusual."

Aldie made a valid point, so Breed let it go. "Tell me I didn't just fuck a teenager," Breed said.

Aldie rolled to his side, propped his head up on a cupped palm. "Jordon is older than what you think. Around twenty-something. He just has that boyish appeal."

Breed sighed with relief.

When Aldie lay on the bed, pillowed, folded arms behind his head, and settled in, Breed arched his eyebrow. "We are done here. Get dressed, Aldie."

"I got the footage, but you know it would be impolite to leave until our client tells us to."

"Get out of character," Breed barked. "You have the intel of us doing the senator's son. We got what we came for. It's time to bail out," he said and then looked at his partner. "Or were you hoping to fuck Jordon?"

"If I said yes, would you be jealous?"

"Have you ever known me to be? Nothing has changed between us, Aldie. Don't misconstrue our relationship."

"Wouldn't make that mistake," Aldie said drily.

"We are out of here."

"I think we should at least wait until Jordon comes out of the cleansing chamber. Don't you think? That, and maybe he isn't done with us, Breed. If we just leave, he might get suspicious. What if we need to return for a repeat, for whatever reason? It will help if Jordon is satisfied with us."

"Fuck that, Get dressed."

Aldie rolled to the edge of the bed and stood up. He walked over to Breed, ran his fingers across his chest soothingly, as if to calm the beast within. "We get dressed, wait until Jordon returns, and then tell him we're out of here. Okay?"

"He's been inside for fifteen minutes. What the hell is he doing in there anyway?"

Aldie said, "Sounds like he is talking to someone on his interlink."

The high pitch of Jordon's voice occasionally filtered through the door. The tone was audible, but not what he was saying, but it was clear he argued with someone. Breed strained to listen, but it was impossible to decipher the one-sided conversation over the sound of the steam infusers humming.

When Jordon came from the chamber, Breed noticed his worried expression. His fingers were clasped in front of him, entwined, fidgeting.

"You okay?" Aldie asked.

It was obvious to Breed that Jordon forced a smile. Whomever the senator's son had been talking to obviously left the man upset. Though he was curious, he didn't inquire about Jordon's agitated state. If he had personal issues, it wasn't any of his business. The assignment included fucking, not babysitting Jordon.

"I'm fine," Jordon whispered.

Breed could see he had retreated into his reserved shell.

"So, I guess we are done?" Jordon asked.

"Yep," Breed said. He finished buttoning his shirt and reached for his jacket when he heard it. He froze.

The sound faint, barely audible, but so recognizable it exploded in Breed's ears with familiarity and put him on alert. The noise was suppressed like someone was trying to spit, but nothing came out. Someone was firing an assault repeater with an advanced silencer.

He could tell Aldie heard it too because he stopped, stiffened, and mouthed, "What the fuck?"

Breed didn't waste time responding. He grabbed Jordon, flattened him against the wall, and withdrew his stunner. Aldie followed suit, gun ready, aimed at the door. Breed flipped the light switch to off.

The wood splintered into toothpicks, sending shards flying around the room when a barrage of laser blasts slammed into the frame. The firepower ceased when the door swayed, hung loose, teetering on its hinges.

Somebody kicked it in, and men charged into the room. Their weapons preceded them into the room. High-powered assault stunners with scopes waved back and forth, setting sight as the men scanned the room for occupants.

Mayhem erupted, rapid fire exploded riddling the walls, bed, and furniture with holes. The fiery bursts shattered the window, sending slivers of glass over the carpet and shredding the drapes. At the high altitude, the gauzy material of the curtains and privacy shades was sucked out the window.

Breed and Aldie didn't hesitate when the men turned in their direction. They moved swiftly, shooting at the attackers. One by one, each of the men who entered the room fell quickly.

Aldie leaned back against the wall, released his empty canister, and reloaded. "What the fuck is going on?"

"The hell if I know," Breed said, checking his amp pulse indicator to see how many rounds he had left. He shifted his attention around the room and eyed the dead men before looking at Aldie. "It's too damn quiet," he whispered and then indicated with a hand signal he was going into the other room to investigate.

Aldie turned to Jordon, who was cowering behind his back. "Get dressed." When Jordon didn't move fast enough, Aldie snapped with authority. "Now, Jordon! Move your ass."

A laser blast sounded.

Then another—two more shots were fired.

Aldie relaxed, lowering his weapon, when Breed entered the room. "The two Secret Service men are dead. Hit in the back of the head, so whoever did it got the drop on them." Breed looked at Jordon. "Did you tell anyone we were coming tonight?"

Jordon started shaking his head and then said no.

"What are you thinking, Breed?"

"Somebody went to a helluva lot of trouble to get to Jordon. There are five dead bodies in here and one outside. Why in the hell send so many for one man?" Breed said.

Jordon's eyes popped in surprise. "You think these men were after me?" Breed grabbed Jordon by the collar. "It's an assumption, but I'm rarely wrong. That's why you are coming with us."

Jordon suddenly looked dubiously at Breed, shifted his focus to Aldie, and then returned to Breed. "Why should I go with you? How do I know you two aren't part of this entire scheme?"

Breed's expression turned savage. "You can either come with us for protection or stay here and hope no more assassins are waiting to finish the job after we leave. It's your call."

"This has to be some mistake."

"You want to see if it is or take your chances with us?" Aldie asked.

Breed exhaled, blasting air through his nostrils. He jerked Jordon by the shirt and started dragging him toward the door. He made the decision for him. Not out of any source of compassion or anything, but if the senator's son got killed, they could kiss the worth of the intel on Senator Sparks goodbye.

\* \* \* \*

They made it from the penthouse, outside, and to the cruiser without incident.

Breed put Jordon in the back seat. He sat in front behind the driver control panel. Aldie got in the passenger seat.

Breed disabled the autopilot and enabled the tracker receptor just in case they got a tail. He maneuvered the vessel into oncoming traffic of the ultra freeway, checked the perimeter displays and then the rearview monitors. He looked at Jordon, who was huddled in the backseat like a frightened child.

"You want to tell me what's going on?"

Jordon was shaking his head no. "I-I don't know."

Breed narrowed his eyes. "You were talking to someone on your interlink while you were in the cleansing chamber. Who was it?"

"Nobody, I swear."

"You make a habit of talking to yourself?" Aldie asked.

"Sometimes. It helps to clear my head," Jordon said quietly.

Breed looked the man up and down skeptically. He actually believed the senator's son. Not because he was the trusting type, but the seat where the man sat had a vital monitor embedded in the coils beneath the leather. The sensors recorded, uploaded to the database, and then analyzed for sudden spikes in heart or pulse rates. Jordon Sparks's rates remained level, which meant either he could fake it with the best or he wasn't lying.

The tracker receptor bleeped. Breed watched a mini-cruiser move in behind his vessel. "We got company," he said.

"Great." Aldie's tone was cynical as he primed his stunner.

Jordon looked at the stunner. He said, "You are carrying a government-issued weapon."

Breed didn't respond.

Aldie followed Breed's lead and remained silent.

He gunned the velocity chargers, revving the cruiser to maximum power, and shot across three lanes of traffic. The tail tried to follow, but had to swerve or risk slamming into several cruisers. Breed maneuvered behind an airbus transport. He kept the speed in pace with the oversize vessel to keep hidden. He checked the perimeter display for the tail, and then, seeing they were in the clear for now, he looked at Jordon. "You know your weapons."

"The Secret Service men carried the same type of guns." His eyes shifted from Breed to Aldie. "You're not from the escort agency, are you? What is going on?"

When neither man responded, Jordon's manner changed. The unassuming demeanor slipped. He got testy. Demandingly, he said, "I want to know what the hell is going on. I want answers now!"

Breed looked at the hand pressing into his shoulder. "You want to use that again?"

Jordon dropped his hand. He retreated, sulked, leaning back in the seat. "This is about my father, isn't it?"

"We work for the government. Our assignment was to get something to use against your father in order to blackmail him into stopping the madness. We figured seeing his son getting banged on the nightly news stream might motivate Senator Sparks to back down," Breed explained without a hint of remorse.

"The Abramson Bill?" Jordon uttered.

"Your father is out of control, and frankly, the government has had enough," Aldie added. "This can't be a surprise to you, Jordon. You were moved to the penthouse for your protection because your father has pissed off too many people. The order came from top-ranking officials in the government so they could keep an eye on you. Your father had nothing to do with the order for added security."

"Nothing my father does or not would surprise me. It wouldn't faze the selfish son of a bitch if somebody tried to kill me. He might even rejoice if I were dead. The Abramson Bill is my father's ticket to the highest-ranking position in the government. He needs the funds he is about to squeeze from the taxpayers to finance his race for president. If you think what you have will stop him, you're fooling yourself."

"It's a well-known fact you have tried to expose your father about something before, but each attempt failed. What was that about?" Breed asked.

"Twelve o'clock," Aldie said.

A cruiser pulled up behind them and kept pace. Breed checked the visual displays and then stopped abruptly, causing a solo-cruiser to slam his butt.

A horn blared, and somebody shouted a few choice words over the intercom.

Breed ignored the derogatory comment. He shot forward and flew past oncoming vessels, made a sharp right, and then exited the ultra. When he checked the perimeter display, the tail was trying to weave through the throng of vessels that boxed it in.

It was obvious Jordon Sparks wasn't going to respond to Breed's earlier question about the beef between him and the senator—he slouched low in the seat and pouted, staring out the window. Breed considered forcing the issue, but the vessel tracking him returned and brought along a friend. The two tails tried to box in and ram his transport.

The men following intended to play for keeps. Mini-launchers distended from the sides of their vessels. The tracker receptor started blinking, and the internal control warned that compact silo missiles locked coordinates. The control voice filtered into the cabin. "Warning. Warning. Evasive maneuvers are required in three...two...one."

"You first, you bastards," Breed said. He swerved a hard right, slammed one tail's vessel, and caused it to misfire. A laser shot went astray and exploded when it hit the side of a building. The other tail wasn't so lucky. When the other tail started firing, he retaliated and blew it to smithereens.

The surviving attackers were back, headed straight for his cruiser, and came at him, intent on ramming him head-on. He slammed the brakes, hovered, and waited. He'd played the game chicken as a kid. He revved the engine, started forward, daring the tail to keep coming if he had the balls. The idiot did.

"Amateur. You might want to hold on," he said. Aldie had the sense to follow instructions. Jordon leaned forward between the front seats trying to see what was going on. Breed kept going full speed ahead until he almost collided with the other vessel. Abruptly, just before they hit, he dropped beneath the tail, spun around, and fired into the fuel compression tanks. The containers popped, fluid spilled, gushing from the vessel. The tail's cruiser swayed and started spiraling out of control, downward, careening toward the ground. It exploded, burst into a fiery ball on contact, sending hot vapors and flames raising that surrounded Breed's vehicle. The explosion rocked Breed's vessel back and forth, but he managed to gain control. To avoid having his own tanks affected by the intense heat, he lowered the transport to a safer level.

He called for a cleanup crew, checked to ensure there were no pedestrian casualties before he turned and checked on Jordon. The man was wedged between the front and back seats. He enabled autopilot, grabbed Jordon by the pants, and pulled him up. He looked white as a ghost. He had a bruise on his forehead where he'd hit the headrest, but otherwise he'd survived.

"You can calm down. Do you need to vomit?" Jordon shook his head no. "We're in the clear for now, but I'm not sure if more tails are around. It's probably best if you stay in a safe house tonight until I figure out what the hell just happened."

Jordon nodded.

Breed looked at Aldie. "I will drop you two off. Handle the paperwork, make sure Jordon gets settled in, and then we can touch base later at headquarters."

"Ah, shit, Breed. I know what that means. You're going to talk to Coleson, aren't you?"

A devious grin crossed Breed's face. "I think a conversation with the lieutenant is in order."

"You think that is smart? Are you trying to get kicked off the force?"

"The assignment didn't include somebody trying to kill us. I want to know what happened, and I have a sneaky suspicion Coleson knows something. It's not a coincidence those men were sent after Jordon while we were there. I don't like that."

"What makes you so sure?" Aldie said.

"Call it instinct. That, and I don't believe in coincidence."

"Neither do I, but browbeating a superior isn't a bright thing to do."

Breed wasn't looking for affirmation from Aldie about what he planned to do. Whatever Aldie had to say was irrelevant. He wasn't in the mindset to listen to his partner and have him try to talk him out of what needed to happen. What occurred tonight was bullshit. Aldie's protest be damned.

He remained mute the entire way to the safe house. He decided when he spoke again it would be with Coleson sitting, or standing, whatever he preferred, but Breed intended to have his superior's undivided attention.

Of course, he would attempt to be as diplomatic as possible, but if Coleson gave him crap, he wasn't adverse to pushing matters. The fact he almost got blown to hell made for an ugly disposition. It made him want answers real bad.

The emblems on the tail's vessels were discreet, but he knew government-issued vehicles like the back of his hand. It was puzzling why bureaucrats would be involved on an attempt on Jordon's life when they'd sent him and Aldie to collect intel. There was no need to send in a second team. Sometimes the agency did just in case the first team failed, but never did the second try to wipe out the first.

Sending in so many men to apprehend one person seemed excessive. It was ridiculous, if he reasoned things out in his head. Jordon shouldn't have been a target. It was his father they were after, so why not just go after Senator Sparks? If he'd become that much of a pain in the ass, why go through all this trouble? Normally, the government used other tactics to dispose of a pain in the ass. Senator Sparks could have had a convenient accident or committed suicide. Of course, these taboo covert actions, ghost

missions, were kept highly confidential, but that didn't mean unorthodox methods weren't used when deemed necessary.

He knew this. The president knew it too. That's why Breed was damned irritated he wasn't privy to the insane scheme some fool on the force concocted tonight—if it were legitimate.

Breed pondered the thought for a moment. Then he decided to stop trying to second-guess shit and go get answers.

#### **Chapter Five**

He didn't really need Aldie to baby-sit Jordon Sparks, but intentionally left his partner behind so he could talk with Coleson alone. Just in case things got ugly, which he knew the possibility was likely, Aldie didn't need to be involved.

Breed walked through the maze of cubicles toward the lieutenant's office positioned catacorner in the large room. The glass-encased office, raised on a platform, allowed the lieutenant to view the entire work area, which he did like a sentry overlooking his flock. He kept his eyes on things to ensure nobody flinched, farted, or batted an eye without him knowing about it. His office had security blinds for privacy and one-way tinted windows so nobody could spy on the lieutenant. That meant he could sit behind his desk and play with his dick all day, and nobody would be the wiser. Something he suspected Coleson might have done on occasion. The first thing he noticed was the blinds were closed. That surprised him because Coleson always left them open so he could snoop. The late hour meant a small nightshift was on duty, but still, it wasn't like his superior to let anything escape his attention.

Breed listened to the tap-tap of boots echo along the tile floor as he walked through the area and made his way toward the lieutenant's office. All thoughts absorbed in the numerous questions whirling inside his head, he paid little attention to his surroundings. He and Aldie almost collided when he rounded the last row of cubicles.

Aldie said, "I thought you were going to wait for me so we could talk to the lieutenant together?"

"I lied. You probably don't want to be involved in this, Aldie. The lieutenant knows something about what happened tonight. One way or another I intend to hear what that is. I'm not taking no for an answer. If

you're involved, it isn't good for your record," Breed said, as if it would make his own pristine.

"That's bullshit, Breed, and you know it. We are partners. You don't make decisions for me when we're working a case. If Lieutenant Coleson has something to say, I want to hear it too."

"What he will probably do is write my ass up and put me on notice for suspension. You want to be a part of that?"

"I want to hear what he has to say firsthand."

Breed started walking. He called over a shoulder, saying, "Fine. If that's what you want, partner. Remember I tried to warn you."

Another idiosyncrasy caught Breed's attention. The door to the lieutenant's office was slightly ajar. He cautiously pushed the door open and then stepped over the threshold. He halted. "Son of a bitch."

Aldie moved around Breed and entered the room. He stopped cold.

"What the fuck is going on?" Breed said and then backed out of the room. Aldie had the sense to follow. Breed connected to the agency private network interlink and reported what they found in a clear, crisp description.

"This is Breed Uonaidas reporting an agent down. Lieutenant Coleson...DOA," he said and then disconnected. He didn't bother entering the location because the agency communicator had GPS.

The shrill alert of the building alarm sounded.

He heard hurried footsteps coming from all directions, heading toward where he and Aldie waited.

"This is so fucked up, man."

Breed looked at his partner, but didn't respond. What Aldie said was true, and they both knew it. First, the attempt on Jordon Sparks, and now they found Lieutenant Coleson dead. Things couldn't get any more screwed up than that. What sucked more is that he and Aldie seemed to be involved in the fiasco up to their eyeballs. He just wanted to know if it was inadvertent or not. Then he remembered he didn't believe in coincidence.

"Somebody has to have balls of steel to waltz into a government agency and kill the lieutenant," Aldie said.

"That, or he or she has unbelievable weight backing them up. This bullshit isn't possible unless you have serious clout behind you to pull it off. Getting past security alone to enter the building should have deterred someone, but obviously, it wasn't a concern. That means whoever did the hit is inside or working with someone on the force."

Aldie was shaking his head no. "I find that hard to believe. Every officer goes through a thorough background check to gain security clearance. Not to mention the random lie detector analysis, psychological mind mapping, and other techniques to ensure one of us doesn't go schizoid. If someone internally is involved in something of this magnitude, he or she would have been exposed by now."

"Those assholes who tried to kill us earlier were in government vessels. I guess you missed that?"

"No, I noticed, but kept telling myself I was dreaming," Aldie uttered.

Breed noticed their captain and an Internal Oversight Affair man named Wheatland heading in their direction. "Well, snap out of it. The lieutenant got us involved in something that stinks. My gut instinct is telling me it's deeper than the lieutenant's level, but the million-ducat question is just how far up the ladder does this crap climb and how far we're buried in it?"

\* \* \* \*

"Is it me, or did we just get interrogated?" Aldie asked.

Breed knew Aldie referred to the question-and-answer session he and his partner just went through with the captain, Wheatland, and an internal lawyer. All three asked questions, or drilled them, depending how you wanted to look at it, for over an hour. Finally, after they became exhausted, maybe bored, of hearing he and Aldie repeat their story, word for word, without changing a syllable, they were allowed to leave.

"It was an interrogation, and you damn well know it." He stopped at his cruiser. The infrared scanner outlined his image. The security module disabled the locks and lifted the door that raised like a wing on a bird about to take flight. "We were the last to see the lieutenant alive and the first to find him dead. Need I say more?"

"I got it. Still, it doesn't make any sense. Not a damn thing that happened tonight seems real. I feel like it is surreal, some damned dream." Aldie yawned. He ran his fingers through his hair. "Maybe in the morning, when my thoughts clear, I will have a better handle on things. Tonight, I say we wrap it up and sleep on it." He could see Breed's mind racing. He knew

what that meant. While he had an interest in the case, he liked to handle matters differently. He normally followed the rules and regulations of the agency, used diplomacy to handle suspects, worked diligently, but slow and steady. Breed functioned more like a machine than a human being when it came to working a case. He did what was necessary to solve a case, right, wrong, or indifferent. The man became a whirlwind of activity from the beginning to the end of an investigation. Often times he worked so hard Aldie wondered if he rested long enough to eat or sleep. Both were suspect, as his partner often quoted that sleep was overrated. Just the thought made Aldie yawn again.

Aldie knew sleep for the next few weeks would likely be nonexistent now that Breed had gotten his ire up about the case. He wanted answers, to solve things just as bad as Breed, but he preferred not to do it sleeping on his feet.

"I don't think there is much we can do tonight. I will see you in the morning. I think we should start with Jordon because my instinct tells me he's the nucleus to this entire mess," Breed said.

Aldie admitted he was a little surprised by what Breed said. Not about Jordon, because he agreed, but giving it a rest for tonight wasn't Breed's style.

"Does that mean you're flying solo tonight?" If he did, this wouldn't be the first time Breed started an investigation without him.

"Good night, Aldie."

Aldie knew a dismissal when he heard it. He started to protest, question Breed on his intentions for tonight, but Breed didn't give him a chance. Before he could form a word, Breed was cruising down the street.

#### **Chapter Six**

The door to the townhouse opened. An attractive man stood in the doorway smiling. "Breed Uonaidas, this is a pleasant surprise. What the hell brings you to my doorstep at this hour?"

Breed showed his friend Monty one of his rare smiles. "I don't care for any of the bars open this late in Carpathia. That, and I know you keep a liquor cabinet stocked with the best. That, and I prefer your company to a bartender who asks too many questions. Long time no see. What's up?"

Monty stepped aside, motioning for Breed to enter the opulent corridor.

Breed knew his way around Monty's place, so he walked down the hallway that lead to the lounge den with Monty following.

He sat on the sofa, rested his head against the cushions, and closed his eyes. When he opened them, Monty stood over him with a drink. "Thanks."

"You look like you need this and more. Do you know you look like crap?"

Breed grinned, took a sip of liquor, and then looked at Monty over the rim of his glass. "Thanks for the compliment." He raised the glass again, saluted Monty, and then took another swallow. "Keep them coming until I ask you to stop or can't request anything because I'm too loaded."

"Would it be an understatement if I said you had a screwed-up day?"

"Somebody tried to kill Jordon Sparks tonight. Lieutenant Coleson is dead. Is that royally screwed up enough for you?"

Monty's mouth fell open. "What the hell?"

Breed ran his fingers through his short, cropped hair, leaving it spiked. He looked weary. "My sentiments exactly. Lieutenant Coleson sent me and Aldie on a mission to get some blackmail data on Senator Sparks's son that the agency thought might make the senator back down about the asinine Abramson Bill," Breed said and then paused before continuing the thread of conversation.

He wanted to make sure Monty followed what he was saying. Monty knew what he did. He also knew that the demands the agency put on their officers weren't always pleasant. The agency wasn't above pimping the officers if it meant getting what they wanted. Monty didn't ask what blackmail data he was sent to collect, but Breed knew he understood. He took a sip of his drink.

"So, we go in and get what is needed, but before we left, men entered, killed two Secret Service agents, and tried to snuff out me, Aldie, and Jordon. We managed to get out safely, but then a couple of tails decided to try to finish us off. There was a little squabble, but I won." He grinned, downed his drink, before finishing. "Because Coleson sent me on the bullshit mission, he was the first one that came to mind when I wanted answers. It was a little past midnight when me and Aldie went to headquarters. At least I arrived around then, but I'm not sure about Aldie because he was there when I showed up. Anyway, we found the lieutenant in his office, dead as a doorknob, one shot center-forehead, another two in the chest."

Monty gave a low whistle. "That is a professional hit. Somebody knew what they were doing. You don't just enter a government-secured facility full of agents and assassinate a high-ranking officer. Just the thought is incomprehensible. This is serious, Breed. Not that I need to tell you that."

"What irritates me is the lieutenant got me and Aldie involved, and I don't know why. The investigation was conducted by another team while me and Aldie had a long, intense conversation with our captain, Internal Oversight Affairs, and an agency lawyer before we could leave."

"That suspiciously sounds like you two were interrogated."

"Uh-huh, if that isn't a kick in the face, what is?" Breed went to finish off his drink when he realized he already did.

"Refill?" Monty stood up and walked over to where Breed sat. He took the glass and headed to the bar console that sat in the corner of the room.

Breed focused a lustful gaze on the sinewy hips and butt outline that showed beneath the comfortable slacks that fit just right over Monty's athletic frame. He wasn't buffed, but defined with muscles that revealed he worked out on a regular basis. He wore his clothes well. Clothes didn't wear him. The gossamer fabric shirt the color of raw sugar fit loosely, but hung comfortably on his wide shoulders. The cream-colored slacks hugged his

hips, but weren't tight. The entire outfit was made for lounging and accentuated his friend's physique nicely. Breed looked down at Monty's feet. Not that he had to know he was barefooted.

Monty Asher and Breed went way back. They'd lived in the same neighborhood on Magnus, and their parents were good friends. They weren't close in age—Breed was five years older—but because Monty was academically ahead of other boys his age, they entered the Academy together.

Both were in accelerated study courses, so they often ended up in the same classroom together and started hanging out with the same inner circle of other students in the intellectually gifted program. After collaborating on a science project, they became friends, and then mutual interests in music, sports, and arts continued to bind the relationship that had expanded beyond youth into adulthood.

After graduation from the Academy, Breed moved to Sanguine and applied to the government's top-notch military university, where he excelled academically and ended up graduating first in his class. The agency eagerly recruited Breed to join the Elite Forces Special Unit that worked exclusively for the government.

He moved to Carpathia because he enjoyed the solitude compared to the endless hustle of Sanguine's city life. Magnus was too tame for his blood. He didn't get home much. Not that he didn't miss his mother and sisters, but he dreaded the volatile disagreements with his father that revolved around whether or not Breed wasted precious life as an agency man.

Breed and Monty lived in separate cities for a few years, but their friendship didn't wane. Breed considered Monty his best friend and possibly the only person he could trust outside family, one of the reasons he often sought out Monty and used him as a sounding board with issues normally kept private from anyone else. They were good friends. He had genuine fondness for Monty's company and an appreciation for his uncanny insight and wisdom, which Breed thought exceeded expectations for someone so young.

They chose two different career paths, but, because of the nature of their positions, they occasionally encountered each other on a professional level. Monty was a private defense attorney, and jokingly Breed gave him hell about it.

Breed respected Monty's profession even though it was too tame for him, but it seemed to work for his friend. He had a notorious reputation as a lawyer—he won cases even when it seemed an impossible feat—and, to date, could boast a hundred-percent success rate. Monty didn't seek clients, but people sought him, which allowed his friend to be discriminate about the cases he handled.

Breed took the glass Monty offered. "Thanks." He ignored the brief contact of their fingers when they touched.

"You're welcome."

Breed sipped his drink quietly and observed Monty under the cover of his eyelashes. At six-one, with blond hair and hazel eyes that were more gold than green, and a dimpled chin, Monty looked more like a movie star than a lawyer. He knew the fairer sex hounded his friend consistently, but he didn't have a steady to boast about. What Breed couldn't figure out is whether that was intentional or not. It wasn't that Monty didn't have a fair share of females gracing his bed—he fucked around like a playboy—but Monty never stayed in a relationship too long.

They had few secrets between them, but Monty never mentioned why he kept the women at bay. Breed wondered if it was because settling down wasn't an interest right now or if maybe he just enjoyed living the high life, free and unattached. Maybe he didn't like females as much as he led him to believe. All reasons were plausible, but he had never inquired. Not that he wasn't curious as hell, but if Monty wanted him to know something, he would tell him. Breed respected that.

Monty knew about his preference for females and males, what he referred to as dual-dabbling. He also knew about his and Aldie's relationship, which really wasn't serious, but more like partners with benefits. They fucked on occasion.

When he mentioned to Monty about Aldie, he had said he didn't think it was a good idea for him to get involved with his partner, but otherwise, he didn't offer an opinion. Curiosity often nagged Breed about how Monty really felt. Breed wanted Monty to elaborate on his dual-dabbling because he wanted to know what he thought about him doing both sexes, about as much as he wanted to know if the occasional "look" Monty gave him meant anything or if it was a figment of his imagination—perhaps a fantasy.

A couple of times Breed considered asking Monty bluntly if he was interested in taking their friendship to another level. He never got around to that, though—intentionally, of course. He valued the relationship they shared and preferred to keep Monty as a confidente more than he wanted to fuck him. Kind of, sort of. He chose not to elaborate on that, though.

Breed's thoughts shifted when Monty crossed his legs. He stared at the bulge between the muscular thighs for a long, rude minute. If Monty was aware of the thorough way he ogled him, he pretended not to notice.

"If the case turns out to be as twisted as I think, how do you intend to handle it?"

Breed faced Monty, staring. "I haven't thought that far ahead yet. This entire thing could include bringing down some high officials in the government, perhaps Elite Forces. Hell, for all I know, the president herself could be involved." He studied the ice swirling around in the amber liquid a second. "I'm going to take it a step at a time. Real slow because I know that I will stomp on some toes. Not that I care, but being cautious in this instance makes sense. I'm going to start with Jordon Sparks because I think he is at the center of this nonsense. Call it intuition."

"If you think it is internal, do you have anybody you can trust?"

Breed shrugged with indifference. He didn't say anything for a minute and then looked up at Monty. "I don't know who to trust right now. I have a few people that come to mind, but until I'm sure they are not involved, I'm riding solo. The first thing I need to do is get Jordon out of the safe house and put him somewhere nobody can get to him."

"You know he is welcome to stay here. I rarely use this place during the weekdays, and even when I'm here, the townhouse is so large we could go days without running into each other."

"I didn't want to ask."

"You didn't. I made the offer, remember."

Breed raised his glass. "I owe you. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Besides, when I was young and dumb, you got my ass out of a few slings when I had the bright idea to buck the system. I feel I owe you a favor or two. God, I was into everything that meant going against the injustices of the law. Picketing, sit-ins in front of the president's house...Remember when I chained myself to the gate outside the federal agency building to protest the law that passed to allow officers to pupil-scan

and collect DNA if a person was stopped for a minor traffic infraction, whether they had a warrant or not? I believed it was against a person's civil rights and encouraged selective targeting of the underclass."

"How can I forget your wayward past of youthdom, as I like to call it? Especially when you decided to protest the law that limited each patron of a bar to three drinks per establishment. You had an interesting way of letting the powers-that-be know how you felt. Remember, you and a few friends went to several bars and drunk yourself silly until you passed out on the sidewalk? Which landed you in jail for public intoxication."

Monty laughed. "In hindsight, I believe that solidified to the bureaucrats the law was a good one. Ah, the stupidity of youth."

"I had to pull major strings to get you out of jail and your record expunged. They wanted to make an example out of you. What did I get in return? When I came to confinement to get you released, you punched me in the jaw and then threw up on my shoes. Yeah, you owe me," Breed said, smiling. Then his expression turned serious. "Things could get ugly, Monty. When this case is over, it might include exposing some heavyweights. I'm not sure you want your name associated in any way with this fiasco."

Monty smirked as if to say "So?" "I still have some of that 'youthdom' in me even though I figured out it was better to fight the law from the inside out."

"I appreciate your help. You don't have to get involved."

"I know."

A moment passed where neither of the men spoke. Breed stared at Monty and wondered if he was getting that "look" again. His friend held his bold stare with an equally concentrated focus that lasted for a heated minute.

Monty eyed him face-to-face, shifted his focus to below his waist, before he looked at his eyes again. That he had just eyeballed his crotch made Breed react. His cock twitched, surged. He shifted uncomfortably and then swallowed the last of his drink as a distraction.

It took a minute, but finally Breed felt comfortable enough to uncross his legs and was thankful when his dick didn't salute the air. He leaned forward, resting elbows to knees, tee-peed fingers beneath his strong chin, and looked up.

Breed's tone, deceptively calm, didn't hint at the racing urge of lust rippling through his body. "I can't fathom why someone would put a hit on Senator Sparks's son. How does that stop the father?"

"A warning, perhaps? This time, your son. The next time, it's you, Senator. I have witnessed it in a couple of cases before. It's not unusual, but I would say a little unorthodox with the players you think are involved. The government normally doesn't make frivolous threats. There is no need when they have the power to make things happen and get away with it."

Breed nodded. "I came to the same conclusion, but the attack *was* against Jordon. I know this because, just before one of the assassins died, the man politely confided in me."

Monty grinned, shaking his head. "Polite, huh? I know that means you forced the man to talk before you killed him. You don't normally take no for an answer."

Breed did the quirky eyebrow thing, two lifts up, when he was about to say something devious. "We—one of the assassins—had a brief discussion, as I said. Of course, I wanted the man to elaborate on information, but he did something utterly stupid and tried to put a blast through my head. Naturally, it ended the interrogation."

Monty's eyebrows slanted downward, concentrated, processing the information. "Okay, so we know for a fact the assassination attempt was on Jordon. We just don't know why. You think Coleson got hit because the attempt was bungled, or to silence him?"

Breed ran his hand down his face. He was exasperated with the lack of answers. "The hell if I know. Either explanation applies and fits the circumstances." Frustration ate at Breed, and it began to manifest and dampen his mood the more he considered things. Normally cool light brown eyes darkened emotionally to cold and unwavering. His expression hardened the lines of his face. He stared at Monty a minute and then said, "It's too many what-ifs right now, and it pisses me off."

"Well, it's unreasonable to think you can solve anything tonight. Maybe after some much-needed rest you will have a fresher perspective on matters. What if you are ordered to bring Jordon in?"

Breed did the eyebrow thing again.

"Don't tell me. You're going to refuse a direct order?"

"No comment under the grounds it might implicate me later...or something like that."

"Close enough. I think I understand your position is not to cooperate. I have one more angle to throw at you. Have you considered Aldie or you are tied to what happened tonight more than you might realize?" The comment got an eyebrow lift from Breed. "I mean, in the scheme of things, you have to consider every person involved, no matter how miniscule, played a major role. You can't ignore it as an uncanny coincidence you two just happened to be on assignment tonight of all nights."

Breed scratched his after-five shadow, rubbed his fingers back and forth over the stubble. He leaned back against the couch, stretched his long legs out in front and crossed them at the ankles, folded his arms over his chest, and stared off in the distance a minute. Then he looked at Monty again.

"That was the conversation I intended to have with Coleson." A frown surfaced briefly, and then he waved a hand in the air dismissively. He leaned back against the headrest. "So much for that angle." Frustration tightened his features, he sighed heavily, studied the intricate design of the Art Deco ceiling with all the crisscrossed lines. He thought the maze was a bit much, and dizzying.

Monty stood up. "You want another one, or are you done?" he said, motioning toward Breed's empty glass.

"I have to confess I did go to a bar before coming here. This is, like, my fifth or sixth. Hell, I lost count. One more, and I'm afraid you will have a guest for the night."

"I have three spare bedrooms. I also happen to know that couch is damned comfortable because I have slept on it a few times when my bedroom seemed too far." Monty chuckled. "You do not have the sole right to drinking yourself into a stupor."

Breed followed the seductive swagger as Monty went to refill their glasses. He studied his friend like a predator sighting prey. A warm sensation coursed through and settled right between his thighs. His cock surged to attention. He wiggled and tried to adjust himself to a comfortable position to keep his dick from poking his thigh.

Monty looked over his shoulder. He said casually, "Do you know you are glowing?"

Breed's eyebrows dipped and created a wrinkle between his eyebrows. "What?"

The left corner of Monty's lip lifted. "Did you forget I have the ability to sense emotions? When you arrived earlier, you were fluorescent blue, which means anger or distress. You're a rose hue now."

Breed sat forward. He stared at Monty. "Rose? What does that color mean?" He had his suspicions, but wanted Monty to confirm his thought.

"Aroused."

"That's what I thought," Breed said sheepishly.

Monty laughed quietly and then finished replenishing the drinks. "If you're concerned about it, it's nothing. This is not the first time I noticed you glowed in my presence."

"Why didn't you ever mention it before?"

Monty raised and dropped his shoulders briefly, but didn't comment.

Okay, he was going to go there. This was a major breakthrough as far as things went. Monty had never said anything, not even hinted that he was aware he made Breed hot. Breed decided to take advantage of the moment. He forged ahead. "Now that you know I'm obviously turned on around you, does that bother you?"

Monty kept his back to him, and Breed wasn't sure if that was a good or bad sign. Did it mean anything at all? Was his friend unwilling to discuss matters now that they had chartered into a delicate topic? Monty remained silent. Anxiously, Breed prodded him because he wanted an answer. "Well, does it bother you or not?"

"Should it?" Monty said, noncommittal.

Breed countered the evasive tactic. "In my mind, no, but I did ask you the question. I would appreciate an answer."

After a long, uncomfortable minute passed, Monty finally turned around and faced Breed. He rested his hip on the ledge of the console. "You are not the first man to get aroused around me. Not that I'm bragging, but it happens all the time." An amused smirk surfaced on his face. "As usual, my dear sister Kincaid gave me her opinion about why this happens. She believes my aesthetic sense and appearance is metrosexual in nature, which is appealing to both sexes." He laughed. "You know Kincaid, though, so I don't put much emphasis on her observation. At eighteen, she considers

herself a pseudo-psychiatrist and readily offers an analysis of any situation whether it is requested or not."

Breed assessed Monty, looking him up and down. It didn't go unnoticed that he dodged answering the question. "Your sister, for all her youth, might be wiser then her years allude to." He settled back on the couch, eyes forward, he perceptively stared at his friend. "If I were the prosecutor, I would demand you answer the question."

Monty's gaze was set, unblinking. "We are not in court," he said, ultra low.

Breed stood up to his towering height and walked over to where Monty sat. He took the glass out of his hand, swallowed the contents, and then put it on the tabletop. In order to do this, he had to brush against Monty. Maybe it was on purpose? The faint scent of spice and wood aftershave, warm and uniquely male, wreaked havoc on his nostrils, sending his senses into lust overdrive. His cock stretched the length of his crotch.

He deliberately stepped forward, invading Monty's personal domain. "It's obvious you intend to dodge answering me." He pressed forward, inhaling the scent of brandy and maleness as if he needed to breathe the intoxicating aroma to live. "I'm curious why you never mentioned that you knew I get aroused around you. Therefore, I'm making the assumption it's a reason you did it tonight. Am I right or wrong?" Monty remained mute. Breed said, "Is this where you refuse to respond on the grounds it may implicate you?"

A slow, easy grin crossed Monty's mouth, making him look sexier, if that were possible. It took everything Breed had not to kiss him.

The sexual tension in the room escalated.

"I'm the lawyer, remember?" Monty effectively sidestepped responding again.

Breed's tone was low and rough. "I know, but I promised not to hold that against you."

Seeing this side of Monty surprised Breed because he never realized there was a reticent bone in his friend's body. Monty stood holding the glass close to his chest as if unable or unwilling to release the last barrier between them.

Breed focused on the full, heart-shaped lips that were still moist from the sip of brandy he drank. Then he forced his gaze upward and met his eyes. Respectively he concentrated on Monty's face—not that it simmered the heat building between his thighs—to keep from ogling the sensual prowess and hot body standing in front of him. He wasn't used to restraining himself, but normally just went for what he wanted, but for some reason he tempered the desire to wrap Monty in his arms and kiss him breathless.

What confusion he had no longer existed—Monty was interested. If Breed had to hazard a guess, he was turned on and hotter than the intense sexual desire he felt. He didn't touch Monty or vice versa, but Breed still felt the heat radiating off his friend as if their naked bodies were meshed together and covered in a blanket of fire.

Normally he took full advantage of an opportunity, but for whatever reason, Breed backed off. Maybe he was concerned that if he pushed Monty before he was ready, things might spiral out of control. There might be regrets—Monty's, not his—in the morning.

Breed destroyed the magical moment and offered Monty an easy out. "I'm going home to get some much-needed sleep. I will touch base with you in the morning when I'm ready to transport Jordon. Thanks for the drinks and conversation." He turned to leave.

The touch was subtle but present and a major violation between men. Monty's fingers enclosed around his arm in what could be perceived as an intimate gesture, something males didn't do.

The warm fingers lingered, pressing firmly into his arm just below the shoulder. Then just as abrupt, as if he realized the mistake, Monty let go. "Maybe you should sleep it off here?"

Breed raised an inquisitive eyebrow. He was not sure what to read into the offer, if anything.

He decided to test the waters. "You know I'm glowing pink like a beacon, right?"

"If you needed to light a path for a ship to land during the worst smog on Sanguine, you could. You're that bright."

"Then you know I'm aroused, my cock is hard, and if you invite me to spend the night, I'm not sleeping on your couch no matter how damned comfortable it is. If I stay, it's with you, in your bed, Monty. We never pretend with each other. Let's not start now."

He knew he pushed too hard when Monty retreated.

"Whoa, I think you may have misunderstood my offer. You have had a lot to drink. I thought it would be better if you slept it off here. If-if it, ah, sounded like I was suggesting something else, I apologize for the confusion."

Breed doubted the bullshit that Monty just fed him. He gave him a pass, though. "Sure. My mistake."

Mistake his ass.

He walked down the corridor, keenly aware that Monty followed. He kept moving instead of stopping as he ached to do. His sense of control could only go so far. He continued to walk away and hoped like hell Monty had the sense to let him leave. If he did or said anything that hinted he might want to take it to the next level, he was going for it.

He'd suffered under Monty's switches between hot and cold signals long enough. Tonight he had too many unanswered questions concerning the case that boggled his mind. Finding out whether Monty was interested in him wasn't going to be another reason to stay awake all night.

Breed stopped, whirled around, and faced Monty. "Do you want me or not?"

Monty studied his hands. "I've never have been with a man. Frankly, I'm not sure I want to be."

"Thank you for being half-ass honest, but you still didn't answer my question. I'm not talking about *a* man, but me, Monty. I desired you for a long time, but resisted the urge to make a move due to our friendship. The relationship we have is important. Getting you in my bed and fucking you silly is too."

"Do you know subtleness is not one of your strong traits?"

"Yes, I've heard that before. Answer my question."

"What If I say I can't, not right now?"

"Why? You don't want to or refuse to be honest with yourself?"

"You're a tenacious bastard."

"Tell me something I don't know." Breed grinned, not taking offense.

"Breed, I don't like my hand being forced any more than you do. Just so you know. Cut the interrogation tactics bullshit. I'm not a suspect you need to break."

A feral grin surfaced on Breed's face. "Trust me, if that was my intent, you would be naked and on your knees, with what I imagine is a sweet ass in the required position."

"You're insufferable. Sexy, but a bit rough." Monty chuckled.

"I like it rough," Breed said and then turned to leave. He called over his shoulder, "I will contact you tomorrow and let you know when I'm ready to transport Jordon. Have a good night."

"So, you are going to leave just like that? I think we should tie up some loose ends about what potentially could be happening here. I'm a little confused how we got to this point."

Breed stopped and then stalked back to Monty. "Confused my ass. You know exactly what is going on. I believe you are struggling with your emotions, but you understand what I want. Let me go, Monty, before things get out of control. That means let me walk out the door or I will fuck you. Is that what you want?"

"Can we talk through this?"

"Talking is overrated. I prefer action."

Before Monty could blink, he was on him. He moved swiftly like an animal that pounced on an unsuspecting victim to catch him off guard. A powerful arm wrapped around his waist, jerked him forward, slamming their bodies together. Breed cupped his buttocks, drew him closer, until he could rub his hot and hard length against his groin. Strong fingers caressed his nape, twisted around the golden strands, and pressed him forward until their mouths almost touched. He slanted his head, swiped his full bottom lip with his tongue, to taste, before kissing him.

His kiss was thorough, thirsty, as he continuously melded their mouths together. He used the tip of his tongue to tease Monty's lips, gently beckoning him to open. Monty trembled, a low moan escaped and vibrated against his mouth when he started kissing him back. He slipped his tongue inside the moist heat, delving with little flicks, teasing, kissing him with a greedy thirst. When Monty gasped, he took advantage of the open mouth, increased the pressure of the kiss, licking, twirling. Finally, blessedly, he felt him go limp and molded his body to his. The contact ignited sparks of pleasure to ripple through Breed's body. He wanted to pick him up and carry him to the bedroom, but Monty abruptly ended the kiss.

Breed wanted to pursue matters. Monty put his palms up between them. He looked flushed and confused. That and aroused as hell. His cock was standing at attention like a soldier. With anybody else he would have gone with his normal method of operation and continued the seduction until he had him on his back. He restrained himself out of consideration for his friend, who appeared off balance.

"You're not going to faint on me are you?"

Monty shook his head to indicate no.

He stepped forward, caught his chin, and rubbed his thumb over the plump, moist lips for a second. His tone low and seductive, he murmured, "You're sweet as hell. I can't wait to get you in bed." He kissed him lightly and then forced himself to step back. "I will call you in the morning and touch base about transporting Jordon," he reminded him.

Monty stood comatose and nodded.

Breed smirked with arrogance, knowing he left his friend baffled, his mouth hanging open and a hard-on between his thighs.

\* \* \* \*

Monty leaned against the wall and watched Breed leave. He remained focused on the expansive shoulders evident beneath the shirt he wore. Breed's trousers were formfitting and showed the outline of his firm ass and thunderous thighs nicely. He strolled with a purpose, boastful, a bit arrogant, but that was Breed—a walking, talking sex machine. The persona fit and was exciting as hell.

He wanted to say something to keep Breed from leaving. It was odd, but being a lawyer meant he had the gift of gab. So why was he standing there unable to form two coherent words together? Maybe because talking required he breathe. He couldn't think straight. The desire he felt had his thoughts boggled and his tongue tied in a knot.

You have never been into men, Monty. Fantasized about it once or twice, but that is something a heterosexual male will do. It doesn't mean anything. At least that's what his therapist would have him believe. Yeah, right.

If that was the case, why did he stand there with a mother of a hard-on? Sexually charged, so hot, it felt like a current of electricity ran rampant through his veins. Not even with the sexiest woman had he felt so excited. The urge to fuck was strong. Not to mention the desire to experience having Breed screw him was just as intense. That's what left him off-kilter.

He admitted there was always a sexual attraction to Breed, but his friend had that effect on people, males and females. He exuded sex like it reeked from his pores, and you couldn't help being drawn to the powerful allure. He couldn't explain why a heterosexual male would be attuned to Breed, who was clearly bisexual, but he'd seen it happen on more than one occasion. Guys he thought were a hundred percent straight seemed mesmerized in Breed's presence. *Maybe that meant they weren't straight to begin with*, Monty thought. It didn't really matter, though. Not at this point, because the question wasn't how other men felt about Breed, but what about him?

Monty sighed in frustration. He enjoyed feeling Breed's body against his. The firmness of his touch and sweltering kiss that made his knees weak. Did that mean he was ready to go all the way with Breed?

Jesus, he was acting like he had a crush on Breed. Go all the way—that sounded like he was still back in elementary school and was trying to decide if he was going to pass the note to Breed to check the "yes" or "no" box if he wanted to go steady.

After tonight he was sure they were well past the point of curiosity. They had kissed. Breed groped his butt. He would say they were beyond second base and would have slid into home plate if he hadn't stopped.

Monty grinned at his juvenile analogy as he walked back to the den to collect the glasses so he could put them in the washer before he retired to bed. As soon as he stepped over the door threshold, a keen sense of Breed invaded his senses. His scent lingered, potent and arousing, teased his nostrils. The aroused scent of masculinity, spicy warm, drew his attention and toyed with his libido sensors. He felt his cock thicken.

Was he fooling himself? Did he have it bad for Breed or what? If so, why didn't he just go with the flow and give in to the physical urges that still strummed through his body?

He wasn't sure how long he stood there in the center of the room with the glasses still in his hands when he heard his interlink bleep. Before he connected he knew who called.

"Hey, I just wanted to make sure you were okay," Breed said.

"I didn't faint or anything, if that's what you're asking?"

Breed's husky chuckle heated him to boiling.

"That wasn't actually the effect I was going for. But, if you said you jerked off before I reached my cruiser, I'd like that."

Monty laughed this time. "No, I did not."

Breed tsk-tsked, saying, "Sorry to hear that. As soon as I got home, I took a long, cold shower. You know, that belief, frigid water killing an erection, doesn't work. I ended up taking care of the matter myself."

"I'm happy you were able to please yourself. That's important," Monty said jokingly.

"Not as important as me pleasing you, but we will get to that. Hey—"

"Breed, I want to take things slow. I mean...you aroused the hell out of me. I admit that honestly, but I'm not sure if I'm ready to have sex with you—ah, any man. I like women and love pussy. So, the fact you got me all hot and bothered still has me fucked up in the head, okay?"

"I can respect that. Not a problem. I called to check on you and see if you can do me a favor. I can access certain information in the agency's database, but getting to some files requires the divine intervention of the Immaculate Providence. Even then, cutting through the bureau's red tape bullshit could take weeks...months. I'm not that patient. I want to get my hands on Jordon's medical records now."

"I have a friend at the Federal Repository of Medical History that owes me a favor. I will contact her tomorrow and have something for you later tomorrow evening."

"You work fast. I like that. I appreciate it, Monty."

"Is there anything else?"

Monty heard Breed smother a little laugh. "I can think of a magnitude of things, but I'm not going to sweat you. I'm going out to pick up a few beers before Pepper comes over. Good night." Breed disconnected.

Monty stood there a long minute trying to figure out why he felt perturbed that Breed hadn't pushed things where they were concerned. It was a very illogical emotion given he had put a halt to Breed's intention to sex him up tonight.

He had refused Breed and meant it. So why was he standing there with an ache in his groin?

Damn if he wasn't confused. He needed to test the shower theory himself.

## **Chapter Seven**

The ultra freeway traffic whizzed by, ten lanes—coming and going—rushing by in a frenzy of motion and bustle as Breed thought about the case now that he'd managed to direct his attention outside of Monty.

He concentrated on the specifics of the case, concrete information he knew to be factual and not speculation. That meant he had little except what Coleson provided in the file on the assignment, but Breed was smart enough to know that tidbit of information, though marked confidential, probably had yesterday's news all over it. What Breed wanted was the secret file that resided behind the agency's intricate identity management system. The data encrypted and embedded with the security access that required the presidential retina imprint and the executive order of three random top officials to access. It was something he intended to get his hands on, but that would take some time even for him to manage, but the feat wasn't impossible. It would just require patience and diplomacy. That, and calling in a few favors from some unsavory characters he'd rather not deal with, but sometimes you didn't have a choice.

Breed activated the IIM, implant intellect module, connecting to the direct access database, and downloaded Senator Sparks's personnel record, military file, and what sparse information existed on Jordon. He scanned the contents again even though it wasn't necessary. The phenomenal ability to read a page in two point five seconds and then recall the material verbatim made revisiting the data unnecessary. It was something to do. He refused to believe the desire for the mundane overrode priority, focusing on the events of tonight should have been at the forefront of thoughts, but his conscience periodically shifted to Monty.

His thoughts stayed on Monty too much for comfort, and it was a little unnerving how much time he spent thinking about his friend. Even now, when he should be focusing on the case, getting to the beverage store, Pepper...images of Monty kept surfacing. When his interlink signaled an incoming call, Breed was thankful. He scanned the internal control display of the loc-tag identifying the network ID of the caller.

"What's up, Aldie?"

"The captain tried to contact you earlier, and he seemed pretty bent out of shape that his calls keep going directly to retrieval. Are you intentionally blocking the captain's loc-tag? Tell me you didn't do that, Breed. The captain is already breathing down our throats, and I don't think antagonizing the man further is wise. Do you?"

"You want me to seriously answer that ridiculous question? His loc-tag is being sent directly to messaging because I can't...No, let me rephrase that. I'm not in the mood for his bullshit. Not right now. Maybe later, after I've had time to think, I will release the captain's ID."

"He wants you to bring Jordon in."

Breed didn't hesitate. "No can do."

"Ah, shit, man, I was afraid you would say that. Don't tell me you're going to disobey a direct order? What am I supposed to tell the captain?"

"I'm not sure, but I know you will think of something inventive. Or, you can follow my lead and send messages to retrieval. I doubt the captain expects you never to sleep," he said, amused. "Besides, in the morning I will call the captain directly, inform him Jordon Sparks is not in custody and doesn't reside with me."

"You're going to bullshit him?" Breed could hear the amusement in his partner's tone.

"That's an affirmative."

Breed could hear Aldie shift about, processing what he just said. He must be tired because his partner was normally more on the ball. Exactly, one minute had passed before he responded.

"Insubordination at its finest," Aldie said, sounding proud. "Hey, did you try to access Senator Sparks's records? I did after returning home, but my access is denied. Not good. I could get to the information earlier when Coleson briefed me, but something obviously changed. Doesn't take a physicist to know anything on the senator and his son is probably NTK basis at this point."

Breed activated internal controls, accessed the files from his homebased system, and sent the stream directly to Aldie's IIM.

He must have gotten it because Aldie chuckled. "Your ability to do the impossible is sometimes frightening, man."

"I don't know, but on a whim, something told me to download the entire senator's data that I could get my hands on when Coleson gave us the assignment."

"Smart move, but the agency probably did a back-trace and erased all previous security clearances and downloads," Aldie said.

"Not surprised about that either, but I'm ahead of the game. The information in my database is safe and secure. If anybody tries to send a seeker and back-trace to my link, they will not be able to. I embedded a bug in the firewall. If there is an attempt to trace the data, it will encrypt Sparks's information and randomly move it from location to location. That effectively will evade any attempt at retrieval. I have friends in high hacking places with unbelievable technology skills the agency wish were on their side."

"Whew. Like I said, you scare me sometimes. I'll look over the file again and see if anything strikes a nerve. What is your sense so far? Other than Coleson got us into some deep shit. Not sure if it was intentional or not, though."

Breed waited a brief moment, as if a thought just came to him, before responding. He said, "What do you think about the possibility the assassins were sent after you or me?" Breed asked to see where his partner's head was at. Aldie didn't respond for a long minute. He could hear him shifting about. "Did I lose you?"

"No, I was thinking about what you said. We can't ignore that possibility, but it doesn't make sense. But then, the agency has done stranger things, and I'm with you about no coincidences. If we were there that night, it was for a damn good reason." Aldie paused. "Where is all this coming from? What's your gut feeling?"

Breed shrugged and then remembered he didn't have the visual monitor on, so Aldie couldn't see him. He said, "Just a thought." He left out the fact Monty helped to plant the seed of suspicion.

"Right, one of many if you're like me. Hey, what about Jordon?"

"What about him?"

"Come on, man, he's in an agency safe house. You think the captain isn't going to find that out if he hasn't already?"

The same thought came to Breed earlier, so he planned ahead. Since Jordon wouldn't be at Monty's until mid-afternoon, he'd already transported him to another location. "I moved Jordon."

"Were you going to inform me? Where?" Breed could hear the disapproval in Aldie's tone.

"A friend's place," he said, intentionally not elaborating. If Aldie noticed it, he let him ride. "I think Jordon is the key to all this, and until I have a chance to do an interrogation, I think it's best to keep him under lock and key, so to speak."

Aldie sighed or yawned, Breed wasn't sure which, before he spoke again. "I agree. We'll touch base in the morning and see what we can make of things." Breed heard a voice and movement in the background even though he could tell Aldie had a hand over the mouthpiece.

"You have company?"

"In fact, I do. You know how the adrenaline doesn't stop even though your mind does? I needed something to help settle me down besides a Bloody Mary. A little entertainment."

He heard the amusement in Aldie's tone and knew the "entertainment" probably had long legs and a nice ass. Not that he could find fault, though. It wasn't like that between him and Aldie even though his partner might disagree. That, and if Monty hadn't been reluctant, he'd be spending the night at his place instead of taking cold showers and running around for brew.

"I think your 'entertainment' is anxious for your attention."

"Jealous?" Aldie gave a little laugh, but Breed knew there was also sincerity in the question. They had been down the route before. Their relationship was not exclusive, and that's the way he wanted it. If Aldie had his way, he'd be solely his possession. He liked Aldie, but not that much. Screwing around with him met his needs. It was enough.

"Nope. Have fun."

He disconnected the communicator and then leaned back in the seat and let the heated gel massagers in the headrest knead the tension from the muscles in his neck. The magical hands soothed away some of the knots Breed felt in the shoulders. He closed his eyes and temporarily reflected on the five-year relationship with Aldie.

Other than the sex he shared with Aldie, there wasn't an attraction except a fondness, but not in a head-over-heels sense like lovers might feel. Where their partnership was concerned, he loved his partner like family members did. He knew Aldie wanted more, but Breed didn't try to pretend like they were ever going to reach that level in their relationship. In addition, since he believed honesty best, he made sure Aldie understood exclusivity between them wasn't going to happen. Not that Breed had a thing against singular commitment, except when it came to Pepper. If he found out she even considered fucking somebody else, he'd rip the man's head off. He knew it was a double standard, but that's how he felt, and didn't consider apologizing for the chauvinistic view.

Aldie's story didn't deviate too much from his own. Being a graduate in the top of the class at the university landed his partner a position with the Elite Forces' Drug Enforcement Agency as soon as he finished school. His record arrests of some big hitters, top drug importers, and a knack for dismantling a number of Sanguine drug rings helped Aldie rise quickly through the ranks.

Three years out, Aldie left the DEA, and Breed never asked why. He made the assumption that burnout, mental distress disorder, or maybe just a need for a change drove Aldie's decision.

They had chemistry together; brains and brawn that seemed to work. Not that Breed couldn't be eloquent when need be, but he preferred to play "bad" cop.

A horn blared somewhere off in the distance. Breed looked at the perimeter display and saw a bunch of teenagers out joyriding, narrowly missing a passenger taxi.

Carpathia wasn't anywhere near the inner city of Sanguine, and he was thankful. Though he enjoyed working high-profile cases, sometimes the deviant nature of some of the criminals he had to interact with made Breed's skin crawl. It seemed as the years rolled by, the criminals got darker, seedier, and bolder, his job tougher, and he wasn't able to forget the things he witnessed from day to day as easily as he used to. There was something about seeing a teenage kidnap victim with a blast in the forehead tossed in an alley like yesterday's garbage because the ransom wasn't paid on time. Or the images of burn marks, strangulation, and sodomy of young boys by a demented serial killer that made him queasy. Breed hadn't puked at a crime

scene in years, but his stomach still got all jittery. When he could look at a mutilated body without reacting and stare at a psychopath and not want to put a blast in his forehead, he knew it would be time to get out of the business.

To date, that hadn't happened. In the meantime, he kept doing what he did best because putting unsavory characters in confinement gave Breed a sense of accomplishment. A few deviants slipped by, and that made for a badass mood, but he did arrest more perps then what got free. Regardless of what his father said, Breed didn't allow the few escapes to deter the belief he wasn't wasting his time.

Breed sat forward and looked around the trendy, but quiet neighborhood where he lived as internal controls scanned the perimeter of his home. The security module of the house that interacted with his vessel went through a sequence of checks, and then a wireless all-clear signal communicated to the gate to disable.

He was walking to the door when he saw a shadow pass in front of the bedroom window. The soft light revealed the outline a curvy silhouette. Breed grinned, knowing Pepper waited on him inside. The hour surpassed late, but knowing she was there rejuvenated his spirit.

If only for the night, he would forget the outside world.

## **Chapter Eight**

Bentley liked the meetings with Senator Sparks as much as he enjoyed dry heaving until he almost choked. If he had his way, he would avoid the caustic man at all cost, but duty prevented such. His responsibility to the government of Sanguine, which provided his paycheck, required he suffer through engagements with the senator with a smile. At a minimum, a straight face had to be on display at all times.

He'd been with the agency for thirty years, and his thinning hair proved his time in service had begun to take its toll. After ten years, he believed his career was on the right track when he received a promotion to staff assistant to the senatorial committee. Twenty years later, though daunting, he realized his design to have an illustrious career in the agency wasn't going to happen. Five years into the twenty-year stint, he'd been bitter as hell. He persisted, though, until he admitted to himself hard work, competency, and an unassuming nature wouldn't get him a higher position. At best, a stable job was all he was going to get. Not that he wasn't talented enough, but not cutthroat savvy enough to rise in the political arena. You had to be a man like Senator Sparks who could swim in the cesspool of the best barracudas and come out on top to rise into higher ranks.

Bentley was a survivalist, though. He took opportunities presented to him and made the best of it. No longer desiring to ascend the rickety political ladder made Bentley comfortable in his new role. His income increased significantly, which meant an early retirement he thought years away suddenly seemed in sight. That made Bentley ecstatic and able to stomach being a patsy to the senator.

He wouldn't even think about what the outcome of his work would mean for Senator Sparks. That might make him jump on the table and do a jig. He never danced, but knowing the senator would eventually get his due made him seriously consider doing it. Bentley looked at the senator and started paying attention when his rampage increased to the point it distracted his thoughts. He might as well listen just in case the prick called on him, which was highly likely. In fact, he knew the senator wouldn't pass up the opportunity to rip him a new one.

Senator Sparks paced back and forth, ranting and raving for what seemed an endless time until every man in attendance felt thoroughly lashed and then some. His chastisement sharp, wielded like a whip, he went into a barrage of insults that went from subtle to calling his staff member idiots.

By the time he finished, the senator's face was beet red, his jaws pinched, and a furious glare settled over each man. A disapproving gaze pierced each person as he looked down his hawkish nose in disdain. "I don't like mistakes. You all damn well know it, so explain to me how my son escaped."

He disliked the senator on first contact, even more so now that he personally was involved with weekly meetings with the man. The senator held himself with a certain superior air that let everyone in attendance know they were inferior. The senator didn't try to put on a façade like most government officials who were elected to serve the constituents; he allowed his disdain for the "lower class" to show through like a brass medal displayed proudly.

Six-two, lanky, and with squinty eyes, he gave the impression he lacked a spine, but looks could be deceiving. The senator didn't try to be transparent and showered everyone unfortunate enough to be in his presence with a condescending smugness. You immediately understood where you stood with the man; no more than a bug he could easily squash beneath his size twelve shoes.

"I want answers, damn it!" His boney fist pounded the table with enough force that Bentley realized there was strength in the frail frame.

He was a senior staff member and considered the spokesperson, or scapegoat, depending how one looked at it. Because all the other men looked in his direction expectantly, Bentley resigned himself to answering the senator. "From what we have been able to gather, there were two Elite Forces agency men at the penthouse that night. I haven't been able to determine why, as the information is behind secure files and I'm waiting on approval to gain access."

The senator's brows furrowed. He drummed his fingers rapidly over the tabletop. "Why would two government men be with Jordon? It doesn't make any sense."

Bentley shifted in his seat before responding. "As I said, Senator, I have yet to ascertain exactly why the men were there, but I'm working on that aspect. Regardless, the men were able to thwart the attempt to 'process' Jordon as you ordered. We lost a lot of good men that night, sir."

Senator Sparks waved his hand in the air dismissively, as if the lives were inconsequential. "Collateral damage," he muttered. "Continue."

Bentley dragged his thumb over the handheld screen to move the pages of the file until he found the information he needed. "The agents are Aldie McMahon and Breed Uonaidas, who are both high-ranked officers with undisputable reputations."

"I was told they were acting as moles" the senator sneered.

"I haven't confirmed what exactly their assignment was, but there is the possibility the two men might have been undercover. However, I'm not sure to what extent I will be able to confirm this." Bentley studied the monitor's screen a second before he looked at the senator. "I would proceed with caution about delving too deep into the officers' backgrounds at this point. Perhaps we should give matters time to cool? It seems the slain officers are not going over very well with the Elite Forces, and there is rumor an investigation into the matter is probable. Some of those men shouldn't have been there. Not to mention two Secret Service men died too. That means the case is federal."

The senator shot a glance at Bentley. He knew the prick resented a staff member warning him. "If matters are investigated too closely and my name surfaces, I will handle matters effectively. I did what I must to ensure national security, and if anyone dares question my authority, then they will rue the day," Senator Sparks boasted arrogantly.

Bentley nodded, not necessarily agreeing with the senator. He acknowledged the prick to let him know he heard the purely egotistical statement. "There was also a lieutenant by the name of Coleson who was killed that night. He was the superior over agents Uonaidas and McMahon, but we think sending the men to the penthouse that night purely coincidence, so their superior's murder is still a mystery. It might not be related."

"You think or know?" the senator snapped impatiently. "These are details I can't afford not to know."

"Like the agents', Coleson's files are sparse, which tells me there is something there the agency doesn't want us to know."

"Are you telling me a low-level agency security overrides the government?"

"The Elite Forces *is* federal. Access to their files is strictly on a need-to-know basis. An edict put into place by the president herself when she took office. I'm working on an angle to obtain the data, but a measure of caution is necessary or we reveal our involvement in the attempt to process your son." He looked at the senator. "Of course, if you wish to push the matter, I can."

Bentley watched the senator's slight twitch that meant what he said made him uncomfortable.

"Find out what you can, but do it with haste," the senator uttered.

"Of course, Senator, and as soon as I find out something, I will report." Bentley put down his handheld, folded his hands demurely in his lap, and eyed the senator. "Is there anything else?"

"Where the hell is Jordon? I have tried to contact him several times, but he refuses to answer my summons. Nor have I been able to put a trace on his loc-tag."

"The last location of your son put him somewhere in the suburb of Carpathia, but we haven't been able to pin the exact destination. Whoever has Jordon also has the ability to scrabble his loc-tag. I suspect the Elite Forces may have him in protective custody. Perhaps he is in a safe house, so I have men working each location to see what they can find. Should we find your son, what are the orders?"

The continuous tap-tap echoed in the quiet room as the senator ran his fingertips over the wood surface of the table. "I want the initial orders carried out. Jordon is a hindrance, and he needs to be apprehended sooner rather than later, before he self-destructs and ruins lives."

Bentley knew what the senator actually meant. He wanted his son conveniently disposed of before Jordon exposed the senator for the asshole he was.

The senator was a self-serving jerk who had abused his power one too many times, and everybody in attendance knew this, but had the smarts to

keep their mouths shut. Not one man refuted the senator's words, but allowed him to speak unquestioned as he spoke about his son as if he were nothing more then a commodity to be used and disposed of like sewage waste when it suited the senator.

"It is regretful I must sacrifice my only son, but my allegiance to the government I serve gives me no choice. Find Jordon, and get things done. The next meeting I expect to hear good news."

Self-righteous son of a bitch. Everybody knows the only person you serve is yourself. As well as that you want the presidency, and if that means putting a blast to your son's head yourself, you wouldn't hesitate to do it.

"I hope to report such, Senator." Bentley stood up after the senator. He watched the stiff back and tight shoulders as Senator Sparks walked toward the door followed by the well-trained puppets he called a staff.

After the door closed, Bentley sat down and activated the handheld. He typed rapidly, going through a sequence of codes, and then waited for the device to connect. He went through the stream of data—the entire conversation with the senator—captured by voice activation that was automatically turned into text and neatly stored and encrypted in a secure file.

Bentley viewed the contents, and then, satisfied, he entered the access code and downloaded the information to his home-based system for safekeeping.

When things got antsy, and he knew they would, he needed to have concrete information on the senator to provide the president. She would want specifics, not hearsay or secondhand data that could be disputed, and he wasn't about to let the commander-in-chief down. He couldn't afford a blunder like that if they were going to bring Senator Sparks down to his knees. The case had to be complete, unquestionable.

He had hope for more information and a verbal admission from the senator that he'd sent the men after his son, but, to date, the man effectively managed to elude providing such. The senator was careful not to say specific things, and Bentley knew it was intentional. Their conversations were speculative, hints, worded too damn careful. It left room for the senator to squirm free should he go before the oversight committee, he could weasel his way out with explanations, if need be. He never outright said he sent assassins after his son, and that's what they needed.

Bentley activated the interlink. He waited until the president answered. "As you requested, I'm downloading my conversation with Senator Sparks over your secure IIM line. You should receive it shortly." He paused. "I understand, Madame President. Perhaps next time the senator will slip up," he said, but he knew it was highly unlikely.

Bentley disconnected.

He had little hope that anyone would be able to do something about Senator Sparks. Unfortunately, his faith in the president's power, which was questionable, if rumors were to be believed.

Senator Sparks might just get away with having his son hunted down like an animal and put away forever, not to mention having the Abramson Bill passed and getting his palms greased. Both thoughts sickened Bentley, literally, and made him pray daily this wouldn't happen.

When he learned Breed Uonaidas was involved, he had a sense things might turn around. The president wasn't getting anywhere. Senator Sparks was a slimy bastard and slipped through every noose she set.

Breed Uonaidas's involvement was pure coincidence as far as Bentley figured out. He wasn't a detective, though, so he could be wrong. After reading Breed's file, he could only hope the tenacious man did what he did best. That meant Senator Sparks's smite on the government's pristine record would be erased.

Before he left the office, Bentley decided to chance it and made another contact. He secured a private line on his communicator and entered the loctag ID for agent Uonaidas. The president would probably rip him a new one if she found out he was intentionally leaking information to someone who hadn't been cleared. Bentley waited for his interlink to connect to Agent Uonaidas's IIM. He encrypted his caller ID so he was anonymous and then sent the conversation with Senator Sparks to the agent.

## **Chapter Nine**

Breed looked fixedly at the wide-screen visual monitor as if he could make the suspicions he believed equal the evidence he had. He wasn't so lucky. No matter how long he stared at the data, it just gawked back. Nothing changed, and he doubted it would until he got his hands on Jordon Sparks and interrogated the hell out of him. Something he was looking forward to doing. In the meantime, Breed settled for entering the information available on Senator Sparks, his son, and Lieutenant Coleson, to see what came up.

After thirty minutes of staring at the screen, he wasn't any closer to learning anything he didn't already know. His vision blurred, and his temples were beginning to throb. Nothing special jumped out about the case.

Breed heard the soft pitter-patter of bare feet over the tile floor. Normally, he preferred to think over a case uninterrupted, but tonight he was thankful for the distraction. Pepper was coming. He knew it before he caught a glimpse of her reflection in the monitor glass. Breed pushed back from the desk, swirled around on the wheels of the chair, and made space for his woman to sit on his lap.

Pepper perched comfortably, brushed her lips softly against his for a taste, leaned back into Breed's body, and studied the images on the display.

She said, "I woke up, and you had left me."

"I couldn't sleep. Instead of tossing and turning, I decided to have a look at the case." He typed on the screen-embedded keyboard. He viewed the page a second before advancing to the next file image.

"Hey, wait a minute. I can't read as fast as you."

Breed kissed the back of her head, mussing the curls. "I know. I shouldn't even be viewing the file images with you present."

Pepper looked over her shoulder. "I'm agency too, remember?"

"DEA, but I swore not to hold that against you," he jested, planting a light kiss on her cheek.

"Your partner is ex-DEA, don't forget."

"I know, and there is not a day gone by I allow Aldie to forget."

Breed read the data on the screen, wrinkled his brows, and then moved data under Senator Sparks. Then he tapped the dots between the senator's photo and his son's, connecting the data by a thin red line that sent a message to the database to rearrange the information in the case file.

He brought up a photo of the senator and Jordon in what looked like happier times. Jordon was smiling, the senator too, and a woman and two young girls. The picture was taken outside, by the ocean, because he could see the water and yachts in the background.

"Seems like a perfectly normal family," Pepper said.

"This photo was taken in front of the boathouse when Jordon was around six or younger, I think. They were on summer vacation at Landis Grove, on Sanguine, according to the information scribbled on the back of the image. Jordon is twenty-five now, and I haven't been able to find any photos of the happy family since. My assumption is something happened that changed the entire dynamic of the family relationship. Things went sour, perhaps."

Breed tapped the screen again and then viewed the file's content. He connected the dots, linking the dates on two files, and watched as the database shuffled the information into chronological order.

Pepper looked at the maze of lines and the data compiled to the left of the screen. She scanned it casually before turning to Breed. "You think Senator Sparks is dirty?"

He didn't respond for a minute, leaned back in his chair, and scanned the contents. "I'm not sure what's going on, truth be told. That's what I'm trying to find out. But, whatever it is, I'm convinced the other night all revolves around something in Jordon's past that includes his father. That's where it begins, and possibly ends, with the senator not wanting the information out." He looked at Pepper. "Yeah, I think the senator has more skeletons in the closest than a tomb. Those men that came after Jordon were professionals. They didn't come to chat with him."

"Are you saying Senator Sparks put a hit on his son?" Pepper said unbelievingly.

"Right now it's circumstantial, but I have to go with my instincts. I need more proof than that, though."

"Where does Coleson come into play?"

"That is the million-ducat question. Right now, I don't see any association between Coleson and the senator, but the night is still young," Breed said cynically. He scrutinized the screen, connected more dots, but there was still no connection between Coleson, Jordon, or the senator no matter how many times he played with the data.

The case board was designed to check files and entered data, and no matter how minute the coincidence, highlight the data if two subjects were linked. Breed stared at the empty space under Coleson's name. There was nothing there, the lieutenant's murder stuck out like a sore thumb.

Pepper turned and faced Breed. She ran her fingertips over his bottom lip. "Are you going to try and solve the case tonight?"

He gave her one of his rare smiles. "You got something better in mind?"

Her fingertips moved smoothly along the strong cords of his neck, kneading, she pressed closer flattening her breast to his chest and poked him with her nipples. "Uh-huh. How about you come back to bed and I take your mind off things for a minute?"

Breed's eyebrow lifted. He looked mischievous, saying, "That's all I get is a minute?" He captured her neck between his fingers, massaging, stroking his thumb over the dewy flesh. The top of his hand brushed against the silky curls that formed around her slender throat. She wore a choppy bob, high in the back and with longer sides that lay against her round cheeks. "Surely I'm worth more time?"

An amused smile outlined her pouty lips, the fullness so enticing he leaned forward and kissed her tenderly. "Soft as velvet", he murmured. He outlined the perfectly shaped mouth, teasing the plumpness with his lips and tongue. He slipped the tip of his tongue inside her mouth, teasing, swirling heat against the moist slickness that eagerly met his. Their tongues mated, gliding around one another in a tantalizing tango.

Pepper whispered into his mouth. "If you're good, real good, I might consider extending your minute to a full thirty," she teased.

Breed ran his fingertips along her curvy sides, over her waist, and palmed her hips. He gently squeezed, holding her still as he arched, and

rubbed his throbbing cock against her apple-shaped bottom. He nuzzled her ear. His voice throaty, lust filled, murmured, "He likes the sound of that."

"Then *he*"—Pepper wiggled seductively, causing Breed to grunt—"better be a real good boy."

"Isn't he always, baby?" He maneuvered her around until she straddled his thighs. He worked to free his cock and then slid the heavy length between the wet folds between her thighs. Slowly, he glided the thick head back and forth, dragging over her clit, but refrained from entering her pussy.

"I said I wasn't going to complain, but the last few times we were together, I got the impression you weren't quite there."

"Really? Because I distinctively recall you screaming my name and begging to be fucked harder just an hour ago. Was I dreaming, baby?" Both hands slid up and under her t-shirt, cupped her breasts, coaxed the nipples to tighten and bead beneath his caress until they felt like ripe berries pressed into his palms.

Pushing his cock forward, thrusting against her panties, he cleaved his dick into the material that was saturated with her juices. If her underwear weren't in the way, he would be inside her, where he wanted to be, but he maintained patience to prolong her pleasure and make her anxious to be fucked.

Pepper purred, wiggled, tried to ride his cock, wanting to feel more of his heat between her thighs.

"Breed."

"What?" He slipped his finger and hooked the elastic band, twisted, moving it aside. With slow, deliberate movements, he parted her labia and traced a fingertip over her clit until it swelled. She quivered, rocked against his hand, wanting more.

She was soft and warm and complaining about his lack of attention. That wasn't a good thing. Her pussy was drenched, soaking his hand, and he couldn't resist. Without warning, he slipped two fingers inside her pussy, his thumb teased the entrance to her untried passage while he finger-fucked her until she cried out and collapsed against him. She climaxed hard, trembling, clinging to him.

"How was that?" he said, steadily moving between her thighs.

"Good," she breathed.

"Hmmm, I think I can do better than that."

"Wha—"

He lifted her up effortlessly until she sat on the desktop. He nudged her thighs wide and settled his shoulders in between her legs. His tongue was swift, a quick invasion, slicing apart the moist, plump folds until he entered the sweltering pussy. He settled into a rhythm, lathing his tongue over the center of her excitement. His hand moved over her mound to join his mouth, working over the swollen bead while his tongue pushed in and teased the small opening.

Pepper went wild, squirming, gasping for air.

His mouth closed over her pussy, suckled, drinking hungrily until she cried out softly, entwined her fingers in his hair, and shattered. Breed lapped at the tangy flow, ravishing, eating the delectable treat that filled his mouth and heightened his arousal.

Finally, he came up for air. A satisfied grin covered his mouth. He glanced at the clock and then turned to face Pepper, who was trying to fill her lungs. She had a dazed, bliss-induced haze in her eyes.

"I have ten more minutes," he said, amused.

Pepper gave him a slanted-eyed look. He chuckled, shifting her into his arms. He put his arms under her knees, raised her up, she wrapped her arms around his neck for balance. The descent was slow, inch by inch, he lowered her onto his tower of power. Rocked up, forging into the slick passage, before gyrating his hips in a succinct tempo that was hedonistic. Hard and fast he churned his hips, driving deep, pounding into the soft flesh repeatedly, he fucked with unrestrained impalements. Each surge more complete than the next sent them flowing in a wave of undulations that surpassed the motion of stormy seas until he felt her pussy clench around his cock. He flexed his dick and settled home, beating directly against her clit.

Pepper cried out, falling against him, suffocating his face with appreciative kisses she rained all over his face before she tensed and then turned to mush when another orgasm hit. Breed continued what he was doing, comfortable to let her ride out the last of her passion. Finally, her eyelashes fluttered and then fell against her cocoa skin as she stared at him.

She panted, mouth open, so he took advantage. He kissed her hard, demandingly, moving so that he sat in the chair. He kept her on his lap, his cock buried, occasionally moving to remind her he was still there.

"Have I redeemed myself? If not, I have five minutes left."

Pepper kissed him tenderly. She said, "You made your point."

He typed over the keypad, watched the dots move and adjust, before he looked at her. "I wasn't trying to prove anything. I just want to make sure my woman is pleased."

"I'm extremely pleased. Are you?"

Breed lifted an eyebrow. "Not sure what you mean."

"I had three mind-blowing orgasms, and your cock is still hard. I must be losing my touch."

He kissed her forehead. "Just because I didn't ejaculate doesn't mean I didn't experience pleasure. Hey, I wasn't the one complaining anyway, remember?" He tapped the tip of her pert nose. "I enjoyed myself as much as you. It's this damned case." He offered it as an excuse that really was the truth.

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you?" she asked quietly.

He met her stare boldly. "Have I ever?"

"No, but being evasive is similar. Is there someone else?"

Breed wondered when the conversation would eventually resurface about extracurricular activities he never lied about. In the beginning of their relationship, he confessed that monogamy wasn't an interest, and, though he never elaborated on the details of what that meant, she never asked until now.

Pepper was his woman in every sense of the word. He had been in a relationship with her longer than any other woman, and somehow she'd become a constant in his life that seemed natural. He enjoyed their time together because she constantly kept him on his toes with intellectually stimulating conversation, a sense of humor, wit, and a no-nonsense, laid-back attitude. She didn't whine for attention or pout to get her way, and when he needed space, she recognized such and gave it freely.

She didn't bite her tongue, either. So, he knew by her question she was asking for an explanation about his dual lifestyle. For the first time Breed had reservations about speaking the truth aloud because the consequences bothered him. He admitted to himself by telling Pepper about his interest in men she might back off, and he wasn't sure if he wanted that. No, he was sure he didn't, but he'd always believed that honesty was the best policy in any relationship.

Harmonious electi relationships—partners, both male and female, living together—weren't uncommon on Carpathia. He wanted nothing more to eventually forge into that type of joining and knew as far as a female was concerned, Pepper stood at the top of the list. What he wasn't sure about was whether or not Pepper would even share a ménage à trois with another man, let alone want to live as life partners.

Things had finally come to full circle. They needed to have that discussion because Breed knew if Pepper wasn't into what he liked that their relationship probably wouldn't survive. The truth was bitter, but factual, and there was no discounting the possibility he might have to end things with Pepper if the idea of a ménage à trois turned her off.

The thought might have seemed obtuse, but brute honesty with others and himself was the code he lived by. Besides, it wouldn't be right to pretend he could live with just a male or female, because he desired both equally.

There was a long pause.

Pepper said, "I'm getting a little nervous here."

Breed washed his thumb pad over dewy flesh and then caressed the bottom of her full lips, an intimate and possessive gesture. "I'm trying to figure out where to begin. There is not someone in the sense I want to replace you. Do you remember I told you I'm not into monogamous relationships?"

Pepper nodded.

"The ideal of being with a single partner doesn't appeal to me because, by those standards, that would mean I would have to settle for a female or male." He paused to gauge her reaction. Pepper just stared at him. "I like being with you, Pepper. You fulfill a need I desire, and there isn't a void you don't fill sexually or non-sexually, but I like men too. I would try to explain it to you, but honestly there isn't an explanation. Things are as they are, and I decided a long time ago to stop trying to figure out my interest in dual-dabbling. I just go with it. Does that bother you?"

"I can't compete with a man, Breed."

"You are not listening to me. I'm not asking you to be in any type of competition with a man for my affection, because it's not necessary. If the roles were reversed and I was having this conversation with a male, it would

be the same. I like men and women, and one day I hope to be in a harmonious electi relationship with multiple partners."

She made to move, and even though, instinctively, he wanted Pepper to stay, Breed released her hand. He thought for a minute her storming away and giving him a few choice words were in order, but she remained standing next to the chair. Arms folded, an unreadable expression, he watched perceptively, trying to figure out her next move. He could tell she was thinking things through, but had yet to decide on a response. That was a positive.

"If I said I can't get into what you want, where does that leave us?"

Brutally honest to a fault, Breed responded. "I don't mean to sound crass, and this might sound selfish, but my needs are important. What you want out of a relationship is also a priority because you are special to me. Wouldn't it be cheating us both if we settled for less than what we wanted—needed?" It was obtuse, but he wasn't adverse to getting his way. He gently reminded her, "At the beginning of our relationship, I was open and honest and told you about my extracurricular activities. You didn't shy away. Is the problem a man is involved? If I told you I wanted you and another woman, would you be down for that?"

"But it's not another woman."

"Answer the question."

Pepper moved uncomfortably and remained silent for so long Breed thought she might not respond. "I don't know."

Her answer surprised Breed. He sat back and scrutinized her, thinking maybe he didn't know Pepper as well as he believed.

"What if I said yes? If I needed you and another woman, what would you say?" Pepper blurted out.

"Is this a hypothetical question?" Breed asked.

"Does it matter?"

Breed stood up and folded his arms around Pepper. He raised the stubborn set of her chin, forcing her to look up. "Baby, I would do whatever made you happy."

The receptor base bleeped.

"Shit," he cursed, mumbling. He moved away and glanced at the loc-tag ID scrolling across the bottom of the screen. "I have to get this."

"Sure."

When she went to leave, he caught her elbow. "Don't go."

"What is it, Aldie? This had better be damned good." Breed groused. He looked apologetically at Pepper. "Aldie's at the door. We need to talk. Give me a minute?"

He waited until Pepper disappeared into the bedroom and he heard the steam jets before opening the door.

Aldie walked in, grinning as usual. "Did I interrupt something?"

"Your timing sucks. What's up?" He held the door open for his partner to enter.

Aldie walked into the room, following Breed to the office area, and stopped at the threshold. He sniffed, filling his nostrils, and then released slowly. "Smells like sex in here."

"What is it, Aldie? I'm busy."

"Did you get the information that came across the agency private network communicator about Senator Sparks? Some kind of way our mission to gain information the government could use to blackmail the senator may have gotten out. The senator knew we were at the penthouse that night. That could make a man desperate, you know. He might have had something to do with the attempt on Jordon's life. If what that *assassin* said is true, we can lean heavier on the senator with this new information."

Breed thought about the unidentified caller who sent him the stream of a meeting with Senator Sparks. He couldn't identify any of the voices he heard except the senator. If the others were agency men, he didn't know it, but knew somebody who could use voice recognition and compare it to the voiceover IDs on file at the agency. It was a long shot. Every agent was required to have his or her voice on file. That meant thousands. He hadn't decided if it was worth the effort or not. He was still thinking it through. Maybe that was the reason he hadn't told Aldie about the sudden, unidentified informant yet. If he could call whoever sent the information an informant. Somebody could be jerking his chain trying to mislead him. The question was, leading to or from the senator?

He was an agency man, but Breed knew things weren't always what they seemed at the political level. The waters of both the government and agency were infested with double deals, under-the-table plots, and too many trying to either get to the top or stay there. In his mind, never trust anybody. If somebody came bearing gifts, he knew to react like the package contained a bomb.

Aldie waved his hand back and forth in front of Breed's face. "Hello? You in there?"

"I heard you, Aldie. Got it," Breed said.

"Hell, man, I thought you'd be a little more excited about the fact Senator Sparks may have played a role in the attempt on Jordon's life. It's all subjective, of course, but things are in motion to prove he may have had a hand in it. If nothing else, it gives us reasonable cause to question the senator, something the captain hasn't allowed, for whatever reason."

Breed walked over to the bar console and poured two glasses of liquor and handed one to Aldie. "Unless we get concrete evidence or a confession the senator put out the hit, there isn't much we can do. You know that, Aldie. I don't want to start after the senator until we know for sure he is involved. If he is, and we can prove it, when I drag the bastard in, I want it to stick."

Aldie sounded deflated. "Excuse me for thinking you'd show a little more enthusiasm that at least we are on the right track."

"I'm ecstatic," Breed said sarcastically. "Is this what you came over to tell me? That, and to see my smiling face?" He was being a jerk with Aldie. The conversation with Pepper still weighed heavily on his mind. At this very minute, she could be dressing and preparing to walk out of his life. That thought was daunting, but if it happened, at least he wanted their relationship to end on a better note. Right now, too many things were left unsaid.

"We both know you rarely smile. Actually, the thought of talking through the logistics of the case when the captain isn't hounding us was at the forefront of my thoughts. That, and I wanted to see you," Aldie said, stepping closer. The hunger in his eyes was suggestive and didn't go over Breed's head.

"I'm a little busy right now."

"You seem distracted. Want to talk about it?"

Breed sipped his drink, watching as Aldie moved closer until they were toe-to-toe. Instinct said to back him off, but for some reason he didn't, not even when his fingertips brushed lightly over his exposed chest. He said, "Funny, but you are the second person to tell me I'm distracted tonight."

Aldie ran his flat palms down the expanse of Breed's chest and settled at the waistband of his slacks. He toyed with the elastic, slipping his fingers inside and trailing along the dark hair that tapered and ran beneath the band. "Must be true. You know I'm excellent at getting you to relax. We don't have to talk if you don't want to." His hand slid farther south. "Mmm, you are thick…and sticky."

An innate warning told Breed to stop Aldie. Pepper could enter the room at any minute and catch Aldie stroking his cock. He told her about men, but he hadn't mentioned Aldie, and that was something else she needed to know. Not that he thought it would aid her decision, but the revelation played a major role. It was one thing to reveal he was involved with a man, but Pepper deserved to know it was someone she knew.

He moved away, but Aldie pursued. "Are we alone?"

Breed knew Aldie already knew the answer to his question. He responded anyway. "Pepper is in the bedroom." He saw Aldie's eyes brighten with interest.

"Did you tell her about us?"

"I told her about my interest in both sexes. No, I didn't get around to mentioning your name. Your timing sucks. Did I tell you that?"

Aldie chuckled and grabbed the waistband, entwining his fingers around the material. "What if I say I think my timing is perfect? You are into Pepper and me. Think how explosive it would be if you had the best of both worlds. The feel of a wet, hot pussy, the drive of a hard cock. Think about it."

"It's not just about me, Aldie. I have to take Pepper's feelings into consideration."

"You said you mentioned triple play, right? People who aren't into such usually reject the idea even if it is put to them hypothetically."

Aldie was pressing the issue, both with valid arguments for all excuses given and the busy hand working his cock.

Breed sipped his drink contemplating Aldie's words, having to admit there was some truth in them. When he mentioned possibly bringing a third party into their bed, Pepper hadn't gone off on a tangent or anything close, but realistically the conversation hadn't ended. It had stalled on an interesting note—Pepper might be into women—but she didn't come out and say being in a ménage à trois with another man was a turnoff.

"Is this our third partner?"

Aldie moved away and looked like he'd been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Hey, Pepper."

"Aldie." She acknowledged him and then turned her cool eyes on Breed. She didn't appear to be pissed, but she wasn't actually jumping for joy either.

"Well, is it?" She directed the question to Breed. She took his drink and sipped, studying him and Aldie over the top of the glass. "I assume the answer to the question is yes. Otherwise, I doubt Aldie's hand would be on your cock."

"Eventually, our conversation would have gotten around to Aldie."

"Humph." Pepper looked at Aldie. "So, how do we play this? Are we in competition? Because if we are, that doesn't work for me. I'm not catty, and if you intend to be an ass about my relationship with Breed, I won't entertain you."

It was just like Pepper to go straight for the jugular. Her bold persona turned Breed on and made his cock harder. He got the impression Aldie was a little put off, but his partner played it off well.

"Whoa, what did I step into?"

Breed ignored Aldie turning his attention to Pepper. "I told you that is not the case. There is no competition unless you make it one."

Pepper put her hands on her hips. Her body language signaled to Breed that she was defensive. Her cool gaze went back and forth between both men, and then she settled on Breed. "So, you want to fuck us both—at the same time. Is that how this works?"

Even though Aldie made it clear he wanted to have a ménage à trois with Pepper, Breed never gave it serious consideration until now. He did think about it, had fantasized a time or two.

The separate encounters with Pepper and Aldie were kept that way for a reason. Aldie filled a need to have raw, primal fucking to appease his cock and nothing more. With a man there was no need for pretense, cooing, and cajoling to appeal to a female's emotional need that existed in and out of bed. He could just let go and fuck himself silly with Aldie. The thought was obtuse, but fucking a man distracted from the day-to-day bullshit he encountered—psychopaths, lunatics, perverts, corruption, and witnessing too much loss of innocent lives. With a man he could release pent-up

frustrations without fear of breaking the fragility of a woman by being too rough.

Pepper's femininity ensconced him in the unblemished world he believed females represented. Right, wrong, or indifferent, being in the arms of a woman helped fade the darker side of the world he lived in and made it more palatable. At the end of a long day, sometimes he needed the nurturing affection of softness and allure to forget all the ugly events happening. Innocence, whether self-perception or not, did that for him.

Now, the two worlds might collide. Having the best of both piqued Breed's interest.

"We can play it however you want, baby."

## **Chapter Ten**

Pepper watched, intrigued and excited by the turn of events unfolding. Even though having two men never crossed her thoughts, an interest surfaced. Apprehension eased inside too, and for a brief moment she feared if crossing over the line and giving Breed what he wanted might turn out badly. What if Breed thought about it later and realized his mistake? Would he think her wanton to reciprocate his needs without putting up more of a fight? She'd talked about this type of thing before with friends who had had a ménage à trois because it was what their boyfriends wanted. When it was good, it was the bomb. But, if things turned sour, there was no recovery for the relationship.

But she wanted to please Breed. She was a sap and had fallen head over heels in love, but kept that to herself because she wasn't sure of his feelings. He cared, and there was true affection exchanged—Breed called her special—but was that enough to survive if things didn't work out?

"Are you having reservations?" Breed said.

Pepper put a credible smile on, shaking her head no. Okay, she just lied to herself and Breed. She ignored her conscience because it wasn't the most horrible thing she'd done in her life. She'd slept with men for worse reasons. She was undercover on a case now that involved a shady character who made her stomach sour, but she suffered through it. Cortez was a drug trafficker the DEA had been trying to get something on for years. She had managed to infiltrate his inner circle by becoming his girlfriend. She was Cortez's plaything. She was a toy to amuse the coldhearted bastard. Unless he wanted sex, he treated her with indifference. Otherwise, she stayed on his arm, and he paraded her around like a pet on a leash. Cortez liked pretty things. She played that role well somehow and managed to gain his confidence. He didn't involve her in his day-to-day activities when he conducted business. He was too smart and paranoid for that. Thinking she

was an airhead with no interest except spending his money and screwing his brains out meant he sometimes relaxed his guard. The man liked to talk in bed. She pretended she had no interest in his affairs, but listened carefully to the idle chitchat for any information the DEA could use against him.

She suffered through Cortez's pawing and fumbling for five minutes of pleasure—all Cortez's. She never got anything out of his rutting, but did it for her job. Surely she could at least try what her man wanted. If she didn't like it, she would let Breed know.

Pepper looked at Breed. Damn, she loved him.

"Is this what you want?" she asked.

"If it's what you want. The decision is totally up to you," Breed said.

"I want to make you happy."

"You make me ecstatic whether you agree to this or not."

Yes, but will our relationship sustain if I refuse?

Pepper left the question unspoken. She took Breed's hand and led him and Aldie into the bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Sitting Indian style on the bed, Pepper focused on the two men who were both hot, but uniquely different in appearance and persona. She knew what to expect with Breed, and he never disappointed. She considered Aldie an added treat; striking baby blues that washed over her sensually, a physique defined and sculpted to perfection, and his dreamy come-hither smile added to his allure. Now she understood why, when his name came up at the DEA, all the women turned to mush. Aldie was sexy, definitely, a charmer, a bit pretentious, she noted. He knew he was eye candy. But then could she really blame him? With a body like that and a pretty-boy face, she assumed a hint of cockiness was innate. His looks matched the classical blond-haired and blue-eyed Adonis. A suavity exist Aldie wore well—he was a true valentine.

Her man captivated her more, though. There wasn't anything superficial about Breed—what you saw was what you got. He was hot and cocky too, but the arrogance seemed more like confidence and added a bold swagger that made her blood simmer. Not to mention his heavy-lidded eyes, bold as warm chocolate, that spiked with hints of gold when coupled with a rare

smile he showed occasionally. The man was definitely easy on the eyes. At first glance, "gorgeous" didn't come to mind, and you might not gawk when he entered a room, but the raw sense of masculinity he exuded made ignoring Breed's presence impossible. He matured on you and warranted a second look, or two, or three.

Breed grew on you—strong jawline, pugnacious chin, prominent nose, and kissable lips too daring for a man. He exuded roughness and power, but with a grace that made it come across with steamy sexuality that was sexy. A true turn-on. The well-formed muscular build—not a pinch of fat existed—and unbelievable cock didn't hurt either.

When she realized how quiet the room had grown and that both men were staring, she said, "I never participated in a threesome, but I do like movies. I like to watch. I have learned a lot studying the way two men go down on each other," she admitted sheepishly.

Breed did the eyebrow thing that made Pepper's heart react like a whirligig toy. "No wonder you do it so damn good."

They lay facing each other in a sixty-nine position. Breed seemed relaxed and took time working his tongue over Aldie's cock, teasing and tantalizing, to add more pleasure of anticipation. Aldie, eager and demanding, swallowed the length of cock as if it contained substance he needed to survive.

Pepper watched and listened. She was stimulated visually and audibly. The sight was erotic, and the sounds of pleasure—slurping, lips smacking, and moans of satisfaction—heightened her excitement.

Actually seeing two men, in the flesh, suck each other, as opposed to watching a movie, sent spurs of lust rushing wildly inside her body. The action made her clit swell, labia flower open, and juice begin to flow like syrup and saturate her inner thighs. Unable to help herself, she slid a hand between her legs. The first touch caused quivers when she rubbed her fingers over the oversensitive nubbin nestled in the moist alcove.

She gasped, and it caught Breed's attention. He said, "Spread your legs wider so I can see that delicious pussy. Enter yourself...ah, that's it. Work your finger deep."

Pepper eagerly did as instructed because increasing Breed's excitement was important. That, and the inner need to feel self-love too, was persistent while she watched the two men get off. Overly excited, she increased the

pace of her fingers, a slip and slide between drenched folds, she worked two fingers to the depths and finger-fucked herself.

Her half-open eyes fluttered at the cusp of release. Pepper watched as Aldie withdrew and let Breed's cock pop from between his lips. She looked at Aldie. He winked and then slid the length of his tongue past the thick shaft and encircled the heavy sacs into the crease of ass. She saw Breed's butt cheeks clench at the penetration. The powerful cords of muscles flexed before relaxing, and the slender whip eased inside.

Pepper watched in awe as Breed obviously enjoyed the forbidden invasion of the tongue. She never did that to him before, and he'd never requested it. Her voice sounded uncertain, but curious. She asked, "You like that, huh, baby?"

Breed let go of Aldie's cock to respond. "Yes, as much as I like seeing you finger yourself."

Now she knew. Pepper stored the information in the back of her mind for future use. She continued to toy between her thighs as the lure of untamed urges built and threatened to erupt. She tore her eyes away from the scene, tossed back her head, and writhed in pleasure, moaning.

She felt the heaviness of weight settle between her spread thighs. Before she could look to see who joined her, she felt a tongue lick over her fingers in leisurely play before washing against the sensitive part of her clit. Slow and easy, cajoling, Breed was there. Then a sleeker and quicker tongue followed—Aldie.

The totality of being eaten alive by two salacious tongues that offered uniquely different sensations was almost too much to bear. The hot licks of fever Aldie provided coupled with Breed's ultra-slow undulations that occasionally slid inside her pussy sent her body into an uncontrolled paroxysm of need.

She fisted Breed's hair, arching up into the hungry mouths, and threatened to suffocate both men in a vise grip she clenched her thighs so firmly.

"Oh my God," she cried softly and then became more vocal as the maddening vibrations became too much. "I'm going to come!"

"That's the idea, baby."

"Come for us, honey."

"Yesss! Oh...yeah!" Her climax was complete and overwhelming and left Pepper shuddering.

The heat of two males, warm and soothing, as they sandwiched—Aldie in front and Breed behind—busy hands coaxed and caressed, mapping every plane of Pepper's body in a calming motion as she struggled to suck air into her lungs. A final burst of air escaped that ruffled Aldie's hair. She grinned and brushed her mouth against his lips. "Thank you." She turned her face to reach Breed. "Thank you too. That was great," she whispered, leaning to give a thorough, open-mouthed French kiss.

"You don't know great yet. We're not done with you." Breed looked primitive and carnal. His heated gaze sent sparks igniting, stirring something inside Pepper again.

Uncontrollable tremors surfaced inside Pepper at the implied indication of what came next. She knew the experience of having two men pleasure her at the same time was about to happen. A sense of anticipation sent hotspurs running amuck beneath her skin and felt like the flames that sparked when fuel-injected projectiles started. The heated blast charged her pussy.

Aldie cupped Pepper's cheek, drawing her mouth forward. His eyes sensually burning, his tone heavily laced with lust. "We're going to take care of you, honey. It will be so explosive...mind-numbing." He slanted his mouth hungrily and then abruptly tore free. "God, you're sweet."

Large, strong hands circled her waist and slid upward to cup her breasts. Lazy thumbs washed over the hardened peaks, drawing the nipples to thicken and poke. Pepper could feel the heat of breath warm the nape of her neck.

"This is going to be so good, baby. I promise you." Breed hummed against her sensitive flesh. "You're special. We're going to make you know it."

Pepper watched Aldie hold the long, thick shaft with a bulbous crown that looked heavy and weighed down the stalk so that it pointed downward, swaying like a pendulum. With one hand, he lathered lubricant over the crest, sealing it protectively. Then he casually worked back and forth, stretching, elongating the cock until he was stone hard and supporting a tower between his thighs. She had to admit the sight was exceptional and mouthwatering.

"You like what you see? Want a taste?" Aldie asked, moving his hips forward toward Pepper's mouth, gently prodding.

She hesitated, and Breed intervened. "You're not getting your cock sucked."

Aldie looked seriously contrite. "I didn't mean to push the issue. I apologize, honey. Whatever you want."

"What do you want, Pepper?" A finger eased along the crevice of her ass and then spread the full globes. Breed's eyes were desire-filled and spoke volumes to what he wanted, but didn't ask for.

Pepper looked over her shoulder. "Give me a minute. I'm not sure I'm ready for...that."

Breed reached and cupped her cheeks, crushing his mouth hard, and delivered a tongue-searing deep soul kiss that aroused Pepper to her toes. "Whenever you're ready. We're not in a hurry."

"It's your fantasy, honey. We're just here to help you play it out," Aldie said.

Breed asked quietly. "Would you feel better if I showed you anal penetration isn't as bad as you're thinking?"

Pepper nodded.

Aldie certainly seemed to enjoy having cock up his ass because he was very vocal and filled with nothing but accolades of praise as Breed fucked him. Pepper still had her reservations, but she admitted the forbidding mating of two males wasn't that much different than when she and Breed were together. There was the compelling drive, unbridled thrusts, and desire she saw in Aldie's eyes that told her a man enjoyed a man as much as a woman did. Aldie raised his thighs, wrapped his arms firmer around Breed's back, and eagerly arched into each descent much like she did when she desired Breed deeper inside.

It was odd to witness, but Breed fucked Aldie with the same madness of measured strokes that drove her insane. The man was just damn good at what he did. She supposed he couldn't help himself. Breed did what he did. She didn't hold any resentment towards him for it. Even if it meant saving his life, she doubted he could perform any differently. The man was a sex perfectionist.

The only difference, she noted, was Breed's movements were more sensual when he moved inside her as opposed to the untamed depths in which he fucked Aldie. But she supposed, man to man, there was no need to hold back.

"I'm...ready," she whispered, watching as Breed withdrew, and she could see the appetizing hardness that glistened with oil.

"Are you sure?" Breed asked.

She remained focused on the solid cock, nodded. He pulled free, removed the latex, and tossed it into the waste receptacle. He put on a new sealant and then moved to Pepper. "We'll go slowly."

Aldie lay on his back, reached over, and gathered her in his arms. The way he held her, as if she was fragile, gave Pepper the impression he'd waited for this moment a lifetime. She actually felt his body tremble. Aldie's reaction caught her off guard, and excited the heck out of her too. To know he wanted her so bad made her pussy more receptive, flower open, and welcome the hard dick he thrust up and into her.

Pepper felt the firm, calloused hands of Breed press into her lower back, cup her ass, and then gently spread. The drizzle of something cool and slick ran down the crevice of her buttocks. Then a hot piercing came next that made her entire body tense.

She felt Breed enter, push, and submerge, breaking through her virginity. "Ouch."

Breed stopped to give her time to adjust to the invasion. He waited for her cue to continue. "Okay, baby?"

"Uh-huh."

Breed rocked his hips forward, screwed, and delved deeper until the stone length went home. Pepper groaned and fell against Aldie under the assault. She dug her nails into his shoulders and knew there would be welts later. "Sorry," she mumbled.

"No harm, honey. Relax...the burn goes away," Aldie said.

"And becomes pure pleasure," Breed said and then nipped Pepper's shoulder gently with his teeth. He felt her shudder...A burst of air escaped that helped relax her now that she breathed.

Breed's forehead fell gently, resting on the top of her damp curls. "Ah, baby, I waited so long for this. I'm going to be so good you're going to beg me to fuck this sweet virgin ass. I promise."

If it was one thing Breed always made good on, it was his promises. The discomfort eased. She relaxed and let things flow and eventually started

enjoying the dual feeling of a solid length thrusting inside her pussy and equal heat working in her ass in a synchronized beat.

The sensations were indescribable—fire and ice. Joie de vivre crossed Pepper's mind as each stroke sent her further into an abyss of bliss that was consuming and started a maddening undercurrent of rippling heat that seared her flesh. She felt her pussy pool with more liquid at the dual strokes and heard the squishy sound as Breed's thrust impaled Aldie's cock to forge deeper.

Her breasts tingled, heat spread between her thighs, and then an abrupt jolt of sensations erupted when her climax consumed all of her senses and made everything around her spin out of control. She cried out in delirium and sank her teeth into Aldie's shoulder. "Oh God...fuck..." she moaned, collapsing.

"That's what I'm talking about." Aldie grunted, raising his hips, pushing higher, and then tensed all over, spilling his seed and filling the thin plastic barrier.

Pepper fell against Aldie's frame and let him hold her. She remained attuned to Breed. His muscles tightened and flexed, and a stifled groan rumbled in his throat. His entire body tensed and then shuddered when he lost self-control and released with a sigh of pleasure.

Breed caught Pepper when she flew into his arms and covered his mouth and face with kisses. "Wow," she said. Her eyes were bright, wide in awe. "Wow," she repeated.

\* \* \* \*

Breed saw Aldie out and then walked back into the room and snuggled up to Pepper in the bed. He kissed her forehead affectionately. She wrapped around his body comfortably.

Her voice was lazy, hoarse with sleep, but she had something to say. "I think I'm missing something here."

Breed cupped her bottom and gave it a pat. "Like what?" He yawned, but faced Pepper, giving her his undivided attention.

"I think Aldie has more feelings for you than you think."

Breed's brows furrowed. "Come again? Me and Aldie fuck, baby. There isn't anything else between us," he said sincerely, wondering where Pepper

was coming from. Had she noticed something in Aldie he missed? He would be the first to admit, being close to someone, you might inadvertently overlook things, but he would bet his ass that wasn't the case. As with Pepper, he had always been upfront with Aldie. He liked his partner well enough, but not enough to enter into anything permanent. Aldie was like a brother to him, sans the sex, but otherwise their relationship was friend, partner, and nothing more.

What he felt for Monty was more deep-rooted.

Shit, he had to tell Pepper about Monty.

Pepper stretched a leg over his thigh. She looked at Breed pointedly. "I'm a pretty good study of people. He is good at hiding it, but I sense Aldie is into you more than you realize. I'm surprised his forehead didn't light up with a neon sign flashing 'love' when you did him."

Breed snorted, unbelieving. He stared at Pepper indignantly. "That is ridiculous. You are reading Aldie wrong. Besides, I wouldn't bullshit you about him."

"I know because lying is not your style. But just because you don't feel for Aldie as he does for you doesn't mean he isn't in love with you. I think he loves you and would do anything to make you happy. Your partner is keeping secrets from you, Breed. Open your eyes. There's something you are missing."

"You're sleepy and delirious."

Pepper shrugged nonchalantly, snuggled closer to him, laid a cheek to his heartbeat. "If you say so."

"You're not going to let it go, are you?"

"As far as I'm concerned, I've made my point. Aldie is attractive, seems like a nice guy, but he weirds me out. Not in a creepy sort of way. He just seems like he is hiding something."

"I don't get that sense."

"That's because you are too close. I'm looking from the outside in."

Breed had to admit Pepper was perceptive, and he couldn't discount her assumption. "I will talk to him tomorrow."

"This is between you and me. If I'm correct, and Aldie confesses his love—"

Breed groaned and rolled his eyes.

"If Aldie confesses he loves you, you can reject him if you want to. You don't want a disgruntled partner watching your back."

"What does that mean? If I want to," he said, testy. He shifted so he could see her face. "I'm being straight with you. There is nothing serious between Aldie and me. It makes me sound like a bastard, but we are friends and partners with benefits." He relaxed, rolled onto his back, and threw his arm over his face. "Maybe I shouldn't have asked you to be with both of us."

When she didn't respond, he turned to study her features. His eyesight was exceptional, but in the darkened room, it was difficult to make out her expression. A revelation suddenly slapped him upside the head. He framed her face. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"You know what. If you were uncomfortable about having sex with me and Aldie, why didn't you say something?"

She hesitated, and Breed didn't like the implication of what that meant. Had he royally fucked up?

"It's what you wanted," she said quietly.

Dumb and dumber couldn't describe how Breed felt right now. He did screw up, big time. When he thought about appeasing his lust, he didn't factor in that Pepper was in love with him. Damn, she never said as much. Yes, he had an inkling, but he dealt in black and white, no gray areas, so if she loved him, he would have expected her to say so.

He felt like a jerk. He *was* a jerk. The voracious way Pepper went after Aldie earlier should have been a clear indication she loved him. Love made you do foolish things—she did it to please him.

Breed stroked her cheek softly. He gathered her in his arms, kissed her forehead tenderly, a telling action that was affectionate and apologetic. His tone low, he said quietly, "I apologize if I made you feel obligated to enter into a ménage. That was not my intention."

Pepper curled her arms around his neck, squeezed him close, and then shut her eyes, not confirming or denying how she felt, but he was astute enough to figure out he messed up.

He had to end it with Aldie.

## **Chapter Eleven**

A man watched as Breed left the headquarters building, crossed the street, and jumped into his cruiser. Breed looked in his direction, causing the man to slouch low in his seat. When he felt it was safe to look about, he saw Breed maneuver his vessel into the oncoming traffic. Slowly, he followed suit. He moved close to the other transport, eased behind Breed. He was careful to keep his distance and still maintain a visional of Breed.

He could tell the agent had his vessel on autopilot by the way Breed rested his head back, closed his eyes, and ignored everything around him, seemingly unaware of the fact he was being tailed or the perilous situation about to unfold.

He also suspected Breed didn't engage his tracker detector. If he had, he'd have been immediately alerted that another transporter was mimicking his movements. His internal controls would have told Breed he was there. The man prayed for small favors. He knew if Breed was aware he was being followed, things would go much different from the easy time he was having tracking the agent.

Confident he was undetected, the man stayed close enough to keep an eye on Breed, but far enough away in case he needed to get away quickly if things suddenly changed. Just in case he became the hunted.

\* \* \* \*

Breed looked at his wide-screen perimeter display that gave him a view of all the vessels surrounding him. He spotted the tail immediately. He zoomed in with the satellite and captured the license plates of the cruiser. He wasn't surprised to see the transporter was government issued.

Even if he didn't see the license plate, he would have known it was an agency vehicle. Only government vessels were equipped with devices that

could scramble a tracker receptor. An alert hadn't gone off immediately warning him he was being followed. That meant whoever was tailing him had capabilities to disable his device. The average citizens weren't allowed to equip their vessels with such high-tech scramblers. That would defeat the law when they wanted to put a tail on a suspect.

A nefarious smirk lifted the corner of Breed's lip. He bet the idiot wasn't privy to that information even though he should have been. It was probably a rookie on his butt.

He had a few tricks of his own. Breed engaged the override mechanism that would intercept the tracking scrambler of the other vessel and rerouted it to the cruiser ahead of him. The tail wouldn't be the wiser his signal monitored the two old ladies up ahead. The gadget installed in his transporter wasn't government issued, and he'd paid a mint for it, but during times like these, it was worth the money he'd spent.

He disabled autopilot and took over the controls himself. As he led the tail into an advantageous position so he could have a little chat with the man, he wondered who had put a tracker on him.

Senator Sparks was the first person who came to mind.

The stream of him and Aldie doing Jordon had been showed to the senator already. The hearing was closed, and only those with a need to know were allowed inside the room.

Senator Sparks was a cool piece of work. He sat in his chair, lips pinched, eyes narrowed, and his hands balled into fists at his side while he watched Jordon getting boned. After the stream ended, an executive informed the senator that he was to drop his quest to pass the Abramson Bill or else. He was not too subtle, and Breed could tell the senator was getting increasingly agitated.

Aldie hadn't been in the proceedings. He was there, sitting in the audience, just in case the committee wanted him to give testimony, but he wasn't required to say a thing. His and Aldie's faces were obscured on the recording, so no one recognized Breed. Somehow the senator must have known it was him, though, because he continued to eye him. Breed assumed his suspicions came from the information someone provided him in the meeting. The voice, as he referred to the unidentified man who sent him the meeting minutes, had mentioned that he and Aldie were working undercover that night. The senator obviously derived a conclusion.

All was calm, and Breed assumed the senator would take the committee's advice, just up until the minute the senator jumped up from his seat, pointed his finger at him, and called him a son of a bitch.

That had gotten an eyebrow raise from Breed, but nothing more.

His reaction must have infuriated the senator, because the man lost his composure. The calm demeanor evaporated, the senator went into a tirade. Breed had never heard such colorful remarks against his person. What he heard clearly was the senator threaten his life.

That did it. Before he realized what he was doing, he stood up. The pompous ass made it personal. Breed knew he should have backed down, but didn't. The rest of the time was a blur. The last thing he recalled was three men dragging him from the proceeding.

It was safe to say the senator had made him a personal target. After he calmed down, he blew off the senator's threat. Nor did he care about what he called the senator's temper tantrum—until now.

Breed drove to a less occupied area, stopped, and parked in front of two buildings. He got out of his vessel and started walking down the street, not bothering to check to see if the tail followed. Instinct told Breed the man was still there.

Casually, he strolled down the street until he reached an alleyway. He scanned the area around him and then ducked down the narrow passageway.

He smelled the man before he saw him. A strong disinfectant odor filled Breed's nose. The man rounded the corner. Breed grabbed him by the shirt collar and slammed him up against a wall.

He threw his elbow in his throat, pressed hard, and searched the tail for a weapon. He found a stunner that he tossed to the side.

Breed increased the pressure on the man's throat, but not enough he choked him. He needed the idiot to be able to answer questions.

"Who sent you?"

"What the hell are you talking about? I came to take a piss, and you go all nuts on me. What is this, a stickup?"

Breed slammed his knee into the man's stomach.

The tail grunted and bowled over, gasping for air.

"I won't ask you again," Breed said.

"I don't know what the fuck you are talking about. I swear. I came to take a leak." The man stammered, barely able to get the words out he was sucking in air so fast, wheezing.

"I'm not a patient man. Don't dick with me," Breed said. He removed his stunner and jammed it against the man's temple. "Let's try this again. Who sent you?"

When the man didn't respond fast enough, Breed yanked his head back, crammed his stunner farther into the side of the man's head, and flipped the safety off.

"Okay...okay." The tail looked around, shifting his eyes only, before looking at Breed again. "It's not what you think. I was sent to deliver a message—"

The distinct sound of several muffled pops exploded. Breed saw pieces of the concrete wall split and fly about all around them. He made to move, intent on taking the tail with him, but when he dove for cover, the tail was jerked from his hold when laser beams ripped through his chest. The velocity of the hits threw the man backwards.

Breed made a dash, hit the ground, and rolled behind a metal trash receptacle for cover.

The barrage of gunfire ceased. Breed inched closer to the edge and peeked out. He kept his weapon aimed, scanning the area, but whoever was shooting stayed hidden.

The heavy intake of breath sounded as the tail struggled to inhale and exhale. Breed could hear the air escaping through his chest, gurgling noises, as he tried to breathe.

Cautiously moving forward, crouched low, Breed tried to grab for the man's leg so he could pull him behind the makeshift shield. As soon as he touched the man, blasts erupted, riddling the tail's leg and knees, ripping open the flesh.

They weren't after him, but the tail? It didn't make sense, but Breed believed his assumption was correct. If not, why did they stop firing once the tail was down?

Breed eased up and searched the surrounding area to see if he could pinpoint the shooter's location. He could tell by the projection of laser beams, the tail got hit from both sides. There were two men firing from different locations.

Why are they after the tail? Dead men don't talk, Breed thought. "Help...me."

Hearing the tail speak startled Breed. He thought he was dead. There was desperation on his face, and his fingers clutched his chest. Blood seeped through his fingers and soaked his shirt. His eyes were half-open glazed over, and Breed knew what that meant. He had the look of a dying man.

The tail was only a few inches away. He could reach the man if he stretched. Breed did a belly scoot along the dirty ground, keeping his head and butt down, as laser beams whizzed past him.

Breed was surprised, and a lot relieved, when he was able to grab the man's arm. When he locked on, the tail caught another beam in the chest.

"Shit!" Breed cursed.

"Th-things aren't..." The man sucked in air and slowly released it, shuddering with the effort. "Seem..."

"Who sent you?" As Breed jerked the man forward demanding an answer, the tail's head dropped to the side.

Footsteps sounded as the men ran in the opposite direction of where Breed lay on the ground. He jumped to his feet, spun around, and found his targets hightailing it out of the area. He aimed his stunner at one of the attackers and fired a round. The man crumpled to his knees and then toppled over.

The other man kept running. Breed adjusted the setting on his weapon, loading the infrared seekers. He wanted this one alive. The man was a distance away, rounding the corner of a building. Breed leveled his stunner on his arm, focused the scope, and fired.

The man wobbled, grabbed his thigh, but kept on running. Breed put away his weapon. Calmly, he walked back toward his cruiser. He wasn't worried about the man getting away. That's what he wanted. No matter where the man ran, he would find him. The seekers were live, tiny molecules that would infuse in the man's bloodstream and stay in his body. Transmitters would send a constant signal from his location that could be tracked.

He would find the bastard. He hoped the idiot ran straight to whoever was behind this bullshit.

Impatiently, Breed waited for the interlink to locate the loc-tag ID and connect. It took five attempts before Aldie answered.

Without an introduction, Breed barked into the communicator. "Someone put a tail on me. The idiot is dead, but I didn't kill him. Apparently, the tail had a tail."

"What!" Aldie exclaimed.

"You heard me. I let one of the bastards who killed the tail go." Breed enabled the homing device and set coordinates to pick up the seeker signal. "I put a trace on the idiot. He is on the run, and I want to know where he is going, Aldie. Follow his ass, apprehend, and then bring the jerk to headquarters so I can have a chitchat with him."

"I'm on it. What the fuck is going on, Breed?"

"I don't know, but I have a sneaking suspicion Jordon can enlighten me. I'm going to have a little talk with the senator's son, and I intend to find out everything he might know about this bullshit."

"Maybe I should come with you?"

"No," Breed said, his tone sharp, clipped.

"Come on, Breed. The man can't get away. Let him go wherever he's headed and then send a seek-and-recover unit to retrieve the idiot. I want to be there when you interrogate Jordon. I *should* be there," Aldie said, adamant.

"Forget it, Aldie."

"Fuck, man, this is bullshit, and you know it. Christ, I'm your partner, not your grunt. This solo bullshit you insist on doing sucks. It's like you don't trust me."

Breed didn't confirm or deny. He remained mute and then said abruptly, "I'm downloading the transmitter trace to your IIM. I want that bastard at headquarters when I get there," he said and then disconnected right in the middle of Aldie's vehement disapproval.

The interlink continued to bleep. He watched his partner's loc-tag scroll across the visual display screen on the dashboard. Breed considered answering and then made an abrupt gesture with his hand. Aldie could wait. He started his vessel, monitored the oncoming traffic, and then stopped and hovered.

His eyebrows slanted downward and his eyes narrowed as he noticed Aldie's cruiser merge into the traffic up ahead.

Aldie was in the area? To double-check himself, Breed retraced the loctag data for the positional location on connect. There was no match for the area he was in. Breed considered why, and a few legitimate explanations surfaced for the mismatch. He set it aside to dissect later.

Was it a coincidence that his partner just happened to be in the same area?

Though plausible, he didn't believe in coincidence.

He maneuvered into the traffic, checked his surroundings, and then set autopilot. A rush of thoughts surfaced as the moving vessels—coming and going—zipped by. Not that Aldie was restricted to one location. His partner could have been visiting one of the nearby shops or restaurants that were conveniently located near the agency building. Maybe he was having lunch with the pretty redhead in security he was trying to sweet-talk and gain access to the Coleson files from the night of the lieutenant's murder?

That was a possibility, and made sense, Breed thought, maneuvering the cruiser skillfully around an airbus transporter that made a sudden stop to disembark passengers. The excuse was satisfactory and made sense. He considered it while waiting on the pedestrians to board the transport before he accelerated and whipped around the vessel.

He didn't like having a partner. His preference was to go it solo, as Aldie rightfully accused him of doing on multiple occasions. He couldn't refute the accusation. Shutting out a partner was wrong on many levels, but conveniently, Breed pushed those negative thoughts aside.

The incident with his partner before Aldie came along still spooked him. Five years, eleven months, and some odd days later, the memory of the day he got his partner killed still haunted him. Just one month he'd like to sleep through the night without waking up in a cold sweat, soaked through, and shuddering so bad his teeth chattered.

The recruit never should have been on the Elite Forces in the first place, but having a high-ranking father sometimes was a good thing. On the other hand, bad, depending on how you looked at it. As far as Breed was concerned, it sucked for the recruit. His father pushed the issue of Waverly's assignment, and for that the young man ended up dead.

Not that the blame was solely on his head, but it happened under his watch, so feeling responsible still lay heavy like a stone.

The stop was routine. Nothing out of the ordinary, just the two of them going to talk with what he thought might be a key witness in a kidnap and murder investigation, until all hell broke loose.

A congressman's teenage son had been kidnapped, tortured and mutilated, and then eventually turned up dead. A neighbor—a government official himself, Mr. Fuqua—reported he might have seen the suspects. Breed wanted to talk to the neighbor to get his account. He took Waverly along just to appease Coleson and to keep the lieutenant off his ass.

He spoke to the neighbor earlier, and the man was expecting them to arrive around noon. Mr. Fuqua had been out of the country earlier, and when he returned and learned about the kidnap, he seemed eager to assist. All routine, and nothing stood out as odd as they approached the well-manicured lawn in the upscale suburbs where Fuqua and the congressman lived. Breed recalled ringing the bell, waiting, and then going to knock when the door suddenly swung open.

Everything happened so fast—a loud blast echoed, a jolt of pain shot through his chest, rocked him back a few feet, and then he landed on his butt. While he lay dazed, trying to focus and get his weapon released, he heard three more pops and the sound of a groan and the heavy thud of dead weight hitting the ground. When he looked over, Waverly's brain matter was splattered over the pavement.

A week later, he woke up in the hospital. He had a wound in his chest that missed vital organs because he wore a protective vest. He'd instructed Waverly to suit up, but he didn't check to make sure the recruit followed orders. Waverly got two blasts to the chest and one in the face that blew the right side of the young man's face off.

Mr. Fuqua's son was a certifiable psychopath. The bastard learned his father was going to speak to the agency and met them at the door. Waverly didn't have a chance. Breed probably would have died too, but he learned when Fuqua's son returned to finish the job on him, Mr. Fuqua killed his own son.

"I put the bastard out of his misery," Mr. Fuqua admitted in court.

The years had passed, but Waverly was never forgotten. Up until Coleson forced Aldie on him, Breed worked alone for a few years. Just how

he liked it. He fought against taking Aldie on as a partner, but Coleson pushed the issue to the point of filing insubordination charges to the IOA, Internal Oversight Affairs. Something the department wouldn't take lightly. He fought like hell, but finally relented and found himself with a partner.

The good thing was Aldie had experience and could handle himself. That didn't mean he didn't occasionally revert to solo mode.

Breed drummed his fingertips over the console waiting on the interlink to connect.

"I owe you one."

Aldie paused and then grumbled. "Damn straight you do. Don't think I won't demand you pay up."

Breed suffocated a chuckle. "Hey, how far are you from headquarters?" It didn't hurt to ask.

"Far enough. It seems the perp is headed out of Carpathia...on the outskirts of the city. Why? What's up?"

"Nothing. Just checking. Let me know as soon as you get him."

"Why? You need me to run another errand?" He could tell by Aldie's tone he was sulking, a mood Breed didn't feel inclined to placate, but he gave it a gallant effort.

"No, I just need you to help me out on this."

"Yeah, got it."

The connection disconnected. Breed checked the loc-tag details. This time the location matched the area.

It was probably the redhead, Breed thought. Fucking around on the company time was an offense. Not that he would report such, but he had to consider that he wasn't the only one contacting Aldie during business hours. That would be reason enough for his partner to scramble his loc-tag locator. He had to admit he'd done it a time or two himself.

Breed pushed the thought to the back of his head. He had important matters to consider besides if his partner screwed around on company time.

Jordon Sparks was the key to the case. He felt it in his bones.

## **Chapter Twelve**

"I said shut *up*." The voice could have come from a movie Jordon was watching, but Breed couldn't be sure. He just knew it wasn't familiar.

Then a nefarious laughter sounded from behind the door. Breed frowned, pressing an earlobe, listening. He could hear a conversation, two people, and voices rising and falling. Jordon could have been talking on his interlink with it on speaker mode, but with the solid wood frame between them, it was difficult to tell.

"You're a sick man." The voice resembled Jordon's, but then again it didn't. It was too strong, forceful, and heavy for Jordon's naturally dulcet tone.

Silence ensued for a brief minute, and Breed heard talking again. This time the voice clearly belonged to Jordon. "Don't...please. Not again. You promised never again," he whined, pleading.

"Suck it up, Jordie." The man laughed again, and Breed thought how sinister it sounded.

After the conversation ended, Breed knocked on the door and then entered without waiting to be asked. Jordon jumped, whirling around, and then sighed in relief as if he was glad to see Breed standing there.

"What's up, Jordon? We need to talk." A genuine smile crossed his features, but Breed swore his eyes were too bright. Was he crying?

Jordon sniffled, wiped his eyes, and then came toward Breed and met him halfway into the room. When Jordon kept coming and held out his arms as if he expected to be consoled, Breed raised hands as if to say "stop."

"So, this is a business call?"

"Don't get it confused, Jordon. It was always about business."

Jordon pouted, stepped back. His tone sounded bitter. "You came into my home under pretense and fucked me. Why?"

"The story hasn't changed since that night. Me and my partner needed to get intel on your father."

The senator's son snickered. "Intel? How quaint. Is that what the government calls blackmail these days?"

He responded matter-of-factly. "Call it what you will. Have a seat. We need to talk." When Jordon hesitated, Breed pointed at the chair across from him. "Sit...down."

Like a recalcitrant child, Jordon slumped down in the seat, crossing his arms defiantly over his chest.

"I'm going to make this simple for you. I ask the questions, and you respond. Are we clear? What's going on between you and your father?"

"I hate his guts, and he despises mine. We don't get along very well."

"Nor do I get along with my father, but to date he hasn't tried to have me killed. You got something on the senator that would ruin his chances at the presidency? Is that why he's after you?"

"Did the intel you gathered work?"

Breed had the sense Jordon already knew the answer to the question and tried to jerk his chain. "What do you think?"

A slight smile curled Jordon's lip so that his mouth appeared lopsided. "I would say no, because my father already knew about my preference for men. I grew some balls one night and confessed. He wasn't very happy about that. The senator said, and I quote, 'You would do anything to kill my chances at the presidency, you bastard. I denounce you as my son and wish you were never born.' Then he politely informed me to leave his house and never step over the threshold again. We haven't seen each other since."

"Don't bullshit me, Jordon. I know the senator tried to kill you that night."

Jordon shrugged nonchalantly. "Things aren't always what they seem. Remember that, detective or whatever you are."

"Got it. What happened at the boathouse?" The sudden shift in topic was on purpose. He wanted to rattle Jordon, and it worked, because his entire manner changed. He got very agitated and jumped up and started pacing.

"I don't want to talk about the boathouse," Jordon whispered.

"Did your father do something to you there? Why does mentioning the place upset you so much?" Breed pushed, hoping that if he got him agitated

enough he'd start rambling. People often revealed things when they were upset.

"Shut up! Don't you dare mention the boathouse again."

Breed raised his eyebrows at the sudden balls Jordon grew. He'd noticed it before. He would morph between hot and cold, almost shifting into another character. He spoke calmly even though his words were meant to hit a nerve. He didn't want to push too hard, but he needed Jordon to confide in him—a slip of the tongue or not. Breed really didn't care as long as Jordon talked.

"I read your medical files, and it mentioned some things in there no small boy should suffer." He lied. He was still waiting on the clearance to view the entire file on the senator and his son, but the agency kept it close to their chest. Monty's person at the Federal Repository of Medical History was stalling and hadn't produced anything so far.

The falsehoods rolled from his lips smooth as honey. Breed followed a hunch. "There were things in the files anybody would find disturbing. Things a young boy should never experience. Whatever happened at the boathouse, is that what the senator fears you might reveal?"

Jordon froze, whirled around, and got in Breed's face. "I told you not to mention that!"

"If you tell me what happened at the boathouse, would that stop the senator from pushing the Abramson Bill? Are you blackmailing your father? If your father did something illegal to you, I can help. You do want to stop him, don't you?"

Jordon's, or whomever he'd become, tone changed, and it sounded familiar, like the one Breed heard before he entered the room. Low and thick like he swallowed gravel. "Father can't be stopped—not until he's dead."

\* \* \* \*

Jordon wasn't dealing with a full deck. In fact, he was six short of a dozen. He was a hundred percent sure the senator's son had snapped, and he didn't want Monty anywhere near the nutcase. That was paramount in his mind as he walked down the dim corridor seeking Monty out.

As if he expected him, Monty was staring at the door when Breed entered the office.

"The glow, right?"

"I saw the blue hue under the threshold."

Breed walked over and sat down on the couch. He didn't say anything for a long pause, but then said, "Jordon is screwed in the head. I should have caught it up front, but I guess I was too absorbed in other details to pay attention."

"Perhaps that is true. I talked to Jordon for fifteen minutes and got the sense something is off-centered. You want a drink?"

"The last time I had a drink or two or three, things got out of control."

"I promise to make you behave."

"Do you want me to?"

Monty smiled, but didn't respond. He walked to the console and tossed ice cubes into glasses and added three fingers of cognac. He handed a glass to Breed. "Here, you might not want a drink, but I've had a fucked-up day. I prefer not to drink alone."

"Thanks. Want to tell me about it? Then we can compare and see who day was more screwed up."

Monty sat in a chair across from Breed, stretched his long legs, crossed his ankles, and sipped his drink. "Not particularly." He sounded weary. "It's the trial I'm involved with. I'm not privy to discuss details, but it's safe to say that it's a bitch. For once I think the illustrious career of a defense attorney isn't worth the bullshit."

The surprise showed on Breed's face. This was the first time he heard Monty talk this way. He sat forward and studied his friend closely. "I never heard you say anything but positive statements about your career."

"I always made it a point not to bother you with my headaches because, when you visit, you seem to have enough of your own. My issues didn't seem a priority or worth discussing with what you go through. You work hard to get scum off the street, and I work to set them free."

Breed waved his hand abruptly, swiping the air, dismissing the claim. That wasn't true, and they both knew it. Monty was a lawyer, but he had a conscience. He was more interested in the first part of his statement. "The first thing you said about your issues not being a priority. Is that how I make you feel? I know I get pretty absorbed in my cases, huh?"

"You want confirmation, or are you just making a statement?" There was Breed's answer.

"You want to tell me why the cynicism?"

"Defending a bastard you know is guilty of rape will do that to you. I actually thought he was innocent up until today. He's a minister, for god's sake—no pun intended—with a pristine record. But today the Devil came out. I was cross-examining the victim, and do you know what that sick bastard was doing? He had his hand beneath the table, and the bastard was rubbing his crotch while the girl gave her testimony." He paused and looked at Breed. "Right there, out in the open, he was jerking off while I harassed the girl about her promiscuous actions in the past until she broke down in tears. I felt terrible afterwards. When the judge called for a break, I drug my client into a corner and politely informed the dirtbag to find another lawyer."

"So you did the right thing."

"Yes, I did, but the damage was already done. The jury isn't going to forget the cross-examination. The girl admitted to multiple sex partners and even group sex. I put doubt in the jurors' minds. The sicko will probably get off." He finished his drink and then rested the glass on his thigh. He looked at Breed matter-of-factly. "So, I have told you about my fucked-up day. Let's see if yours tops mine."

Breed knew Monty wanted to change the topic, and he respected that. This time he fixed the drinks and then sat down. "Did you notice how Jordon morphs from cold to hot? What's your gut feeling?"

"My first love is psychology, and I seriously considered pursuing that profession until I realized listening to the evils that exist in the mind was too daunting. Now, I realize there is a thin line between listening to someone who is clearly insane talk openly and freely, because they don't know they're psychopaths or worse, as opposed to sitting across from a client that clearly knows he's evil. The line fades between the two scenarios greatly. Evil is evil."

Breed knew Monty's penchant for acting the pseudo-psychiatrist. He remained silent and listened, waiting for him to finish his analysis.

"I don't think Jordon is a psychopath, but there is some type of mental issue there. A majority of the time we talked he seemed fine, even a likeable fellow, but then there were other moments when I noticed the disconnect in his brain. Dual personalities, perhaps?"

Breed agreed, nodding. "Whatever, I'm convinced it all stemmed from an incident in his past that involves his father. When I mention the senator, he gets tense and clearly agitated one minute, and then the next he changes into this character I don't recognize."

"I made the mistake of mentioning his father, and he flipped on me. His aura turned dark with no shades, pure black."

"Which means what?"

"Black usually means a person is trying to shroud their true emotions. Usually when there are conflicted or convoluted feelings toward a person. I have to assume mentioning his father triggered Jordon's dark mood."

Breed studied the liquid in his glass a minute, reflecting. "You would think if Jordon hates his father so much he would jump at the chance to bring him down."

"It depends on what type of mental state we're dealing with. Sometimes diagnosis of mental instability is difficult because it could be one nuance that makes the condition deviate from the clinical description. Jordon might not fit into any neat medical category. That, and we don't know for sure what sets Jordon off. We know he is angry with his father and even may hate him. I also get the sense, while he might despise his father, there is also a sense a fear of authority the senator represents. That fear might keep Jordon from revealing the truth about the senator. Because of the lack of control, hostility could drive Jordon to act out against his father, but stop short of actually trying to harm him in any way, whether physical or mental. If the senator is responsible for Jordon's mental state, dependent on what he did, it would decide what type of psychosis we're dealing with. Psychosis is normally driven by life experiences, and the result manifests in different ways. The dual personalities, if that is the case, could be Jordon's way of coping with his past. This is all speculative, of course."

Breed raised the glass in a salute. "I'm impressed. If you give up being a lawyer, you should seriously consider psychology."

Monty chuckled. "My assumptions are based on what I've read recently. I subscribe to all types of medical journals that focus on psychology, and I admit I'm a junkie when it comes to watching every show related to crimes associated to serial killers, psychopaths, anything dealing with mental issues. That, and the few years I studied in school when I tinkered with

pursuing a psychology career. What you need is a certified psychiatrist to talk to Jordon, if possible."

"I know, but getting Jordon to talk to one will probably prove difficult. About as hard as getting my hands on the senator's and Jordon's medical records and psych evaluations that every government official and family member must have on record. I'm trying to access the information, but it's not an easy task. I can get the president's information, but for whatever reason the senator's data is under lock and key, so to speak."

"That means something is there the government doesn't want out."

"Yep." Breed leaned back, relaxing against the cushions. He stared up at the dizzying ceiling for a long minute until his eyes started to cross. Monty's voice drew his attention back to him.

"Your case is really getting to you?"

"About as much as yours, so I think we both win for having the most fucked-up day." Breed paused and then added, "You want to talk about what happened between us the other night?"

Monty effectively tried to avoid the question. "I think I need a refill. I don't, but I'm going to have one anyway. You want one?"

"What I want is an answer."

"We got caught up in the moment," Monty said matter-of-factly.

Breed rose, sitting straight forward, and watched Monty's back. "What the hell does that mean? I'd hardly call it that. If you don't want to talk about it, Monty, then just say so. But don't give me a bullshit excuse."

"You asked a question, and I responded. Don't try to interrogate me because you didn't get the answer you hoped for. Stop being a cop, will you?"

"When you stop the lawyer crap." His tone was gruffer than he intended.

Monty turned around and stared at Breed. "When did you become such a jerk?"

Breed looked amused. His lips lopsided. He didn't take offense to what Monty said. "I have always been a jerk, but I suppose this case and the daily bullshit I'm forced to deal with has exacerbated the negative trait. At least that's what I keep telling myself." He rested against the headrest again and closed his eyes. "That, or maybe I'm just anal."

He heard movement and knew Monty was walking about. His voice sounded from the other side of the room, coming from the direction of the balcony. "Maybe I should put the question to you that I asked myself today. If you're disenchanted with your career, why do you continue to do it?"

"Somebody has to stop the madness," Breed said somberly.

"You think you can do that single-handed?"

Monty had moved closer. He could smell the unique scent of his cologne. "Nope, but I'm going to give it a helluva try. I like being an agent, and I know I can't right all the wrongs and bring all the criminals to justice, but each one I apprehend is one less nutcase out there."

The heat of Monty's closeness seeped into Breed's senses and warmed his body. Monty was close, standing behind him, and the thought made Breed pause. The anticipation of what Monty was up to made tremors of excitement burst alive inside his body. Not to mention his cock became alert and swelled.

There was a long moment where neither one said a word. The sexual tension in the room was obvious. Breed didn't say anything or make a move because he wanted Monty to come to him.

Powerful arms wrapped around his chest. A chaste kiss was planted on the top of his head that flattened his hair. The feel of Monty's lips seared his flesh and sent a signal straight to his cock, which stretched and filled with desire.

"What's going on here?" Breed said ultra low. He tried to turn, but Monty pressed the flat plane of his stomach muscles against the back of his head. His fingers ran over the exposed skin of his arm and down the length, running through the fuzz of hair.

His warm lips hummed over the nape of his neck, tickling when Monty spoke. "You're pretty astute. I think you can figure it out." He gripped Breed's face and turned him until their mouths were within kissing distance.

Breed focused on the full lips, moist with liquor, and then shifted his attention to the depths of Monty's hazel eyes. "I'm thinking you are going to kiss me. I want you to kiss me."

The contact tentative, gingerly searching...a light brush...lip to lip, as if Monty wanted just a taste to see if he liked the flavor of a male. Breed assumed he did because he slid the tip of his tongue along the crease of his

mouth, beckoning, savoring. Monty slanted his mouth, crushing his lips, and slipped his tongue inside, filling Breed, fueling the fire raging inside him.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Breed turned, looking up at Monty. He reached for him and pulled Monty downward. "How far are we taking this?" His voice throaty, lust-filled.

"If I knew that, I'd be all over you instead of acting like a virgin," Monty said quietly.

Breed laughed softly. "Technically, you are innocent. Are you leaving it up to me?" he inquired casually, but hopefully.

"Let's just take it slow and see what happens."

That wasn't the green light that Monty wanted to be fucked, but it was close enough. Of course, if Monty said stop before things went too far, he would respect that. It would drive him nuts, but forcing actions on Monty he wasn't ready for wasn't his style.

"We will take it slow." Breed agreed and then entwined his fingers in the waistband of Monty's pants and pulled him around the chair and forward until the object of his attention stood between his welcoming thighs.

Breed's large, strong fingers settled on his hips, and with a slow and easy descent, he pulled the slacks down until the material hung low, revealing the top swell of his muscular ass cheeks.

Monty said, "Your hands are hot."

"So are you." Leisurely, he ran his fingertips over the defined planes of Monty's stomach, dipped low, and planted a moist kiss that made his muscles quiver when Breed touched there. He heard the sharp intake of breath as the sensual licks of his tongue followed the trail of gold baby-fine hair that disappeared beneath the waistband. He flicked his tongue and teased the area just above his cock. He swirled his tongue back and forth over the peach fuzz, enjoying the taste of what he described as essence. Purely intoxicating and made Breed drunk with need.

A savage thirst ensued, driving the need to go lower and feast on the hard length straining against Monty's crotch. The cock that he had yet to release from confinement tented the material. A gentle yank caused the cock to bob free like a floating buoy and then stretch to attention, jutting between his thighs. Damn near pointing at Breed—calling. The column lengthy and the head a flawlessly shaped mushroom that looked palatable. The vein beneath was visible and thick and ran downward into the well-formed sacs, perfectly molded, and added to the delectable sight that made Breed eager to taste.

He enclosed the length of his cock in his palm and dragged his fingers back and forth along the stalk, pausing to strum his fingertips over the slit that quickly filled with pearly liquid that beckoned his tongue to feast. Breed lathed with his tongue, lapping the moisture, swallowed, and then moaned appreciatively at the tangy-sweet flavor that made his mouth water and taste buds burst alive and dance.

Breed kept up the tune, moving his lips and beating over the rigid length in a succinct tempo of lavish pulses, capturing the satiny flesh and firming before clasping and applying suction to his cock, repeatedly milking. Monty squirmed and thrust his hips forward. His fingers entwined and twisted in Breed's hair and threatened to pull the roots free.

Breed knew what he was doing—intent to drive Monty wild and succumb and fill his mouth with a man's pleasure. He eased up, licking along the masculine hardness before gulping the entirety of the length to the back of his throat.

Monty came unglued, trembled, and cursed under his breath. His fingers digging deeper, holding the succulent mouth against the base, he rocked his hips forward, silently demanding more.

Breed was happy to oblige. He let his mouth slip free and mumbled, "I know it feels damn good."

It wasn't an arrogant statement, but the damned truth.

"Christ—yes!"

"Then give me what I want, what you need...Cum for me, and let me taste what I've fantasized about for years."

The oral fixation with wanting to savor the essence of male drove the ravishing with mouth, lips, and tongue. He rubbed the hard length against the roof of his mouth, suckled, and pulled at the glorious cock, drawing

more pre-cum to seep and satisfy the persistent craving like a sweet tooth for sugary treats.

Monty's hips twitched uncontrollably and started a gyrating movement, sending the swell of cock rocking in beat to the rhythmic tempo pulsating over his dick. Breed nudged his thighs apart, held him open, and settled in between.

Monty suffocated a breath and shivered violently. Breed didn't know if it was because of anticipation or reluctance. Breed knew he was feeling uneasy about what was happening. He understood Monty's reaction.

Monty pressed his palms against Breed's shoulders, holding him back.

He looked up at him. "Don't hold back. You want this, and there's nothing wrong with that, Monty. Let me please you to completion, show you the feel of a man and the pleasure of the touch that's like nothing you have ever felt before." He sucked two fingers deep inside his mouth and moistened them before sliding them up the snug crease to tease his puckered hole. He stopped short of penetrating. Teasing, he nibbled at his inner thigh, taking tiny bites, and then soothed the assault with the heat of his tongue. Then abruptly, without a warning, he swallowed the entire girth and vacuumed, bent on devouring Monty like a treat.

The element of surprise and feel of hard sucking forced Monty to lose control and slam his thighs forward demandingly. With a swiftness, two fingers entered the virgin territory. Monty gripped his shoulders as if he wanted to push him back, but he didn't.

"Don't...move..." Breed said. He watched as Monty's mouth fell open and then closed. A guttural groan escaped his lips when Breed started fingering, scissoring, and flexing his fingers before plundering and distending the tightness of his ass.

"Breed-fuck!" Monty moaned.

"I know, baby, but it was best to take you fast." His look feral, he added, "I'm not going to apologize because I'm not sorry about finger-fucking this sweet virgin ass. In a minute, you will be pissed that it was just fingers and not my cock riding high. Trust me." He slapped his tight cheeks. "Now, fuck my mouth. Give me that cock like you never have anyone before. I like to deep-throat."

Breed could tell the wicked instructions he gave coupled with the diabolical sucking motion drove Monty to the brink. He added another finger to the first two and picked up a beat that made Monty's knees buckle.

At this point, Breed knew he had him. He could tell by the uncontrolled spasms of Monty's body as he sucked harder and faster, then slowed his pace, dragged his mouth over the thickness, and bit the inside of Monty's thigh before he started suckling again.

Monty's entire body stiffened. He fell forward, pressing against Breed's head, and released in a violent rush.

Breed didn't stop sucking his cock until he was convinced he'd pulled every last drop of man-juice free. When he was satisfied, he let Monty's cock go.

"Damn, you're sweet," he said and then wrapped his arm around Monty's neck, drawing him forward. He kissed him thoroughly, pushing his tongue between the heavy pants, sharing. "See how good you taste? Now you know why I couldn't resist wanting your cum in my mouth." Slowly, Breed withdrew his fingers.

Monty looked flushed.

"Are you okay?" Breed asked.

"I never lost control like that before. I looked down at my cock in your mouth, and the greedy way you sucked me was my undoing. The way my hips slammed back and forth between your lips. I went wild, became somebody I didn't know. I couldn't stop the frenzy and the maddeningly desire I had to hammer you." Monty looked at Breed, contrite. "I felt like I went too far, but couldn't—didn't want to—halt."

Monty moved back on wobbly legs and fell into a chair. His entire body quivered. Hooded eyelids laced in the aftermath of bliss looked at Breed. He ran his fingertips through his hair, setting the damp strands off his forehead. "I don't know what to say."

Breed did the eyebrow thing that was his signature wink. "Not to sound arrogant, but I know what I'm doing. Your cock is gorgeous and made for sucking. The pleasure was all mine." He wormed about to adjust the heaviness between his thighs. The telling movement caught Monty's attention. Breed could tell because he stared at the bulge in his pants.

"I suppose—" Monty stammered, cleared his throat, and then tried again. "I assume you want me to reciprocate?"

That would be great. Breed said instead, "It's not necessary."

"I'm not a selfish lover."

"The thought never crossed my mind, Monty."

"It's what you want, though, for me to do you?"

Breed was amused by his friend's unexpected shyness. "Honestly, hell yes, but it's not a requirement. We're taking it slow, remember?"

Monty licked his bottom lip as if he could taste him. The action made Breed react, seeing the pink tip slide along his firm lips. His cock surged, thickened, making him damned uncomfortable.

"I feel like I should do something," Monty said.

"Don't feel like you have to, Monty, but if you want to help me out here, I have a suggestion." He crooked his finger, beckoning Monty to come to him. When he hesitated, Breed said, "Come here."

Monty didn't move, but sat watching Breed.

A slow, easy grin surfaced. "I don't bite," he teased.

"Yes, you do. When you sank your teeth in my thigh, I came on cue." Monty stood up. "Damn, you're hypnotic." He walked toward Breed, but stopped short of standing between his thighs.

"I want you closer," Breed said. He worked on the fastening of his pants, unzipping, he freed his cock. He twisted his fingers in the band of Monty's pants and jerked him forward until he stood between his legs. Breed shoved his pants down around his hips. "On your knees...please."

Monty stared down at Breed's cock. "That's some stunner you're packing."

Breed threw back his head and laughed wholeheartedly. His eyes brightened and shimmered with mirth when he looked at Monty. "I take that as a compliment. Thanks."

He kissed Monty demandingly, crushing his lips against his friend's, dancing his tongue around and about, setting a wild tempo before he stopped. "I'm suffering here. Would you mind masturbating me? I don't mind doing it myself, but I want you to do it. Put your hands on me."

The first touch was tentative, innocent, and then grew bolder with heated instructions that Breed whispered in Monty's ear. "Squeeze it...Stroke along the shaft. Make me cum." Breed moaned as Monty increased the beat against his dick.

Their foreheads lay against one another. Monty stared at the burgeoning length. He tried to complete the circle around Breed's cock, but it was impossible. "I can't imagine having something this size in my ass. Your fingers...whew...I'm still open and can feel your brand there."

"Since I have already broken the seal of your virginity, this would be a good time to let me tap that ass. Interested?"

Monty said, "Maybe next time. How do you like to get off?"

"As long as your hands are on me, it doesn't matter. Kiss me."

Monty reached up and seared Breed's lips with a kiss that sent tendrils of heat washing over him like a heated saber. His tongue, hot and quick, flickered about and set Breed on fire.

Monty turned out to be a perfectionist, but that didn't surprise Breed. He moved his diligent fingers, massaging his cock, gliding over his shaft, back and forth, pulling the skin up and over the crown before drawing it down until his skin was taut again. He rubbed his thumb over the eye slit and used the moisture seeping out to ease the friction.

He pumped his cock, interchanging between fast and slow, firmly jerking the shaft with each stroke. Breed thrust his hips in tune with Monty's diabolical fingers working over his shaft. The need to erupt was close. He was at the cusp...almost there.

"Finger me," he said, spreading wide so Monty could get to him. The penetration of his thick finger made Breed buck off the chair seat. "Ah, fuck me." Breed cupped Monty's jaws and slanted his mouth and kissed Monty hard, thrusting his tongue between Monty's lips with the same rhythm of the hand on his cock and the finger working his ass.

His entire body became immobile, teeth clenched, he abruptly shot out like a geyser sending a mist of cum splashing on Monty's face when he came. The final squirt hit Monty in the eye and dripped down his eyelashes.

After the numbness went away and he could speak, he mumbled, "Sorry." He ran his thumb over Monty's face and washed his seed away. Cleansing the remainder with his tongue, he eased the tip inside Monty's mouth. "Taste me. Remember me." Breed came to his feet and wrapped an arm around Monty's waist. He molded their bodies together. "I know I agreed not to sweat you, but I want you, Monty."

Monty opened up his mouth to respond when Breed's interlink bleeped. "Somebody has damned bad timing." He thought about ignoring the call, but saw Aldie's loc-tag scroll by his IIM. "I have to get this."

When he moved to step away, Breed held Monty in place. "This had better be damned important," he barked into the communicator. "Are you fucking kidding me?" He listened to Aldie and then disconnected.

"Sounds serious."

"It is, and so screwed up you wouldn't believe it. I have to go."

Breed worked on adjusting his clothes as he stalked to the door. He stopped at the threshold and looked over his shoulder. The sight of Monty standing there with his hair tousled, lips plump and wet from being ravaged, and the way his slacks hung low on his hips made him look too damn sexy, enticing.

He couldn't help himself. "Fuck..." He grabbed him by the nape. Slamming forward, he crushed his mouth against Monty's and gave him a thorough kiss, all tongue, heated and salacious, before stepping back. "I hate to go, but duty calls."

"I understand."

"Oh, by the way, Jordon is out of here tonight. I will have him transported immediately."

Monty followed Breed down the corridor that lead to the front door. "I don't think that is wise. Besides, I'm sure he is not a threat to me."

"Yeah, maybe not, but I'm not willing to take that chance." Breed left before Monty could protest further.

As he walked to his cruiser, he replayed in his head what Aldie said. *This shit can't be happening*.

He jumped into his transporter, activated the strobe lights, disengaged autopilot, and gunned the projectiles. He headed in the direction of the location of the crime scene. He went to headquarters.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

"Well, it's about time you grace us with your presence," Cox, a junior detective, said cynically, greeting Breed when he rounded the corner of the hallway leading to the row of interrogation rooms.

"Fuck off," Breed said and then shoved Cox aside.

Cox was a veteran officer, an overweight, overbearing, two-pack-a-day chain smoker, with three ex-wives and many grudges to bear. It was no secret he loathed Breed and the ground he walked on. Cox had put in ten years on the force, then watched Breed get promoted after a year, and Cox never let an opportunity pass to remind Breed he thought it sucked.

"Yeah, well, you would probably love to," Cox shot back.

It was either bash his fat mouth in or keep walking. Breed decided on the latter. What he didn't need right now was a fight with a team member and his captain breathing down his ass anymore than he already did.

He gave Cox the middle-finger salute.

"What the hell happened?" Breed asked Aldie, who was stepping from one of the rooms.

"I traced the man like you asked me to do. When he tried to leave the city, I knew he was a flight risk, so I apprehended him and brought him to headquarters. I just left him for a second. When I returned, I found him dead."

Breed swore, cursing. "You're fucking with me, right?"

Aldie moved aside and let Breed see into the room. A man was slouched over in a chair, head twisted to the side, and a neat hole was center forward and two in the chest.

"Just like Coleson. This is bullshit." Breed raked his fingers through his hair in frustration. "Tell me this isn't real. What the hell happened, Aldie?"

"Your partner left the perp alone. I believe that is dereliction of duty. A major fucking blunder," Cox said, grinning.

"God, I want to smash my fist in your fat mouth." Aldie simmered, eyeing Cox.

"Yeah, me too, so back off, Cox." Breed grabbed Aldie's arm and moved him back. He lowered his tone. "What is asshole talking about?"

Aldie folded his arms over his chest. His stance tightened. He looked grim. "I fucked up, Breed. I was on the man pretty hard, and the idiot got all agitated and started acting like he was about to hyperventilate on me. I thought if I gave him some space he would calm down. I went to take a leak. I couldn't have been gone more than, ah, less than five minutes."

"You know never to leave a perp alone. Never." Breed started to chastise Aldie, but his partner already knew the drill. It wasn't as if Aldie was a rookie. He knew better. "The captain is going to be all over this. Great, just what we need."

"A junior officer, Patrick or Patten, was standing outside the room. Hell, when I told him I was going to the restroom, I didn't think I needed to spell things out to him. I made the assumption he knew to stay put."

"The perp was your responsibility. You don't make any assumptions when someone is in your custody. Damn it, I shouldn't have to tell you this. Fuck, Internal Oversight Affairs is going to be all over this," Breed said. He sighed heavily, seeing Wheatland milling about, sniffing around like a hound after a scent.

"IOA is already pulling the security stream."

Breed frowned. He prided himself on knowing everything going on within the agency. "When were cams installed in the interrogation rooms?"

"About a month ago. Wheatland insisted it was necessary because of the increased complaints from perps about coerced confessions."

"Uonaidas and McMahon, in my office now!" Captain Foresight's voice boomed, vibrating in the narrow hallway.

"Great, the wrath of Foresight summons," Aldie murmured sarcastically.

Cox chuckled. The exertion made his stomach jiggle like Jell-O. "Looks like you two boys have been called into the principal's office."

"You know, Cox, one day your mouth is going to get a foot up your fat ass," Aldie said and then stormed off, shoving Cox out of the way.

"Up yours," Cox called out, grabbed his crotch, and made a lewd gesture.

The temptation to shut Cox's mouth was great, but Breed ignored the offensive buffoon. In his present mood, once he started in on the idiot, he wouldn't let up. He was in that kind of mood, pissy as hell.

Captain Foresight was a formidable man. He stood five-eight, with a bulldog head, thick neck, and a beefy chest that bulged with muscle. No flab there. He looked more like a linebacker then a high-ranking official with a cushy desk job in the Elite Forces.

Foresight jabbed his finger at Aldie. "The IOA is preening for your head. Give me one good reason why I shouldn't hand it over on a platter," he barked.

"You like me."

"Cut the bullshit, McMahon. Your pretty-boy smart mouth is the last thing I want to hear. Are we clear?"

Aldie sulked in the chair.

"You left a perp alone, and now the man is dead. The worst is, the security stream was screwed with, so we don't have a fucking clue how this insanity happened. Twice, mind you. First Coleson, and now a perp. You think this looks good on my record downtown? Hell no."

"Captain, I didn't intentionally leave the perp alone. Not that I'm using this as an excuse, but there was an officer outside the door."

"Patterson? He is a rookie, just a week on the force. He can barely unholster a weapon without sweating, let alone be qualified to watch what might have been a key witness. So no, absolutely not, can you use a rookie as an excuse," the captain snapped.

"I wasn't using him—"

"Shut...up!"

Aldie leaned back in his chair, pursed his lips tight.

Captain Foresight turned his shrewd eyes on Breed. He wrinkled his thick, bushy brows that hung like tufts of hair over his eyes, setting a stern concentration on Breed. His hard, lined face tightened, teeth set, made the captain look like a voracious badger. His beefy fist rested on the desk, knuckles clenched so tight his fingers turned white. "When I fucking contact you, Uonaidas, I expect you to answer. Not show your ass here like you own the place and get around to things on your own damn time. Got that?"

"Loud and clear, sir."

Foresight set a blistering glare on both men. "I don't like this. I'm not happy," he said, as if it wasn't obvious. "Wheatland is already breathing down my ass about Coleson and other things going on within my department. I don't need this bullshit. Not to mention we have a breach in security. The damn video stream is crap. Oh, and let's not forget the government has gotten wind of our involvement with Senator Sparks's son, and they are sending a man here to investigate. I don't need or want a Fed man hovering over me like a mother hen. That self-serving prick Wheatland is enough."

Breed moved from side to side in his seat. "Even though it doesn't appear like it now, we have everything under control, Captain. What happened with Jordon was not our doing, but given that, we handled the situation well. The senator's son is alive."

Captain Foresight leaned forward, glared at Breed. "Don't get all cocky, Uonaidas. Kidnapping a senator's son tosses all your he-man heroics out the window."

Aldie sat straight up. "Kidnap?" he protested.

The captain eyed Aldie narrowly. "Since when do I stutter? Where is Jordon, anyway?"

Aldie didn't respond. Breed didn't bat an eye when he answered. Carefully, he chose his words. "Jordon is not under protective custody. He is free to leave the residence where he is staying at any time." It wasn't actually a lie, so he felt vindicated.

The captain looked annoyed. He said, "You're a damn good agent, and someone above must really like you, Uonaidas, because you've been walking a thin line of insubordination for years. However, it would behoove you not to dick with me. I don't appreciate you trying to jerk my chain with your silvery tongue. Are we clear?"

"Wouldn't think of it, sir," Breed said dryly.

"How did someone breach security to get to the perp?" Aldie asked.

Captain Foresight focused a look on Aldie that should have shrunk him and made him pale. "I heard you weren't just a pretty face," he said sarcastically. "Figure it out. Besides, if I knew the answer to that dumbass question, the IOA and Feds wouldn't be ready to ream my ass without lube." The captain waved his hand dismissively. "Security doesn't report to me, anyway. How someone breached us is not my headache. That doesn't matter

to Wheatland, though. For some reason he is gunning for you two already. You may have just given the prick the evidence he needs to bust both of you down a rank."

Breed said, "I believe our records boast a hundred-percent success rate. Maybe we don't always go by the book, but Wheatland is fishing in this instance."

"I have only been over this department for a short period. I read both of your personnel files thoroughly. Yes, your records look good, but your tactics for apprehension have red marks all through them. You push the limits, Uonaidas, and some call you a bully."

"I get the results the agency demands of their agents." Breed tried not to let his irritation show. Sometimes unorthodox techniques were necessary to get the desired outcome the Elite Forces required. The agency demanded agents give one-hundred and fifty percent and pressured them to perform up to high standards they set. But then the bureaucrats frowned on certain tactics that they silently encouraged and then openly discouraged when an agent crossed the blurred line of right and wrong protocols. Agents were required to do whatever asked of them to complete an assignment, and that included bending over and taking it up the ass, if necessary. There were double standards; the agency could break all the rules, but as an agent you were forced to follow regulations and not step out of line while still producing results. Hypocrisy at its finest.

"We do what's necessary to handle our cases effectively. Textbook training doesn't do crap when you're out on the streets. The criminals don't go by our rules of engagement." Cynicism dripped from Breed's tone.

"Don't lecture me, Uonaidas. I did ten years on the force before I made captain. I know what it's like out there, so don't try and tell me what it takes to work with the idiots on the streets and solve a case." He turned the visual monitor so Breed and Aldie could see it. "I don't give a rat's ass about how you feel personally about doing your job. What I'm focused on is the memos I just received." He typed rapidly over the keypad, searched for the messages, and then jabbed his finger at the contents that displayed. "I'll summarize the notes for you two. If I don't get my house in order, the IOA and Feds will do it for me. That means my ass is grass. So, stop dicking around, and get this crap wrapped up. Preferably with no more bodies in the agency appearing. Got it?" He pointed at Breed. "Maybe that can happen if

you get off your solo ride, ego trip, whatever, and keep your partner abreast of all activities at all times. You are smart, Uonaidas, but two heads are better than one."

Breed couldn't help but ask. "What makes you think I'm riding solo?"

"I read your file, remember. What happened after the Waverly thing is common knowledge. That, and if you were here with the perp *you* put a trace on, your partner might not have made a rookie mistake."

Aldie clenched his teeth, biting back the retort Breed saw forming on his lips.

"I don't think that is a fair assessment...sir," Breed said. "Aldie is a good agent and—"

Captain Foresight waved his hand in the air abruptly. "If you want fair, you can get a job with the transport garage detail. I hear it's run by a very nice fellow. He does everything by the book and treats his agents like pussies. I'm not trying to fuck you, Uonaidas. Get this case solved pronto. No more slipups. Got it?"

The captain stood up, crossing his arms in front of his chest, making it look like two large slabs of meat were packed beneath his shirtsleeves. "I want a report every twenty-four hours." He tapped his interlink, turned his back, and started talking. It was an obvious dismissal.

The man is a first-rate jerk, Breed thought, leaving the office.

\* \* \* \*

Aldie waited until they cleared the office before he voiced an opinion about the meeting. "Well, my ass feels reamed. How about you?"

"This is bullshit," Breed said, walking alongside Aldie. He caught Cox standing with a few of his cronies, looking in their direction with a smirk. He glared at Cox and then turned away. "Jordon knows something that might implicate his father in something illegal, but he's too scared to talk. That, and I believe he's missing a few marbles, so he has to be handled delicately, or we could lose him totally. My discussion with him earlier didn't go over very well. He shut down on me like a whore in authority station, so I need you to help out here. You seem to handle Jordon better, so I want you to see if you can get him to open up. But, whatever you do, don't mention the boathouse—he will flip out."

"You are *not* my pimp. I'm your partner."

The irritation was obvious in his tone and didn't go unnoticed by Breed. He ignored Aldie's sarcasm. "We have to do what we must to get Jordon to talk because you know as well as me he holds the key to this bullshit. Hell, it all started with him. Besides, it's not like you haven't already let Jordon do you. Have you already forgotten our little assignment with Jordon in the first place? You told me to take one for the team. I did. Now, it's your turn to do your part. You need to get Jordon to open up, and if that means bending over and taking it up the butt while you sing cock-a-doodle-do, so be it."

"I thought Foresight was the biggest ass in the department."

Breed looked his partner up and down. "What has gotten into you? You usually don't fight so dirty."

Aldie sighed, slammed his fingers through his hair, clearly disgruntled. "Dereliction of duty is not a miniscule offense. Wheatland will try to burn me on this. I don't need this shit."

"I will handle Wheatland. Don't worry about him."

"Fuck, this is bullshit."

"Yeah, and we're knee-deep in it, so stop whining," Breed said.

Cox sauntered closer and overheard their exchange. "You two having a lovers' spat?" He grinned, chuckling. He switched the toothpick in his mouth from left to right, pressing his thick lips on the stick, and started chewing.

"You want me to put my foot up your fat ass? Don't keep pushing me, Cox." Breed fumed.

"He is an asshole, man. Cox isn't worth the time or energy." Aldie tried to move Breed forward, but he didn't budge.

More officers started to pay attention, listening, moving forward, seeing the tension build between Cox and Breed. This wasn't the first time Breed and Cox had words. The last time it didn't end so good for Cox.

"Let it go, Uonaidas," another officer said. "We all know Cox can be a first-rate jerk."

"Yeah, love you too, Dickerson," Cox shot back. He switched the toothpick to the other side of his mouth. He snickered. "People just keep dying on your case, Uonaidas. Now, I know you fathom yourself a

maverick, but this doesn't look good for you. What, you can't keep your partner under control?"

"Get lost, Cox." Breed tried to leave, but Cox wasn't having it.

Cox kept jabbing at Breed, taunting him.

"Come on, Cox. Let up," Dickerson said.

"What's your problem, Cox? Let's just get it out in the open so you can finally put this bullshit to rest. Go ahead, get it off your chest." Breed folded his arms over his chest, waiting.

"Don't waste time, Breed. He's not worth it," Aldie said.

"Maybe for once you should listen to what your partner has to say. Things could get ugly. Do you *really* want everybody to know why you got promoted in a year?" Cox asked.

Breed's eyes turned to slits, darkening. "I was promoted because I'm good like that."

Cox scoffed, boasting. "Good at what is the question."

"My...job," Breed grit.

"Breed, this isn't going good. Fuck him," Aldie said.

Cox turned attention to Aldie. "Do you mean that literally?" He chortled, causing his gut to bounce up and down. "Uonaidas ain't my type. Cocksucker."

A few men standing nearby start snickering, but most of the other officers milling around watching the exchange gave Cox hell. They suspected about Breed's dual-dabbling, but in the larger scheme of things, he was a damn good agent, and as far as they were concerned, what he did after hours didn't matter. There wasn't one man standing around who would refuse to have Breed watching his back when things got ugly.

"What did you say?" Breed hissed lowly.

"I think I called you a cocksucker," Cox repeated, puffing out the flab of his chest.

"Shit!" Aldie said, seeing Breed move fast on Cox.

Within a second, Breed had Cox bending his fat ass over the desk and his stunner pressed into his temple.

"Y-you fucking lunatic!" Cox stammered.

"Yeah, maybe I am."

"Come on, Uonaidas, it's bullshit to pull your weapon on a fellow officer," Dickerson said. "Let him go."

"He isn't worth it," Aldie said, grabbing Breed's arm.

Breed hesitated an uncomfortable minute.

The uneasy feeling in the room escalated and hung thick like a cloak.

Cox was sweating, the adrenaline rushing through him made a funk seep into the air.

Breed released his weapon and put it away. "Stay out of my way, Cox, or the next time your ass is mine." Breed stormed from the room.

"Your partner is crazy. Unhinged!" Cox shouted, wiping the sweat pouring down his face.

\* \* \* \*

Aldie caught up to Breed when he was halfway down the front steps of headquarters.

"You want to tell me what the fuck just happened back there?"

"Cox is an asshole."

"Yeah, well, we all know that. You pulled your gun on a fellow agent, Breed. That is an offense, and you know it."

Breed eyed Aldie. "So fucking turn me in," he said, continuing down the steps. He stopped at his cruiser and waited on Aldie, who was standing, staring at him. "You coming or what?" he barked.

"I can't believe you are letting Cox get to you," Aldie said, getting into the passenger seat. "You know he is a butthead, but you're letting him get under your skin. That isn't like you. What gives?"

Breed engaged the vessel and steered into the street refusing to answer Aldie's question. "You going to talk to Jordon or what?"

"What do you think? Of course I will talk to him. I'm on this case, too, remember? I want to know what is going on as much as you. Where is he?"

"He's staying at a friend of mine's place. I will call and let them know you will come by later." Breed intentionally didn't give Aldie Monty's name. He wanted to make sure he let Monty know he might have a visitor first. On second thought, he wouldn't allow Aldie to visit Jordon alone. He and Monty had met on a few occasions. Monty hadn't said as much, but he knew there was no love lost between the two.

He changed the subject. "I talked to Jordon earlier, and the senator already knew about Jordon's sexual preference. That video wouldn't set

Senator Sparks after his son, so I'm convinced there is more to their lovehate relationship. Jordon might be possibly blackmailing his father. That is an assumption, but Jordon wouldn't validate my suspicion."

"That doesn't change the facts. Actually, it gives the senator more of a motive to go after Jordon. You know, to silence him."

"We're on the same page. I was thinking the very same thing. We just need confirmation before we can haul the senator in for attempted murder. What it doesn't answer is who murdered Coleson and the perp back at the station. Or who ordered the attempted hit on me, if that's what it was. The more I think about that day, something the tail said keeps coming back to haunt me. He said things aren't what they seem. The man never pulled a weapon on me, either. Didn't even try. After he died, the attackers ran off. That means I was never the target in the first place."

"You never mentioned that before."

"I just thought about it." Breed scanned the area a minute before turning back to his partner.

Aldie asked, "You think the tail knew something about the internal hit and wanted to tell you something?"

Breed shrugged. "I keep wondering, but that's all I can do right now. We don't have squat else." He was still toying with the idea of telling Aldie about the meeting stream he received, but he hadn't figured out what it was about. He remained silent. "What about your little redhead in security?"

"What about her?" Aldie asked, and then it clicked. He started shaking his head no. "I thought about that angle too, but she's a level above an administrator. Even if she had access to tamper with security files, she wouldn't know what to do with them. Talented"—he grinned—"nowhere near technical, if you know what I mean. I will ask her to keep her ears and eyes open."

"Yeah, maybe we can catch a break since we can't figure out shit else. The entire case is screwy. Something is not sinking, but I can't put my finger on the matter. That chaps my ass," Breed said.

Breed sat silently, as did Aldie, each emerged in his own personal thoughts as cruisers moved steadily by. The hour was late, but even at this time there seemed to be more than the usual amount of vessels on the ultra freeway. Several times cruisers hovered, waiting, as lines of passenger vehicles shot by before Breed could cross the lanes and exit onto the byway.

He needed to think. He and Aldie needed to talk. Breed decided to take the long way out of the city to give them more time to discuss the case.

The outline of the metropolis with its buildings, towering skyscrapers, and maze of traffic faded into the backdrop as he made his way to the outskirts of the city and into the suburbs.

Breed concentrated on the change of landscape as metal towers gave way to the urban flair of buildings that were smaller, more colorful, and filled with people walking about, visiting the trendy shops. Everybody cruising. Nobody seemed in any particular hurry. The setting was more serene, laid back, and had a calming effect on Breed. He finally forgot about the altercation with Cox. Not that he was worried about Captain Foresight making an issue out of it. The fact he let the bastard get under his skin bothered him more.

Breed interrupted their lapse into silence. He said, "I scanned all the information we have so far into the case board. I added some things manually and even put in a few assumptions just to see what happened. The senator and Jordon got an immediate connection, but Coleson is the lone ranger. The perp's name didn't connect to the senator or Jordon, but he was linked to Coleson because they were both in the agency. The perp was DEA." He glanced at Aldie. "Did you know that?"

"No, maybe he started after I left. He didn't look familiar, and when I questioned him about his identity, he clammed up on me. It's funny, but I ran his prints, and nothing came up. He was clean. Not even a record that he was an agent."

"He could have had latex over his fingerprints," Breed said.

"That would mean he was pretty high up in the agency."

"Yes, that, or working for someone who is. You know if the agency wants us to be ghost, they can do it. New prints, identification, everything about an agent can be falsified if needed. If they want, we can die and be resurrected, if necessary."

Aldie nodded, but didn't respond.

"I want to talk about the other night with Pepper. That was the first and last time."

"What happened? I thought we got along nicely?"

Breed stopped suddenly when a vessel failed to come to a complete stop and made an abrupt right-hand turn in front of him. He sent a warning to the cruiser's internal controls and then continued down the street. "Pepper doesn't feel comfortable about anything happening between us again."

"I'm not surprised."

Breed lifted an eyebrow questioningly. "Why not?"

"She's in love with you. You do know that, don't you?"

"I figured it out that night. I wish she had told me before we all had sex together. Women talk a lot until they need to, and then you can't get a peep out of them."

"You don't actually make someone feel comfortable sharing their emotions. It's difficult to tell where you're coming from, Breed. Pepper was probably leery of rejection if she confessed her true feelings for you."

"I like to think I'm transparent."

"You are, and it's scary as hell," Aldie said.

The rolling hills and well-manicured lawns of a neighborhood came into sight. A few kids playing in a front yard caught Breed's attention. He watched the innocence a second and then turned his attention back to Aldie.

"It's over between us," Breed said.

"Not surprised. I knew it was coming. Do you love Pepper?"

"I'm very fond of her. She is great, and I feel the connection between us is stronger than in any other relationship I've been in with a female. I can't really say I love her, not in the sense I'm ready to confess my undying affection or anything like that. She's special to me, though."

"What about us?"

Breed wasn't sure what Aldie was asking. He already made it clear their relationship had ended. He started to ask Aldie to elaborate on his question, but considered it a waste of time. Aldie was a big boy. "I'm going to ask for a new partner. All on me, of course, and I will wait until we finish the case."

"Fine," Aldie mumbled.

He knew Aldie wasn't happy with his decision, but in the scheme of things, he didn't have a choice. Monty was right. They never should have gotten involved in the first place. When Aldie was assigned as his partner, Breed was at what he considered a dark place. Waverly's death really screwed him up more than he admitted. He couldn't lose himself in liquor, drugs, or anything else that would get him kicked off the force. He wasn't into any of that stuff anyway, not to the point it was addictive. Aldie offered solace—a major distraction—and, thinking with his little head, he went for

it. The attraction to Aldie was superficial. His partner was hot and exceptional in bed. A little pushy, but that was cool at the time. He needed to keep his mind off Waverly, so he didn't have a problem staying indifferent and detached and focused on screwing Aldie. There wasn't going to be anything serious between them. He made that clear from the beginning. Sometimes people didn't listen to what they didn't want to hear.

Aldie changed the subject, and Breed thought it was a good move. What really else was there to say about them?

Aldie asked, "What's the beef between you and Cox?"

"I banged his son," Breed muttered. The incident still left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"What happened?"

"I try to forget about that night, so I will give you the short version. I royally fucked up. I made a big mistake."

Aldie grinned. "What did you do, slip and accidentally put your cock in Cox's son's ass? Yeah, right."

"Screw you. No. Not that this is an excuse, but I was young, drunk, and horny. It was when I first moved to Carpathia and joined the force. I attended one of the agency's boring affairs. After having enough of listening to the bullshit of the pretentious pricks inside, I decided to step out on the balcony for some air. The guy followed me. We started a conversation. Things were going well; he was tossing out all types of signals. You know how it is. Cox's son wasn't subtle. He made it clear what he was interested in doing. In fact, he was the aggressor. Even though I tried to play dumb, Cox's son was persistent. Not to mention hot. Did I mention that?"

"No, but I assumed as much. You like a pretty face, male or female."

"'Cause Cox's son kept wanting it, I decided to give it to him. Actually, the thought of getting a blow grew on me the more I talked to the man. When we walked to the parking garage and got in his cruiser, I assumed he would suck me off. I would return the favor, and then go home and sleep it off. I was pretty buzzed. But, Cox's son had other ideas. He did go down on me, and was damned good, I might add. When I went to do him, he made it clear he wasn't interested in me putting my mouth on him."

"Don't tell me Cox found the two of you screwing each other? Jesus, this is classic," Aldie said, grinning.

"Actually Cox found me doing his son. I was so into banging the man...He was very vocal. The next thing I knew, the door was thrown open, and Cox went ballistic."

"Can't say that I can blame him. Must have been something seeing his son get hammered. I probably would have lost it too."

"He exploded, to put it mildly. I'm not sure what all he said, but there was a lot of 'motherfucker,' 'bastard'...words like that. Anyway, it was too late. When Cox opened the door, his son was in the middle of losing it. I was close to climaxing myself, so all I could do when Cox jerked me by the collar and pulled me out of the car was ejaculate. I think I came all over his shoes."

"Classic," Aldie repeated, laughing. "No wonder Cox hates your guts."

"I'm not proud of what happened. In fact, every time I think about it, my stomach burns. I was profusely apologetic to Cox, but you can see he isn't the forgiving type. I was twenty-five. His son just turned eighteen. I thought he was older, but didn't bother to ask."

Aldie gave a low whistle. "At least he was legal. Otherwise, you could have been in hot water."

"I would have been thrown off the force and charges brought against me for statutory rape of a minor. Cox tried to push that issue, but since his son was legally eighteen—had I touched him five minutes earlier he'd have still been jailbait—but, based on the time it was past midnight. Thank the Immaculate Providence."

"You didn't rape Cox's son. It takes two to tango."

Breed remained silent, then switched the topic. "How do you want to play Jordon?"

"You were going to pimp me, remember?"

He knew Aldie was being sarcastic, but there was no vinegar in his tone, so he let it go. He expected Aldie to be bitter about getting dumped. Pepper was right. His partner tried to hide it, but Breed could see Aldie was having a hard time with his decision to make a clean cut. Aldie wouldn't voice his protest. He wanted to, Breed could tell. Aldie would let it go, though, because he knew once he made a decision, it was final.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

If Aldie still simmered about being dumped, it was hard to tell. As soon as they stepped over the threshold of the room where Jordon waited, he turned on the charm. He chatted up Jordon real quick and silky smooth. A chameleon, he morphed comfortably into another character.

It didn't take long for Jordon to warm up to the attention Aldie poured on him. The senator's son acted like a child starved to be noticed by a parent who treated him with indifference for too long. Jordon lapped up Aldie's sudden interest in him like a thirsty dog. Within minutes, he sat beside Aldie on the couch, seemingly enthralled and excited to hear whatever bullshit Aldie fed him.

Had Jordon forgotten Aldie was an agent? Breed considered it even though he thought it highly unlikely. How do you forget something like that? Either Jordon didn't remember, or care, or was desperate for any recognition he received. When a person is used to being invisible, in the dark, and somebody brings them into the light, Breed supposed attention was attention. Right, wrong, or indifferent, Jordon was hungry for someone to show him some consideration, and Aldie conveniently fit the bill, it seemed.

A threesome was a crowd. He left his partner alone with Jordon and went to seek Monty out. He wanted to discuss the case and was eager to see Monty again.

Before he could knock, Monty called out for him to enter. That damn sense thing of Monty's spooked him sometimes. Not that he had anything to hide, but he felt like Monty reading his emotions was too damn close to looking into his soul.

When he walked into the office, Monty was sitting at his desk looking at the visual screen, entranced in what he read. His brows furrowed in deep concentration that left wrinkles in his forehead. After a minute he finally looked up. "Three is a crowd?"

"Something like that. Apparently, I'm not as charming as Aldie." Breed smirked. He walked over and sat on the side of the desk. He folded his arms over his chest and looked at Monty. "What's going on? You don't look too happy about something."

Monty waved his hand dismissively. "Nothing, really. What's going on between you and Aldie?"

"What makes you think something is wrong?"

Monty typed something and then pushed back from the desk. He twirled around in the chair, rested back, and settled his eyes on Breed. "Your auras are off. There is tension between the two of you? Whatever happened made Aldie upset."

"I just dumped him."

"Ah, then that would explain why he is pissed. You hurt his feelings too."

"Aldie is a big boy. He will get over it," Breed said. He sat down in the chair across from Monty, rested his elbows on the desk, and stared at his friend. He got the impression Monty wanted to say more about him and Aldie, but he didn't.

Breed was happy to let the topic drop.

Monty said, "Hey, I have something that might interest you. He leaned forward and began to type over the keypad, searching through files, and then turned the screen in Breed's direction.

Breed scanned the first few lines on the screen before facing Monty again. A wide grin crossed his face. "Your friend in records finally came through, huh? You got your hands on Jordon's medical files. Good man. It would have taken me forever to get this information. Trying to access government data is harder then breaking into the Sanguine National Fort. Even tighter when the bureaucrats are trying to keep things secret. Especially if the data involves something they need to cover their ass for. I appreciate you."

"What are friends for?"

He maneuvered around to the side of the desk where Monty sat. His eyesight was better then most, and he could have read the files from the small distance away where the monitor sat in front of him, but he moved anyway to stand beside Monty.

He scanned the information quickly and absorbed it. Causally, he said over his shoulder. "Friends don't stare at friends' asses." He glanced at Monty, catching him ogling his butt. He said, amused, "I don't mind. I look at your ass every opportunity I get."

Breed finished reading the contents. Resting his hip on the desk, he faced Monty. "I'm not surprised Jordon spent some time in the institution, but how much is shocking. From his records he stayed in the psych ward more than he did elementary school."

"I took the liberty at looking over the file. Most of the information is missing because Jordon was a juvenile, and the courts usually seal any records before the age of eighteen. From what I can tell, Jordon was eight or younger when he first went in. Admitted first for his 'weird behavior,' as his parents reported."

"That could mean anything, but what interests me is what brought on this 'weird behavior' in the first place. It says Jordon had an imaginary friend that he talked to."

Monty lifted a shoulder, shrugging. "The parents could have been overreacting to common childhood behavior. Sometimes kids, especially one that feels isolated, can create a 'play buddy' just to have somebody to talk to. Maybe Jordon didn't have any friends. Children do pretend things, Breed."

"I agree, but what bothers me is that the doctor made a note about Jordon hearing voices. That usually is a clinical term to mean he might have been delusional, schizophrenic, or maybe he was suffering from adolescent disorder. Either option gives me the willies. And furthers my belief I'm dealing with a head case."

"True." Monty reached and tapped the screen. He dragged his finger over the monitor, scrolling the pages to the right, and then stopped. He motioned toward the display. "Based on this, your assumption is probably correct."

Breed read the information. He sat back and stared at Monty. "Jordon tried to kill his father when he was twelve? What the hell? I wonder how this escaped the vetting process when Senator Sparks was considered for election. Normally, a thorough investigation is done into the person's family members. Hell, even the family's pet is scrutinized before the government is

allowed to let anyone run for office. This"—he pointed to the screen—"is not something someone is likely to overlook."

Monty folded his arms in front of him and rocked back in the chair. "Come on, Breed, you know the government will/can ignore what they want to. Besides, from what I read, it's purely speculation. If you read further down the page, you will see neither Senator Sparks or Jordon admitted to what happened that night. It only said security found Jordon in his father's office with a knife in his hand, blood splatter on his chest, and the senator barricaded in a private bathroom. The senator refused medical attention, and Jordon didn't have a mark on him. Nothing else was documented. After the episode Jordon disappeared for a long time."

Breed knew Monty had read the entire file, so he already knew the details. He would read the file line by line later, but in the meantime he tossed questions at Monty. He trusted his memory, judgment, and to give it to him straight. Monty was a good person to use as a sounding board. That, and he simply enjoyed the husky appeal of his friend's voice.

Monty spoke, and it brought Breed back to reality. "I just encrypted and downloaded the entire file to your IIM for you to review later at your leisure."

"I will, but I've read enough to know I never should have let you talk me out of moving Jordon from here. He's whacko."

"Unless I become a threat to Jordon, I doubt he will try anything with me. I'm not concerned."

"But you will keep your guard up anyway. I should just get him out of here," Breed said, clearly uncomfortable with giving in to Monty's protest.

"Right now, nobody can associate Jordon, you, or me, so they haven't figured out where Jordon is staying. That means he is safe. You also get access to him whenever you want. If you move him, and he gets put under protective custody, it ties your hands and your access to Jordon."

"You make a valid argument."

Monty grinned. He said, "I'm a lawyer, remember. It's what I get paid to do."

"And you're very good at it." Breed stood up, stretched, lifted his arms above his head, and rolled his neck until it popped. He gave Monty a sideway look. "Maybe I should stay and babysit Jordon to ensure you are safe?"

"Wouldn't that mean you'd actually be babysitting me? It's not necessary, Breed. If I were concerned about Jordon, I would have never offered to let you bring him here. I can take care of myself."

"I know you kicked my butt enough times when we had sparring matches in school. You were a damned good wrestler, kickboxer, and every sport you always managed to get the upper hand on me. I always ended up on the bottom in any physical competition between us. How come I'm the agent, though, and you have a nice desk job? I would have thought you'd be interested in a career that required you to be more physical."

"You didn't have the weight or was buffed like you are now, and we both know you ended up beneath me because that's what you wanted."

Breed did his wink thing. "I thought I was being sneaky." Monty laughed, showing perfectly white teeth, giving his signature Hollywood smile that made Breed's heart constrict and heat simmer between his thighs. "So, you knew since we were young I had a thing for you?"

"I knew you got a hard-on every time I touched you."

"Hell, if I knew you were aware, I'd have made a move on you sooner."

Monty intentionally changed the subject. "What else is happening about the case?"

"The other night, when I had to leave abruptly, it was because a perp Aldie brought into custody ended up like Coleson. He used the exact same method of operation, one to the head and two in the chest. Somebody killed the man right there in the interrogation room."

"You're kidding me, right? What the hell happened?"

"Aldie screwed up and left the guy alone. Somebody got to him."

"Aldie knows better than that. Hell, I know you're not supposed to leave a suspect alone for one minute. I can't even talk to a client in confinement without eyes and ears around."

"He said he thought a rookie was looking after him. He didn't realize the guy left the perp alone until he returned and found the suspect dead. In Aldie's defense, I can see how he fucked up. Can't excuse it, but I understand. The IOA and Captain Foresight are all over it. The captain blew a gasket, and I think he threatened our jobs. You can't be too sure with the captain. He's new to the department, and I haven't figured out how much he blows off steam and what is clearly a warning. Wheatland is serious, though.

The prick has been looking for a reason to nail me and/or Aldie to the wall for years."

"I run into Wheatland on occasion in court. The man is wound a bit too tight in my estimation."

"He's a prick," Breed said. He walked to the console and poured himself a drink. He motioned to Monty, asking if he wanted one, but his friend declined.

A moment passed in silence as Breed sipped his drink.

"How is Pepper?"

The inquiry caught Breed off guard because Monty had never brought up his girl before. "She's great. Why?"

"It was just a question, Breed. No need to interrogate me for a deeper meaning."

"I'm a cop. It's innate. You are a lawyer, and sometimes you act like one whether you realize it or not. You ask questions for a reason. I haven't known you to simply chitchat before." There was a hint of accusation in his tone. Breed knew Monty noticed it. His friend diverted his eyes and gazed off into the room, studying nothing. He could have cut Monty some slack, but he didn't. "Why the sudden interest in Pepper? If you want to know about our relationship, you can ask. Does it have anything to do with the other night? You have regret?"

Monty waved his hand, dismissing Breed's last question. "I started thinking about your interest in multiple partners, extracurricular activities, as you say. Where do I fit in?"

"Aldie and I are finished. I mentioned that earlier, remember? If you are asking if I intend to end it with Pepper, the answer is no. She is special to me. We are friends and lovers, and I don't intend stop seeing her."

"I can always count on you to be honest. I appreciate that."

Breed eyed Monty perceptively, trying to measure his feelings about what he said. Monty might as well have been in the courtroom. His manner was solid, unreadable. He scratched his head and then raked his fingers through the strands of hair. "I'm a little baffled here. Does my relationship with Pepper bother you? If so, why? What's going on in your head, Monty?"

He stretched his long legs out in front of him and crossed them at the ankles. He folded his arms behind his head and studied Breed for a long minute before he answered. "I had a session with my therapist because I

needed to work some things out in my head. Yes, I wanted her to convince me I'm not bisexual even though I had oral sex with a man."

"Technically I performed on you, so it's not the same thing. But, let's not quibble over the dynamics of how things played out that night. I'm damned curious what your therapist said."

"Just because I crossed the line of my fantasy into actually taking action doesn't mean anything. She said I wanted to appease my curiosity and nothing more. That doesn't mean I'm into men."

Breed frowned. "Bullshit."

"Why can't you accept that might be the truth?"

"Why do you keep lying to yourself? Monty, you enjoyed the other night as much as me. I know because you came in my mouth. If I hadn't been called away, things would have gone further. If what I say is not true, then call me a liar. Can you do that?"

Monty said, "Now I know why people get irritated about my tenacity. I can see how it would get under someone's skin when someone won't take no for an answer."

"You haven't said no yet. If you do, no means no."

"Can you cut me some slack? I admit to being confused about us. I confess I enjoyed what happened the other night. That doesn't mean it isn't screwing with my head, Breed. I like women. What do you want me to say? You have my head twisted. Every male in my family is a hundred percent heterosexual. All my brothers' marriages are monogamous even though by law they can take as many wives as they want."

"You're not your brothers. You're just bi. That doesn't make you a horrible person, weird, or freakish. It's not the end of the world, either. Relax."

"I'm not sure I'm interested in a marriage orgy. Where is the sense of commitment? I guess that is what bothers me the most. This harmonious electi thing you keep mentioning."

Breed watched as Monty walked over to the balcony, his favorite place, where he knew his friend liked to stand and reflect while he viewed the serenity of the clear purple sky, silvery moons, and twinkling stars. He assumed the scene and fresh air cleared Monty's head. He joined him. "Just because people have monogamous marriages doesn't mean there is any

more commitment than a multi-partner arrangement. Trust me, I've been with enough married women *and* men to know this."

Slowly, very slowly, Breed moved his hand around Monty's waist, pulled him back against his frame, infusing the heat of their bodies. He bent his head and kissed the sensitive area at his nape. "Our relationship will be what we want it to be, Monty. I do want you. But, I also like females, and if I find the perfect partners, it's the best of both worlds for me," Breed murmured, whisper-soft, over Monty's neckline as he slipped a hand under the hem of and up his shirt.

\* \* \* \*

The sheer madness of his feelings for Breed surprised him. The burning intensity in his groin was singular to Breed. No other man made him feel this way. When he turned in his arms and gazed into his intensely sensual eyes, the desire he saw in Breed ignited a rush of something primal inside. Breed held him in a lover's embrace. The contact was intimate, but it was the way he looked at him that made his reservations dissolve. His stare as intimate as contact—sans clothing—Monty felt the heated gaze strip him bare, and he felt exposed.

War and peace forged a battle inside Monty's mind as he struggled with doubt. Breed ignited pure madness, an intense craving that left him simmering with lust. The urge to satisfy the yearning to explore the unknown of male seduction firsthand haunted him daily. Honestly, he was growing weary of fighting against the possibility that he might be bisexual. He was into Breed. How much clearer could his feelings be? Why continue to fight it?

He didn't intend to continue to struggle with uncertainty he forced on himself. It only made him more confused and provided no answers. The stark truth of the matter was that Breed drove this insane need for man-to-man attention. To date, his endless inquiries that he pondered nightly resulted in more unanswered questions. Stressing over matters when he lay in bed with his hand on his cock and images of Breed burned in his brain, he didn't get any further in solving his conflicted conscience. He got off thinking about being with Breed. That was a plus. Otherwise, he found himself right back where it all started by daylight.

"Don't overthink your emotions. It resolves nothing. Just go with what feels right," Breed said, slipping his hand into the waistband of his slacks.

Large, powerful hands kneaded his butt cheeks. Another hand reached around and grasped his cock.

Think. Think. How the hell was he supposed to do that feeling the warmth of fingers caress over his erection? He held the air in his lungs, waiting, and exhaled in a rush when Breed's fingers squeezed and started a wicked undulation, back and forth, and pumped his cock. Maddeningly slow, leisurely stroking his penis until it thickened, elongated, and felt ripe enough to burst.

"You want me, and I have to have you, Monty," Breed said, the tone of his voice low, husky. "Tell me I'm wrong."

He hadn't a coherent thought, let alone the ability to refute Breed's statement. "I can't." Was his voice trembling?

"That's a good thing. So, does this mean you are going to quit this catand-mouse thing—toying? I believe you enjoy taunting me. Maybe not, but just so you know, I like to be the predator."

Monty groaned inwardly at the thought of raw masculinity bringing him down and having him succumb to what Breed wanted. He exuded virility, a primal allure that charged him sexually and magnified the potent attraction to him.

"I thought you weren't going to sweat me?"

Breed's eyes twinkled with mischief. "I lie sometimes. Especially when I intend to get my way. That, and I'm a predator, remember? We like to strike without warning—"

Every nerve ending inside Monty spiked when Breed suddenly dropped to his knees, pulled his pants down, enclosed his moist, thick lips over his cock, and sucked. His tongue licked, nipped, and touched him where he knew it felt the most pleasurable. He mapped his penis with his tongue, laved the flaring head, and flicked the heavy crown before engulfing the entire length of his penis into his mouth.

His earlier misgivings evaporated and slipped away like a whisper in the wind. His mouth was amazing. He was incredible. The sheer pleasure of his lips on his cock made every thought nonexistent as he lost himself in the mounting passion.

Monty gripped the balcony railing, tossed back his head, and struggled to fill his lungs with air. A guttural sound escaped, an animalistic growl tore from his mouth when Breed eased a finger between and up inside his ass. He massaged his male G-spot, increased the pressure of his mouth, and sent him into an abyss of mind-numbing bliss.

"Damn, Breed." He panted, gulping in air. He twisted his fingers in his air, jut his hips, and buried the length of his cock in Breed's succulent mouth. He came unglued, erupted, spilling his cum freely until he felt drained.

Breed came to his feet. He had a satisfied grin on his face as he pulled up Monty's pants. Monty felt bedazzled watching him. He concentrated on his hands as they busily adjusted his clothing, recounting how those magical fingers felt all over him.

Breed used the tip of his finger to close his mouth that had dropped open. He sealed his lips over his and kissed him hard. Then he stepped back, crossed his arms over his chest, and waited as if he knew he was still struggling to regain his composure.

"Th-that was the best."

He actually winked this time. "I know. I'm good like that. Just wait until you let me sex that great body of yours up."

"You know, you continuously say you aren't going to sweat me, but I get the sneaky suspicion you do every opportunity you get."

Breed pretended innocence. "What I do is take advantage of that lovely body every time you allow me to. You refuse to admit it, but you want me bad."

Monty grinned. "God, you're arrogant."

"I know," he said, snaked his arm around his waist. He jerked him forward until their bodies were molded together, chest-to-chest, and their cocks made contact. "You love it, though, baby." He kissed him again, slanting his mouth over his for a quick beat before releasing him. He patted his butt. "I have to go. Aldie should be finished with Jordon and is probably wondering what I'm doing."

"I will walk you out."

"It's not necessary. We'll talk later. Have a nice evening, Monty."

He followed him as he walked to the door and disappeared. He continued to stare for a long minute at where Breed had stood. Then a wry

smile surfaced when a revelation sprang to the forefront of his brain. He almost laughed with the thought. Breed was sweating him, and each time they encountered each other, he turned up the temperature to sweltering. He, the master seducer, was being effectively seduced as easy as a virgin.

He wanted Breed. There was no sense in denying the truth any longer. He wanted his attention, body, and what he offered for a long time—forbidden desire that only a man could provide.

Breed was right, his therapist dead wrong. He was bisexual.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

Breed almost didn't take the call when he heard his interlink bleep. He'd been awake most of the night, energized by shots of espresso and adrenaline, hours and hours had passed by. He was beginning to look dazed.

The puzzles of the case weren't coming together. Nothing made sense. When things didn't wash with him, he didn't sleep much, which meant he was running on fumes. He glanced at the clock on the wall. The sun was setting, and like a hyped junkie, he was wide awake, going on twenty-four hours now.

The situation with Monty was constant on his mind, and that didn't help matters. When his full concentration should have been on solving the case, his thoughts often got distracted.

The constant alert of an incoming call made Breed check his IIM for the loc-tag ID. He saw Pepper's number and immediately answered.

Pepper was in the neighborhood, so he told her to come on over. As soon as he saw her, he was glad she dropped by, but as the time passed, he had reservations about having company. He knew his mood was withdrawn, bordered on pissy, wasn't conducive to being good company. The sudden onslaught of fatigue accelerated his solemn manner. He hoped being with Pepper lightened his mood.

He relaxed back against Pepper's slippery, damp breast and closed his eyes. He stretched his legs out, let his head fall back into the fold of her cleavage. The movement made the still water move like a wave, bubbles popped, hot water sloshed against his body.

Pepper ran her sudsy fingers back and forth along the length of his arms, down his back, massaging the hot, soapy water infused with oil over his body, making it feel satiny. She stopped and encircled his chest, caressing

his nipples, and ran her hands up and over the muscles in his neck before gently kneading the tension out of his shoulders.

Her fingers dipped beneath the water surface, circled his waist, slid farther down until she cupped his cock. She glided over the length. Breed caught her hand to stop her.

"I just want to relax," he said. He raised her hand and kissed each wet finger before laying it against his heartbeat. "How does that sound?" He meshed their bodies, chest to her breasts, his butt nestled against her pelvis, and shut his eyes.

"You want to talk about whatever is bothering you?"

"Nope."

"You seem distant tonight. What's up?"

"Pepper, I prefer not to talk right now. Do you mind?"

"Yes, I kind of do. I came by because I needed to talk about what happened today. Bounce some things off you, you know. We can talk about whatever is on your mind first."

Breed patted her hand. "Not right now, okay? Let's just sit here and enjoy the moment."

"I really need for you to be open to some communication."

Breed inhaled and then slowly released the air from his lungs. "Can whatever you have to say wait?"

"I already waited, Breed. I wanted to start in on what is bothering me as soon as I walked through the door, but I got the sense you weren't in the mood."

"Not to be crass, but I'm still not in the mood. I just need a minute."

"Fine, but remember it's not always about what you want."

He heard the terseness in her tone, but decided to ignore it. The last thing he wanted right now was to argue with Pepper. He wanted to bathe, relax, fuck again, and then fall asleep. There was time to talk in the morning, as far as he was concerned.

Pepper had other ideas, because she wouldn't let up. "Sometimes I feel like our relationship is always about your needs. What about me, Breed?"

"I took care of your needs an hour ago, didn't I?"

"It's not always about sex, you know. I don't complain, pout, whine, or give you a hard time when you disconnect emotionally, which, by the way, is a lot lately. I just go with the flow. That doesn't mean I'm okay with it all

the time. Especially when I need you to listen to me. Talk to me. Allow me inside whatever is going on in your head. Sometimes I need to feel there is a connection between us that exists outside the bed."

"I hear you, but honestly I don't have the temperament to handle any relationship drama."

He felt her stiffen. He realized his comment was crass, but he didn't apologize.

"You think wanting you to listen to my fucked-up day is drama? That is selfish, Breed, and a terrible thing to say."

"I told you when you called I was in a funk. That hasn't changed since you arrived."

Pepper shoved a fist into his back. "That's a mean thing to say to me. You are an insensitive jerk, you know. Maybe I shouldn't have come by."

"Maybe not," Breed said dryly.

"Are you saying you want me to leave?"

"No, but I don't want to get into a disagreement about my emotionally dysfunctional trait—your term, not mine—my inability to communicate and connect to your emotional needs on cue. Is that a fair assessment?"

She pushed him away and tried to leave the tub. He caught her arm. She struggled from his grasp. Finally, he let her go. Maybe it was best under the circumstances. He'd rather allow her to leave now before things turned ugly. The path they were heading down was a familiar one. A rocky road that sapped all his energy and was bound to put him in more of a dark mood. The same argument—her accusation was he was emotionally detached—surfaced occasionally. Normally, he would entertain what he called an immature temper tantrum she had periodically to get her way. Tonight he wasn't in the mindset to placate her. Not that he thought the way he felt was right. It was just safer to let Pepper go before she said, he said, something they would both regret later.

"Forget it. God, you are a jerk," Pepper said.

"Just so I'm clear, is that all the time, or when I don't agree with you? When I'm fucking you, what am I then? Asshole? Jerk? Detached?"

"Screw you!"

Her outburst was a surprise. Pepper was normally more controlled, calm. She wasn't given to hysterics.

Breed stood up and stepped from the tub. He stood toe-to-toe with Pepper. Gently, he captured her face between his hands, rubbed his thumbs over her cheeks. He felt the moisture on his fingertips. Something inside his stomach dropped to his knees. Pepper never cried. She gave as good as she got. Something was wrong.

"I apologize," he said quietly. He kissed her so tenderly and sweetly, his way of saying "I'm sorry a thousand times." "What's going on? Talk to me."

Pepper moved his hands away. She glared at him. "Oh, so now you want to talk. Forget it," she snapped.

Breed slapped his palm against his forehead. "Women...I swear. First you want me to open up and talk, for us to share, and now you don't. Does that sound logical to you?"

She slammed her hands to her hips. "It's my prerogative."

"It's bullshit." Breed grabbed a towel and dried off. He tossed the cloth to the floor. He left her standing there and went into the bedroom.

It wasn't over. Pepper never gave up a fight so easily.

He sat on the edge of the bed, lounged backwards, put his arms behind him, locked his elbows, and waited.

She hadn't bothered to dry off, and suds clung to her breast like frothy cream on the top of a steamy cup of coffee. Droplets of water rolled down between her breasts, over her flaring hips, and pooled at her feet. She looked delicious. He felt his cock react even though the scathing look she gave him should have shriveled his gonads.

He acted blasé, as if the alluring sight didn't send a heat wave coursing through his body. "You ready to talk now? Come...here." She was defiant as hell and remained glued in place. "You want me to come and get you, baby?"

"If you come anywhere near me, I will kick your ass."

An amused smile curved Breed's mouth. He felt the heaviness swaying between his thighs as he moved toward his woman. He stopped directly in front of her, close, but stopped short of touching her. He wanted to run his fingertips along her breasts, outline her pouty lips, but forced himself not to. She always said he thought sex was the answer to every argument, and he wasn't about to validate her claim. "I don't want to fight, baby. What's going on?"

"I had a fucked-up day and..." Her voice faltered as a wave of emotions overwhelmed her. She looked up, and Breed saw tears pool in her eyes. She blinked, and one slid down her cheek. She slapped it away with her hand.

"Why are you crying?" he said softly.

"I do that sometimes, but you wouldn't know that. I'm upset."

He saw the strain in her features. It bothered him. He caressed her cheek with his fingertips, wiping away the tears that fell. He tilted up her chin, forcing her to meet his gaze. "What the hell happened?"

"Never mind. It's not important," she mumbled.

"I'm going to give you a little insight. Men tend to see and hear things in black and white, no gray. We can't/don't read between the lines if you hide what you are trying to say in too many words. We are not good at reading signals or hints, so whatever you want us to know gets lost by the time we try to translate any of that stuff. Men have short attention spans. It's best to be blunt, or we miss what you are telling us. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, and that would explain why you miss it a lot."

Breed grinned. He pulled her against his chest. He kissed her forehead. "I think I *hit* what is important." She tried to move, but he wouldn't allow it. He kissed her lips, tapped her nose, and then entwined her fingers in his. He led them to the bed. "It was a joke, baby. Chill." He sat down and gathered her on his lap. "Tell me what's the matter. I've never seen you this upset, and whether you believe me or not, I'm concerned."

Pepper paused a long time until Breed thought she wasn't going to say anything. Then, ultra low, barely audible, she said, "I got shot today."

Breed's entire body went rigid. "What?"

"I think somebody tried to kill me. If I wasn't wearing my vest, I'd be dead."

He spoke calmly even though raw fury raged through his body. "Why didn't you tell me this earlier?"

"I tried to when I called this afternoon. You rushed me off the phone."

Guilt burned the lining of his stomach. He remembered their conversation. She barely had three words out before he abruptly cut her off and said he'd have to get back to her later. He'd disconnected before she could say anything further. It didn't go unnoticed that she'd called him in the middle of the day, because it was uncommon, but he figured if it was important she'd call back.

"Something like this deserves another call. Immediately."

"Why, so you could just put me off again? No thanks."

She sounded bitter, but he couldn't blame her.

"I apologize," Breed said sincerely.

"It's nothing."

Nothing! She got shot and now acted like it wasn't a big deal. Her nonchalance infuriated Breed. This was a fucking huge deal, and she knew it.

"That is bullshit, and you know it. It's not nothing. I want you off the case you are on—now," he demanded. She hadn't said as much, but he had an inkling what happened had something to do with Cesar Cortez.

"Hell, no. You don't tell me what to do, Breed."

"I'm serious, Pepper. You never should have been put on the Cortez case to begin with. You're too green and have no idea what an asshole like Cortez is capable of. People stay away from the man for a good reason. He is not only a top drug trafficker, but he's a cold-blooded bastard who wouldn't give a rat's ass if you lived or died. Even if you dropped dead in front of him, he'd step over you and keep on walking down the street."

Pepper went into a tirade. She said, "You think I don't know that? I'm careful around Cortez. That's why I've survived this long. As far as he knows, I'm a pretty-faced, airheaded, ditsy female who couldn't understand his business dealings if he uploaded everything to my IIM. I act like what Cortez is comfortable with. Getting my nails and hair done, shopping for frilly things, pampering, and being given gaudy jewelry and money is what he believes are my interests. As far as he is concerned, I'm a pretty, flawless mannequin with space between my ears. I worked hard to give him that impression and do a damned good job of keeping up the pretense without puking every time he touches me. It helped me get where I am today. That's why I have survived this long. I'm damned close to bringing Cortez down, and you are not about to start ego-tripping and demand I quit."

Breed heard everything she said. That didn't change his mind. "Fuck that. I'm not discounting your ability as an agent. We both know you're damned good at what you do. I don't want you anywhere near Cortez," he said emphatically. He stood up, walked over to the window, and gazed out into the night. The sky was hazy, clouds started to roll in, no stars showed, which meant a storm was brewing. The view was nondescript, nothing

inspiring, but Breed stood rigid, staring at it a long minute. Finally, he swiveled around and faced Pepper. "I mean it, Pepper. I will be damned and fucked if I allow you to stay on the Cortez case."

Pepper tightened, locked her shoulders. She narrowed her eyes at him. "It's not your decision, Breed. I'm asking you not to interfere in my job, just like I respect what you do and stay out of your way. You go undercover all the time. Each time it makes my stomach ache until I see you again. I have to do this."

Breed stalked back to the bed and leaned down. He was close, almost in kissing distance. His nostrils flared. He pressed forward in an intimidating gesture. Pepper didn't budge. She met his stare boldly, raised her stubborn chin. Breed's expression was impassive as he continued to look fixedly.

When he finally spoke, his tone quiet but firm, he said, "You can throw a hissy fit, baby, but I'm going to check into your case and review the records of the men assigned to watch your back. If I see one thing that stinks, you are out of there. Call me a jerk, but that is the way it's going to be."

Pepper sized him up. Breed stood his ground. She finally slumped and nodded. "You're going to interfere whether I want you to or not." It was a statement.

"You got it, cupcake."

"I should object—"

"You did...profusely," he reminded her. When she started to speak again, he put his thumb pad on her bottom lip to keep her silent. "You have stated your position, and I have told you mine. There is no need to continue this conversation." His words were final and left no room for debate.

"I will be all right." Her attempt to comfort him was met with glacier silence.

Cortez was a fanatic. The man was suspicious about anyone he encountered, and that included his own goons and family. He went through great measures to ensure his ass was covered at all times. In his business dealings, keeping them private, and when he ventured out, he surrounded himself with six guards. The DEA had worked years to get something on Cortez. Pepper being able to infiltrate his inner ring was a phenomenal feat. Secretly, he was proud of his girl. Damn proud. That didn't mean he was

going to stand by and let Pepper do something utterly stupid and get herself killed.

It would only take one slipup, and Cortez would come down on her like a vulture. He'd strike first and ask questions later. If he even bothered to validate if she was DEA or not.

The bastard had ice in his veins. He breathed icicles. It was rumored his heart didn't exist, and the man had no soul. He'd killed his own brother, plucked out his eyeballs, cut out his tongue, removed his ears, and put him on display for others who might betray him to take notice. It's how people in Cortez's racket handled rats. The sad thing was his brother hadn't done a damn thing except for pick up the wrong girl in a nightclub, bang her all night, and then leave her in the morning. Breed was sure he felt lucky that evening, but after what Cortez did to his sibling, it turned out Cortez's brother was one unlucky son of a bitch.

The girl worked for the federal agency as an administrator. She didn't have the clearance to mop the agency floors, but Cortez didn't bother to check this out. He assumed the worst—paranoia does that to a man—he killed his own brother for nothing.

\* \* \* \*

They lay in bed, naked, tangled in the covers and wrapped around each other's bodies. Breed on his side with Pepper facing him, their bodies connected from chest to knees, snuggled in a lovers' embrace. He held her close, his palm cupped her butt, her head cradled in the hollow area where his neck and shoulder joined. Breed held her as close as possible, continuously running his hand over her thigh as if he couldn't stop touching her. As if he never wanted to let her go for fear of never seeing her again.

When she murmured drowsily, stirred, nuzzled his shoulder with the tip of her nose, he pulled her firmer against his body. He kissed her forehead lightly.

"I love you." He thought she was asleep. Her voice was barely a whisper, but her words vibrated inside his head like a bell.

She stretched lazily, threw a leg over his thigh, and rubbed against him like a cat. He expected her to start purring. She reached up and brushed her lips against his mouth.

No more words were spoken for a long moment. He knew she waited for him to respond to her admission. He should, but didn't. It should have been simple to say three simple words, but Breed remained quiet.

It wasn't that he didn't feel for Pepper. He admitted that what she brought out of him was the closest feeling to love that he'd ever experienced before. His emotion surpassed affection, but was deeper.

Breed rolled and lay on his back, pillowed his arms behind his head, and stared up at the ceiling.

"You don't have to say anything," Pepper said.

"It's not that, baby. Damn, things are complicated," he muttered. He thought about Monty. She deserved to know the truth. As far as she knew, Aldie was an adventure, something he did to amuse himself, and wasn't his way of life. He had never made it clear that wasn't the case. Or, if he did, he wanted to be sure Pepper was down with the lifestyle he desired. After what happened with Aldie, he told her he'd dumped him. That seemed to satisfy her, and she never questioned him further about why he would be into Aldie, any man, in the first place. She'd said bisexual escapades were popular. He admitted that was true. People were getting into swinging and experimental sex lately. Breed considered it a new era, but it would wane eventually, just like any other trend. Maybe, maybe not. What he did know is he'd been into both sexes for as long as he could remember. It wasn't a fleeting fancy that would eventually go away when another fad started.

Pepper deserved to know this. He had to make sure she understood being bisexual was who he was. What he liked. His lifestyle that he didn't intend to give up.

"Baby, I have to tell you something. I broke it off with Aldie, but there is someone else, a man that I'm really into," he said. "We've been friends for a long time, but recently we've been fooling around, thinking about taking our friendship to another level."

Her head popped up like a gopher's out of a den. "Monty?"

Okay, she didn't try to go for her stunner or unman him. That was definitely positive. He still proceeded cautiously due to the major faux pas with Aldie. That was stupid on his part. Hell, he had a hard time forgiving himself. It seemed right if she let him get all comfortable and then coldcocked him. Especially now that he was mentioning Monty.

"You already knew?"

"I kind of figured it out for myself. The few times I was with you and Monty, I saw it in your eyes. You were subtle, but you watched Monty's movements like you do when you're checking out a woman you think is sexy. A heterosexual male doesn't do that." She rolled on top of Breed and straddled his hips. "So, it's you, me, and Monty if I decide to do this threesome thing?"

"Aldie was a mistake. It was a dumbass thing that never should have happened. I'm sorry." He felt obligated to apologize again even though she never asked him to. Pepper was cool like that. She let bygones be bygones. "Would you be okay with Monty?"

"I like Monty well enough. I haven't been around him a lot, but I get the impression he is sincere and not pretentious like Aldie. Oh, that, and he is really hot." She giggled mischievously.

Breed arched an eyebrow. "You think Monty is hot?"

"The man is gorgeous, and you know it." She grasped his cock, raised, and slipped him inside her pussy.

He gripped her hips, rocked upward, pushing upward until he was buried deep. Slowly, ever so slowly, he started gyrating his hips to meet her steady rocking back and forth. "Just how hot do you think Monty is? I mean, I'm just curious if your pussy is dripping because of me or the thought of fucking Monty."

Pepper laughed, increased the tempo of their bodies thumping against each other. She reached down and kissed him hard, demandingly, swiped her tongue over his. She released him. Gingerly, her fingertips leisurely traced the contours of his jawline. She looked at him affectionately, and so sensually, it took Breed's breath away. Nobody had ever looked at him with so much love.

She said, "Monty is damn hot, but not as sizzling as you. You are sweltering and make me loopy in the head." Her tone turned serious. "Nobody else makes me feel like you do, Breed. Nobody. Ever." Her hips started swaying, rocking hard, sending her pussy gliding along his cock. "It's the truth. I love every inch of your impossible ass. You know that, right?"

He didn't respond. There was no need. Pepper knew he was a man of little words, but more given to action that spoke volumes.

Everything he didn't say came across in his movements—orchestrated, fluid motions of carnal delight that were possessive, consuming, and endearing—the way a man makes love to a woman he loves.

\* \* \* \*

The sound was constant and damned annoying.

Breed opened his eyes and then turned toward the nightstand. He frowned at the interlink receptor base that continuously flashed a blue light, casting flickers of a fluorescent hue on the ceiling. He touched his ear. The light stopped, and the connection was made to the ear implant.

"This had better be damned good."

Pepper murmured something and then curled around his body as he listened to Aldie.

"What?" Trying not to wake Pepper, he eased away. "Come again?" A brief pause followed as he listened. "Shit...I'm on my way."

A call about a dead man didn't require that Breed hightail it out of there. It wasn't as if he could prevent anything, but he would be required at the crime scene to investigate. He took a quick shower, dressed, and headed toward the door when Pepper called out to him.

"I tried not to wake you," he said.

"I missed your heat. You sneaking out on me?"

"There's been a murder. Someone involved in my case."

Pepper yawned, nodding. "I won't be here when you get back. Cortez is expecting me at his place for the weekend."

Breed didn't try to hide his disappointment. He walked back, pulled her close, and then kissed her luscious mouth hard. "Be careful. If something doesn't feel right, I want you to promise me to get the hell away from that bastard."

"I promise."

He kissed her, brushing his lips lightly over hers. "See you later."

"See you later."

They never said good-bye because of a superstition of the word sounding so final. Good-bye was something you said when you never expected to see the person again.

# **Chapter Seventeen**

Abramson's quarters buzzed with activity; homicide and forensics worked the crime scene.

The media outside hovered like vultures hoping for a scrap of information to be tossed their way. The word had already gone through the agency not to utter a single syllable to the press. That didn't keep the street in front of the financier's townhome from being overrun with media. Nosey neighbors and curious onlookers stopped and gawked and traded speculations about what was happening inside.

Aldie looked outside the window at the crowd below and then closed the curtains. "It's going to be hard to keep the media at bay for too long," he said to Breed. "Sooner or later what happened here is going to leak."

"Probably," Breed mumbled and then moved closer to Abramson's body so he could examine the corpse more closely. Abramson was sitting in a chair, head down, his mouth twisted in a crude manner. He'd seen it before. The mouth frozen on a last scream, eyes wide, and features contorted in horror. The look of someone who had died a tortuous and horrible death, Breed thought, looking at the thin wire twisted around his balls. Someone tried to castrate him...He bled out slowly.

"Somebody really hated his guts," Cox said, looking at the body. He popped a mint into his mouth and sucked hard. Swishing it back and forth, sucking. "Yeah, from the looks of it, somebody hated Abramson pretty bad."

Breed didn't agree or disagree, but continued to look over Abramson's body. Cox was right, but he wasn't about to say that aloud. There really wasn't any need. It didn't take a physicist to figure out that whoever murdered Abramson wanted him to suffer. A swift death wasn't good enough. Because the scene hadn't been processed completely, he examined the garrote twisted around Abramson's neck with a stylus.

"If you are thinking to contaminate my crime scene, Uonaidas, just let me know, and we'll wrap up here," Hollis said. "There's no sense in doing a thorough investigation if you all"—she waved a hand around at all the officers in the room—"insist on trampling around the room like a herd of yim yaks." She exaggerated to make her point—"all" meant the agents from homicide, him and Aldie, and her team.

Hollis didn't like to work with anyone in the room except her people, but regulations required homicide be present. This was his and Aldie's case, so he insisted on being present during the processing. It was always a battle, but Hollis reluctantly relented.

Breed grinned at Hollis, she had a sharp tongue that he'd grown accustomed to over the years. He knew she was a hard-ass, but he also knew she was the best at her job and if anybody found some evidence it would be Hollis. He respected her expertise, and a part of him actually liked the hard-nosed attitude, abrupt frankness, and sassy mouth that made most agents cringe.

She wasn't bad to look at either. A nice ass, voluptuous breasts, and a decent enough face added to the bundle of spitfire. But, that whip tongue of hers kept even the boldest agents from making a move even though some wanted to.

Secretly, behind her back, of course—the agents weren't fools—they jibbed about one day taming Hollis. It was a fantasy, of course, because nobody was actually stupid enough to approach her. Except Cox, who at one time was hot and heavy after her, but Hollis swiftly and effectively ripped him a new one. She busted his balls in front of the entire team. Cox still hadn't recovered even though that had happened two years ago.

When he first encountered Hollis, they had their run-in, but Breed respected her. He didn't take any shit from her, though, and eventually they managed to be civil to each other. Most of the time they got along great as long as he allowed her to win a few of the pissing contests.

He raised his hands in mock surrender. "Just looking."

Hollis walked up to Abramson. She pointed to the other side of the room. "Look from over there. I don't need you contaminating the air. Sometimes evidence is airborne," she snapped and then motioned for a junior processor to vacuum the body and the perimeter around the corpse.

She leaned over and examined the body. "He was choked, no surprise there. But somebody also tried to unman him before they finished him off."

"Care to explain?"

Hollis glared at Breed as if to remind him he should be on the other side of the room. "I was getting to that," she said testily.

Breed grinned. Hollis eyed him and then started examining the body again, ignoring his presence. But she hadn't dismissed him. When Hollis dismissed you, you knew it.

"Yep, somebody was pretty angry, I'd say. All the torture was sexual in nature except the choking." She turned the chair around. Abramson's butt was sticking out from between the seat back and cushion. "An extremely large object was used to sodomize him, and with enough force to perforate his anal walls and cavity. His genitals are practically severed."

"I would think with that type of torture somebody would have heard him scream," Breed said.

"He might have if there wasn't a wad of paper shoved in his mouth. I had a digital recording made and fed it to the agency evidence database."

There was always one piece of evidence held back, and Breed knew not to ask, but he did anyway. "What was on the note?"

"You know I can't tell you that."

"Come on, Hollis, this has something to do with my case. I'm drowning here."

Her stare held a cold affront, and then she smirked. "I'm going to break protocol because I like you, Uonaidas. That, and you know how to get to a girl's heart."

He knew she was talking about the supply of treats he gave her to feed the insatiable sweet tooth she had. He kept her supplied with cinnamon mocha and cream tarts every morning.

"Somebody stuffed a piece of paper in his mouth, almost down his throat. It had remnants of semen and the words 'suck this and die, you sick bastard' scribbled on it."

"Did you get a match on the semen?"

Hollis shook her head no. "Nope, which is way weird. Everybody has, or should have, a DNA sample on file. I wanted to send the sample through the priority database, but you know getting through the red-tape bullshit to

access the DNA samples stored there is like trying to ferret out a fart from an ass. I'm still waiting on the okay to run the sample through."

The priority database held DNA samples along with other medical information of top-ranking officials in the government and all government employees, secretaries, janitors, all the way to the president's personal chef and lawn man. That included family members, both immediate and distant, and anybody that could remotely be connected to a government employee.

The information wasn't readily available to anyone, because if, Lord forbid, a high-ranking official was involved in a crime, as Fuqua's son had been, the government wanted to know about it first so they could do damage control.

Hollis might never get to run her sample through the database.

"I might be able to pull a few strings," Breed said.

Hollis gave him a look. "That's supposed to make me let you know if I find a match?"

"Yes, that and two boxes of cream-filled jellies. And"—Breed gave her a broad smile, seeing Hollis's eyes brighten with interest—"I know where to get my hands on a case of two-hundred-year aged claret. That would make a nice addition to your wine cellar, wouldn't it?"

Hollis threw back her head and chuckled, causing curls to bounce and frame her heart-shaped face. "If I believed in pissing where I eat, I might be charmed as hell by you, Uonaidas."

"I can only keep wishing."

"Yeah, right. I will let you know if I find out anything."

Aldie walked up to Breed, his eyes followed the sway of Hollis's ass a minute before he turned to his partner. "I'm still trying to figure out what makes the ballbuster operate, and you have her eating out of your hand. What gives?"

Breed knew he wasn't talking about how he was able to keep Hollis from busting his balls. Aldie wanted to know what she'd told him about the murder that she wasn't telling anybody else.

"Nothing that isn't obvious. Abramson apparently pissed off the wrong person. This wasn't a random killing, but up close and personal. From the looks of it, a psychopath, possibly. There's some evidence Hollis is holding back. She's got it locked tight in the agency evidence database," he said, not feeling remorseful that he didn't share with Aldie what Hollis had told him

in confidence. "You know how bureaucracy is. What do you know about Cesar Cortez?" He knew Aldie did a stint in the DEA, and he wanted to pick his brain about the drug magnate.

The thought somebody had sent Pepper a clear warning was still eating at his gut.

Aldie looked baffled. "You think Abramson's death has something to do with Cortez?"

"No, I was just asking. Pepper mentioned something about being on assignment and that it had to do with Cortez, but she wouldn't elaborate." He intentionally left out details because Pepper trusted him not to tell what she'd confided.

"Cortez is pretty high up in the drug trafficking business. He ships a good amount of Twilight and other narcotics into Sanguine and other planets. His reach even goes as far as Earth, and from what I know, neither planet has been able to stop or even slow down his import business. When I was at the agency, they were after Cortez bad. Rumor had it he was about to import a new drug and put it out on the market. Whatever it is—nobody has actually seen the stuff—I hear it is bad shit. Twice as addictive as Twilight and lethal if cut the wrong way. What does Pepper have to do with him? He's bad news, man."

"Like I said, she wouldn't elaborate, but I didn't get the sense she's directly involved with Cortez. Probably working some informants on the side. You know Pepper. She's pretty tight-lipped when it comes to her cases."

Aldie studied Breed a minute and then looked around the room. He watched as the med techs put Abramson's body in a formfitting bag that sealed everything on the corpse inside and would help to filter any impurities out. The vacuum-sealed sack would also preserve the body's organs by freezing the body and any evidence that might be in or on the body for a month or longer—the time frame it sometimes took Hollis and her team to perform and process an autopsy. Hollis was understaffed and overworked, and it could be months before Abramson was processed.

"Well, you think this puts an end to the senator's push to pass the bill? What does it gain him now that Abramson is dead? No kickback. You think he will back off?" Aldie asked.

"I can't think of a reason why he wouldn't. A dead man can't pay."

"So I guess that immediately crosses the senator off our list of suspects. It wouldn't make sense for him to kill Abramson and dash his hopes of getting his hands on the millions of ducats he needed."

"Yes, I agree," Breed said.

Aldie took out his handheld and scribbled a few notes before putting it back in his pocket. "It's early, but I'm starving, and we need to sit down and think through the case now with this new turn of events. You want to grab some breakfast and discuss things?"

"Sure. Give me a minute." Breed turned his back and tried to connect to Pepper's interlink. He looked at his watch. It was still early, so he was hoping she hadn't left yet.

He listened to the message, a recording telling him Pepper had set her interlink to private mode.

Breed had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

The jitters hadn't gone away, but were still fresh with the knowledge someone had taken a shot at his woman. A cop's instinct, intuition, whatever made him think Pepper was in serious trouble. Maybe not at the moment, but the niggling feeling her involvement with Cortez would end up bad tore at his conscience. He'd put some feelers out within the DEA and even went so far as to inquire with one of the top brass at the DEA about the Cortez case. He wanted to know how things were progressing or not. The man told him he had balls of steel to question him. He'd been offended, but Breed politely let him know he didn't give a flying flip. If necessary, to protect Pepper, he'd go to the president herself if it meant keeping his woman safe. Something he was seriously considering now.

Breed's thoughts about Pepper were interrupted when an anonymous loc-tag ID crossed his IIM. Then a message stream appeared. He read the information, tried to retrace where the signal came from, but he couldn't get an identification of the caller. Whoever called hadn't scrambled the ID, but it was nonexistent. The loc-tag ID wiped clean, which made his back-trace useless. Somebody who had inside knowledge and was technically savvy was sending him messages.

"Things aren't what they seem. To catch a murderer, you have to know the true victim."

"What?" Aldie asked.

Breed wasn't aware he'd spoken out loud. He glanced at Aldie. "Nothing." Inside his head he repeated the message. The first part, "Things aren't what they seem," wasn't rocket science. He already figured that shit out for himself. He admitted the second part of the message baffled him. Whoever sent the information knew where he was at, and why. That meant they knew Abramson was dead. An outsider looking in would consider Abramson the victim of a heinous murder. So why did they insinuate Abramson was not a target, but the person who committed the crime? Maybe Abramson had victimized someone years ago, and his past had finally caught up to him? Was this a revenge killing? The way someone had did Abramson made it clear whoever was responsible wanted him to suffer. Abramson's murder was payback?

"Hey, man, you looked distracted. What's up? Are we going to go over the case, or do you intend to stand there all night with a puzzled expression on your face?" Aldie asked.

"No, I'm good. Let's go." He started toward the door and then stopped. He looked at Aldie. "Did you just get a message download to your IIM?"

"Just now? No. Why?"

"Just curious. Sometimes I think the damned thing is on the blinks."

The agency interlink system was the most secure network that existed. All the checks and balances implemented ensured no hacking occurred. Not even his own personal techno guru had been able to breach the agency's system, and XO was one of the best. He knew this because he had his friend try to gain access to the agency's restricted lines as a test. He wanted to make sure what he said over a secured line was truly classified. XO held some unique skills that exceeded most technical geniuses. He was on the Feds' top list of hackers they wanted to chat with because his friend hadn't done anything damaging when he sneaked onto businesses' information networks. He let XO be, because he didn't implant viruses, steal identities, or anything stupid like that. At worst, XO hacked as a hobby.

Because he was smart enough to know someone like XO could come in handy, he didn't reveal his location to the Feds. He did XO a favor a year ago that got the man out of serious trouble. XO owed him, and he knew there would be a day when he needed to call in the favor, big time.

XO hadn't been able to get into the agency's network. That was telling and confirmed whoever sent him the messages came from within the agency. High enough up to have serious influence. They were on the same side. So, if that was the case, why didn't they just communicate to him directly? What was the need for the secrecy? Maybe they didn't want him to know their identity. People who worked like that didn't sit well with him—criminals weren't the only ones who were capable of having two faces.

## **Chapter Eighteen**

Lord, he is a dick. A first-rate asshole.

Bentley adjusted his position in the chair doing his best to appear interested in the senator's endless rants about the same old thing. He wanted answers. He wanted his son found with haste—yadda...yadda...yadda...yadda...the man made demands as if he could pull Jordon out of his ass.

"Well, Bentley?"

The bark of the senator's tone snapped him to attention. Bentley sat straight up in his chair. "Sir?"

The senator narrowed his eyes, giving him a scathing look. "If you want to continue and work on my team, Bentley, I suggest you get your head out of the clouds and stop daydreaming on my time. We're in perilous times. The longer Jordon is out there, the more risky things become. What have you found out so far about Jordon's whereabouts?"

"Ah, nothing, but I'm working diligently on it. The agency doesn't even know where your son is hiding out. It's like he disappeared, went underground. Nobody is talking, sir. I had a brief conversation with Captain Foresight of the Elite Forces. He's Breed Uonaidas's superior, and he claimed no knowledge about Jordon's location." Bentley thought about his short conversation with Captain Foresight. He met the senator's penetrating gaze. "Of course, he might have been blowing smoke up my behind. Everybody is antsy since Abramson's death. Security has tightened, and gaining access to information is more difficult than before."

Bentley saw the senator flinch when he mentioned Abramson's death. The action was subtle, a faint tightening of his body, and then just as quickly the senator's unbreakable façade he wore like armor was back. The motion was telling and revealed that Abramson's murder left him nervous.

The senator put his back to Bentley. He walked over to the window, clasped his hands behind his back, squared his shoulders, and concentrated on the vessels that hovered just outside the window waiting for an opportunity to cross the intersection. He remained quiet a long time, and Bentley wondered if he dismissed him. Impatiently, he waited.

"Senator," he said.

"What details have been released about Abramson's death? I haven't received anything on my communicator. His wife and family have called me several times, and I want to be able to tell them something next time they contact me."

The agency wasn't releasing any details, but he found out the gruesome details about Abramson from an outside source. He stalled, toying with his handheld as if he was searching for information while he wondered just how much information he should reveal to the senator. He had to be cautious about what he leaked. Finally he said, "This is all speculation. No coroner has released an official report."

"Well?" The senator sounded agitated. Bentley wasn't sure if it was because someone close to him had died or if he objected to having to ask a peon like him to elaborate.

"The details are pretty horrible, sir."

"Isn't death always? Tell me what you know, and I will decide what to say to Abramson's family," he said grimly.

"Strangulation, sodomy...he was tortured before he died. It's safe to say this was not a random act."

The senator reacted to the description. His shoulders slumped, and then he squared his frame and put his armor back in place. Bentley did notice his voice faltered nervously. "Any suspects?"

"Nothing has been released if there is one. The agency is starting with his employees. Maybe someone who was disgruntled about how Abramson handled the company—drove it into the ground. A lot of employees lost their jobs, retirement, livelihood..."

The senator waved his hand in the air abruptly to dismiss his statement. Bentley relaxed back in his chair, eyed the cold son of a bitch, and tried to throttle the fury bubbling inside him.

Bentley leaned against the table, entwined his hands, and rested against the lacquered tabletop. "Not to be insensitive, sir...I know Abramson was a good friend—"

"Damn fine man, Bentley. One of the most brilliant I know."

If he was that smart, how the hell did he bring a billion-ducat company to its knees and allow it to go under in financial ruin? Bentley swallowed the statement on the tip of his tongue. He said instead, "Ah, under the circumstances, it is desired for you to rethink your position on the bill. With the CEO dead, the president, committee, and others think it is best to allow the company to dissolve. Salvage the assets, pay the employees a decent severance, and close the doors of Abramson Finance." Bentley waited on the senator to jump at the suggestion like a hungry dog after a juicy steak. Time ticked by. The senator remained quiet. He pressed forward to get a response. "It's rumored the directors and stockholders are still hopeful that you will continue to try and get the bill passed to keep the company afloat. Their hopeful of a recovery, but it doesn't seem viable. Especially given Abramson's death, and the next CEO—if any—unproven, congress doesn't see the sense in risking millions of ducats on a chance."

Senator Sparks spun around. He spoke sharply. "I have not decided on my course of action concerning the bill. That is not paramount in my mind right now."

"But, Senator—"

He held his hand up for silence. Bentley promptly pursed his lips tight enough to crack a tooth.

"I still believe it is a practical business, and the next CEO—who will likely be Abramson's son—is just as capable of running the company."

He is certifiably insane. One greedy bastard. If he killed the Abramson Bill, that would destroy any chance at getting his hands on the money, and everybody knows it. Does the man have no conscience?

"Are you saying you won't consider backing down?" Bentley said, sounding bewildered that he would even have to ask.

Without a hint of regret, Senator Sparks responded. "The Abramson family is already devastated about his death. Now you think I should take away their source of income too?"

Bentley had gone stock-still. His mouth hit the floor. The blood running through his veins thickened, curdled, at the ruthlessness and audacity of the man. How could he be concerned about Abramson's family as opposed to the taxpayers? The Abramson name was a dynasty. He doubted shutting Abramson Finances would put the people out on the street. The common people, however, would suffer the burden of financing the bill when their taxes were raised. He almost choked on the loathing that made the bile in his throat rise and burn.

His voice sounded hoarse as he struggled to settle down. "I would think you would follow the government's, constituents', lead on this...sir," he said between pinched lips.

The senator's expression turned rabid. His eyes narrowed, and his lips thinned, disappeared, and faded into the hard lines of his face. "Don't think to overstep your boundaries, Bentley. You are in your position because the president insists. Don't believe I'm not aware of this. I will handle the Abramson Bill how I damn well please. When I make a decision, you and everybody else will know when I release the information to the media. Now, what you need to be concerned about is finding my son. Until you do, I expect you to pause long enough to eat, sleep, and crap, but even that you should keep to a minimum until Jordon is located. Are we clear?"

In other words, the president, and everybody else, could kiss his narcissistic ass..

"As ice, Senator," Bentley said between clenched teeth.

He watched the senator leave the room with a ramrod-upright stalk that made him wonder just how far the stick up his butt reached.

Typing rapidly over his keypad, he entered the information and sent the encrypted file to his home base. Then he tried to contact the president's loctag ID. After five attempts, he disconnected.

Bentley considered his options for a moment. He accessed another loctag ID. He was careful to block his identification number, as usual.

The president's intentions were good, but he wasn't happy about her objection to go after the senator's jugular with the information she had. She was concerned about the backlash of the good ole boys of the committee if they found out she wanted to reveal Senator Sparks for the bastard he was. She wanted to keep her attack business, not personal. She was using the senator's insane attempt to pass the Abramson Bill as an excuse to go after him, and not the true reason she despised the idiot. That and her concern for keeping elected officials' faces pristine in front of the constituents. He

didn't care the president wanted to be discreet. For what Abramson did, he deserved to be hanged by his balls and put on display in the inner sanctuary of the official library so that everyone would know just how sick the man was.

He sent the stream.

### **Chapter Nineteen**

The nightmares grew worse. The visions surfaced, darker and seedier, and left Jordon in a cold sweat.

He sat straight up in bed and covered his ears with his palms. Digging in until he threatened to pop his eardrums with the pressure, desperately, he tried to stop the voice inside his head.

Naked, shivering, the sweat drenched his entire body as he swayed back and forth.

The voice, low, nefarious, raked over Jordon like claws. "Abramson had to be stopped. The others too."

Jordon jerked, whirling around, searching the darkness for the source of the voice. He squinted into the blackness and met his reflection, which eerily stared back at his huddled mass quivering in the bed.

"No. Not again," he whispered.

"Ah, Jordie, come on. They have to be punished." The voice chuckled, low, making the hairs on Jordon's neck spike.

He slapped the perspiration running into his eyes with the back of his hands to clear his blurred vision. He lifted his head, stared at the ceiling, as if he expected to see an apparition floating overhead. He spoke into the darkness. Groveling, he said, "Please...not another one. You promised," he murmured and then shouted, "Go away and leave me alone!"

The voice didn't respond for a long pause. Jordon jumped when it spoke again, hearing the crude and sharp tone. The voice, shrill, struck Jordon like a slap across the face. "I will go away when you grow some balls, you piece of baby shit. You and me are like two peas in a pod—joined at the hip." The voice crackled.

Jordon shrieked. "You're horrible and evil."

The voice laughed quietly, a sinister sound that chilled Jordon like ice down his back. "Quit your sniveling! Abramson was a piece of cake.

Besides, I think the bastard actually wanted to be put out of his misery. Hey Jordie, we need to take care of business."

"No. No. No. You swore no more killings."

"Ah, come on, baby-shit. You think we can stop at just one cocksucker? Naw, just don't seem right. Hey, between you and me, I think you enjoyed watching," the voice taunted. "I think you messed your pants...had a little spill when I did the cocksucker. Old times are hard to forget, huh?"

Jordon cried pitifully. "Nooo. No more."

The voice turned vulgar, more ominous. "Remember the boathouse? You screamed like a bitch and begged me for help. Sissy-pants, you cried for me to come to your aid. I came that night, Jordie, and saved your ass, you ungrateful wimp." Jordon flinched when he thought he heard fingers snap to get his attention. He whirled around, searched, strained to see in the dark. "Hey, listen up. I do the things you can't stomach. I do the dirty deeds, you little prick."

Jordon started rocking...faster and faster. He slammed his fist into his ears.

"You need me, Jordie. We feed off each other. If I don't put those cocksuckers out of their agony, who will? Come on, baby-shit, you know what I have to do. One by one, the bastards need to pay. They *will* pay. I'm just trying to figure out who is next." The voice snickered.

Jordon shook his head back and forth furiously. He clawed at the interlink implant, dug his fingernails deep, scraped his skin raw until blood trickled from his earlobes.

He had to stop the voice.

### **Chapter Twenty**

"Hey, Uonaidas," Hollis called to Breed when she saw him walk by. She looked around and then motioned him inside and closed the door.

Hollis leaned against the frame breathing heavily. She looked excited about something.

"You are thinking to ravage me?" Breed teased. Hollis looked like she'd either just had a mind-blowing orgasm or just did a sprint around the building.

She smirked. A hint of mirth curled her lips almost into a smile. "You wish. Follow me. I have something interesting to show you." She led the way to the lab through an adjoining door that connected her office and work area. "I think you will find this interesting. I know it knocked my socks off."

Breed watched as she adjusted the microscope and then stepped back. She motioned for him to look.

A wide grin surfaced on Hollis's face when he stepped back. Breed knew he didn't hide the surprise about what he just saw.

"Tranquilizer residue?"

Hollis flipped the light on the flat-screen visual hanging on the wall so they could look at the material under the microscope, but magnified ten times. She pointed at the oddly shaped sickle formations that were mixed in with slender oblong shapes that resembled capsules.

"Blasts are liquidized in the holding canisters, but on contact, like when they hit a body or hard surface, they crystallize and become harder than steel in order to penetrate. These long shapes are blasts we removed from the Secret Service men killed at the penthouse." She removed a stylus from her jacket pocket and pointed at the half-moon shapes. "Now, we also found these at the penthouse, on various surfaces. Tranquilizers that harden on impact too, but the formation is uniquely different from a blast."

"Are you telling me the assassins were using tranquilizers and not full blasts?"

"No, I'm saying both types of weapons were used. The unique residue we found in the room confirms that."

"You use trangs to incapacitate someone, not kill them." Breed was thinking aloud. "Why would they use trangs and live blasts if the intent was to kill Jordon Sparks? It doesn't make any sense."

"From the residue and the evidence collected, I would say at least two or three men, at most, used tranquilizers. The Secret Service men definitely got hit with full blasts. The other men, too, because you and your partner didn't leave any witnesses. I can't narrow down what weapon fired what type of blasts because stunners are equipped to handle both, so we can't figure which man had what intent. I can only tell you someone was out to kill Jordon Sparks, and the others intended to shoot him full of 'happy blast.'"

"What the hell is going on?"

"I do forensics, Uonaidas. I'm not an ace agent like you, so I'm afraid you will have to figure out that part for yourself. I thought you might like to know about this, though."

"Thanks, Hollis. I owe you."

"Yeah, I came in this morning and was gravely disappointed not to find any jellies, mocha...nothing. You should be grateful I'm telling you about this."

Breed lips curved upwards. "I was running late this morning, so I didn't have time to stop. I could have gotten something from the cheesy side-car vendors that hover at the traffic lights and harass you to buy day-old doughnuts, but I couldn't do that to you. I know you like the real thing. I promise to make it up to you tomorrow. Double."

Hollis gave Breed a sassy smile. "You bet your sweet ass you will, or you can forget finding out the results of the semen when I run it through the priority database."

"You got approval?"

"Yes, I did. The president just signed the order, and it's on the way to my IIM shortly."

"Let me know immediately if you get a hit. Thanks, Hollis." Breed headed for the door. He called over his shoulder, "Oh, by the way, you should be receiving the case of claret soon. I had it sent directly to your home address, and the outrageous bill to mine."

"You're a good man, Uonaidas. You know how to keep a lady happy." Breed laughed. "You're a doll too."

Hollis called back just before the door closed. "Yeah, but if you tell anybody that, I swear I will stomp your ass. Got it?"

"Loud and clear, ma'am."

Aldie was standing outside the door, leaning against the wall across from Hollis's office, waiting for Breed when he came out. As soon as he entered the hallway, Aldie tossed a soda can in the trash. "I just spent ten minutes with Foresight, and I swear my ass is still raw. The man insists on making my life a living hell. He threatened my position more than once and said if I slip up again he'd personally feed me to Wheatland. You know, now I realize Coleson wasn't the biggest prick in the agency."

"You say that every time you're forced to face the captain alone. He's just blowing off steam because some heavy hitters are breathing down his neck. I wouldn't take what Captain Foresight said seriously. Hey, Hollis just told me that some of the men who attacked Jordon were carrying tranquilizers."

Aldie did a double take. "Come again? That doesn't make any sense."

"I know. That's why I'm still reeling, trying to figure out this odd twist of information. It certainly means we can't accuse the senator of trying to kill his son now that we know this. What if he was just trying to subdue Jordon for whatever reason?" Breed didn't wait on Aldie to answer because he was just thinking aloud. "But then if that's the case, who sent men to kill, and why?"

"A few angles come to mind, kidnap, revenge against unjust politics, or just because. Jordon's life has been in jeopardy before. That's why he was tucked away at the penthouse. Maybe what we thwarted was a hit and a scare tactic by two separate vigilante groups that got their wires crossed. Coincidence."

Breed said, "One, I don't believe in coincidence. Two, if that is the case, then why Coleson and the perp? What did they have to do with this if the groups intended to make a political stand? That, and if someone is bold enough to make a try at a senator's son, you would think they would plan better. I'm sure Jordon's place was being watched, so as soon as we arrived,

you would think they would have backed off. Kidnaps and assassinations are meticulously planned for a reason. No surprises. Nevertheless, the bastards went through with it anyway. That makes me think our presence was all part of the plan. I just haven't figured out why."

Aldie scratched his forehead in puzzlement. "You make valid points."

Breed continued down the corridor with Aldie following. He continued to reason aloud. "You can't just purchase tranquilizers. That stuff isn't available on the streets...not even on the black market. The ammo had to come from within the agency." They both stopped at the same time and faced each other. "Hilton," he said. Aldie nodded in agreement.

He didn't like to think another one of their own was involved, but no matter how he dissected things, Hilton's name kept surfacing.

Weapons acquisitions were run by Hilton, an agent fifteen years on the force with an impeccable record, up until two years ago. The rumor was that weapons were disappearing and ending up on the streets. Breed knew Hilton was under suspicion because all roads led back to him, but to date no one had been able to pin the illegal sales on him. Hilton kept meticulous records, albeit the numbers of shipments received versus processed were probably false, but so far, the accounting forensics team couldn't prove it.

Breed said, "Hilton is being investigated, but so far he's managed to slip under the radar, always staying a step ahead of the investigators, which leads me to believe Coleson might have been feeding him intel. That would make sense. The two were friends, and Coleson would have been high enough in rank to be an effective mole because he had access to secure information. The question is why were they in bed together? Not literal, of course, but you get my point."

Aldie opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something, but then thought twice about it.

"What?" Breed asked.

"Coleson and Hilton may have been in bed together...literally."

This admission got an eyebrow lift from Breed.

"I mean, I'm not sure, but there were rumors going around. I didn't put any stock in them because I didn't see it personally. That, and Hilton is working on his second wife. Coleson is iffy, though. I never said anything, but Coleson threw some subtle hints my way. Know what I mean? I pretended like I had no idea what he was suggesting." Aldie shivered as if

the thought sickened him. "I ran across Hilton a few times after hours, and all the man talked about was boning some young hottie."

Breed never got the impression Coleson was into men, but then you never could be sure these days. Besides, if Aldie mentioned it, he trusted him. "Hilton has a girlfriend who lives in the East Canal district."

"East Canal? That area is known for its numerous bars because the liquor is cheap—watered down, of course—but plentiful. A lot of young people go there to hang out and listen to the live bands, drug out, and party the night away. I haven't been there myself, but I hear if you're into something more than dancing on the floor, you can hit a back room and join a sex orgy. I'm not sure if that is true or not."

"It's true," Breed said, ignoring Aldie, who just stared at his admission as if the thought he was young and stupid once dumbfounded him. He started walking again, Aldie on his heels. He wasn't going to offer any explanation, but if his partner asked, he would be honest.

"So, you know this because?"

He knew Aldie would ask. Though they had a working relationship, they never talked about their personal lives much. Not that he was into sharing, but he didn't think it would hurt in this instance. "I wasn't born thirty-two, Aldie. You're in your twenties, so you telling me you have always been on the straight and narrow, mature-ass path? Even when you were in your teens? Just before I graduated the Academy, I was pretty wild by social standards." He glanced at his partner. "I never did drugs. It's not my thing. That, and I knew I wanted to enter the government university and didn't want to screw up my chances of getting admitted. Besides, narcotics are not my thing. But sex? Now, sex is another matter. I defined the word promiscuous, and every opportunity to screw around I took."

"That doesn't surprise me. So, is that when you found out you are bisexual?"

Breed shrugged indifferently. He thought about it a minute. "I kind of, sort of knew it before then, but never acted on it because I thought it was a phase. One day, while I showered with other boys my age and got a hard-on, it solidified my interest in men. I was fourteen, but I didn't act on the urges until I turned twenty. Was at a party one night, and this gorgeous man approached me. I think you can figure out what happened from there."

He didn't get the impression Aldie would open up. He remained silent for a long time. It kind of surprised him when Aldie gave him a little insight to his past. Breed listened because his curiosity about Aldie sometimes got the best of him. Sometimes you had to understand a man's history to know how he ticked. Aldie seemed transparent on the outside, but then there were moments when he thought his partner worked hard to display the type of personality he wanted everyone to see. His partner acted the chameleon well. Was that because he'd been doing it all his life?

"I was raised in a state-owned group home until I turned seventeen. Then I went to live with a support family who sponsored me through college. The family was nice. They had other children, four girls and twin older boys. You know, it's true what they say about twins sharing everything."

It was something in Aldie's tone that alerted him. "Was the sex consensual?"

"They didn't rape me, if that's what you're asking. They were just tenacious, kept after me, until I gave in one night. The first encounter was just oral. I enjoyed it, so I figured I had to be into males," Aldie said, shrugged.

"That is not necessarily true, especially for a young, sexually inexperienced boy."

Aldie looked at Breed pointedly. "It wasn't rape. They didn't turn me bisexual. They did me, and I did one of the sisters. While I was in college, I had a girlfriend I adored and an affair with an older man for four years until he dumped me for someone younger. At twenty-one I was a has-been."

Aldie laughed, but Breed failed to see the humor. Maybe because he felt like Aldie forced the laugh.

"Besides, if I had any doubts about my sexuality, which I do not, I know for sure I enjoyed the hell out of our time together."

Okay, it was time to change the subject. The waters they were wading into were too murky for Breed. He'd made a clean and honest cut from their relationship and didn't think it was necessary to rehash it. Not that he wanted to, as far as he was concerned, it was in the past.

Aldie must have sensed why disquiet suddenly fell between them. He tried to explain the awkward comment. "I was just making a statement. Our time has passed. We have both moved on. We're sharing, remember?"

Breed grimaced at the word "sharing." It sounded sensitive and emotional. He wasn't into that. He changed the subject before Aldie got any ideas. "You hungry? I'm starved and could use a cup of java or two. Why don't we grab something to eat and go over the new evidence? We also need to figure out how we want to play Hilton. I think we should pay him a visit at his girlfriend's place tonight and see if we can rattle him some. How does that sound?"

"Like a long-ass, boring night of surveillance. What if Hilton doesn't show up?"

"I guarantee he will show," Breed said.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I know East Canal like I know Hilton's plaything, Cherry. She and I have a history. She will cooperate and get Hilton to her place if I ask. I have to make a quick stop. I will meet you by the cruiser in about ten, okay? I want to try and catch a friend at the DEA and see if he has heard anything about Pepper."

"I checked around, and everything seems to be going fine with the Cortez case."

"Pepper got shot in the back the other day."

Aldie looked surprised. "What? You didn't mention that earlier. Hell, man, no wonder you're freakin' out about her being on the Cortez case."

Breed didn't agree or disagree, but continued down the corridor until a thought hit him. He stopped in mid-stride. Slowly, he shifted and faced Aldie. A light suddenly came on. It was bright, blinding, and gave him a jolt of revelation. "Whoever hit Pepper aimed at her back."

Aldie raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"An assassin goes after the head. Always a head shot to ensure the person dies. Pepper was being warned."

"Okay, but I still don't get the connection between Pepper's incident and our case."

Breed raked his hand down his face. He considered things a moment. What he thought was a long shot, but it was worth reasoning things through with Aldie. "The person who hit Coleson and the perp had to be bold as hell to do it at agency headquarters with the tight security and agents around that night. The bastard was able to do it because he wasn't worried about either. That means someone high up in the agency had his back." Aldie opened his

mouth, but Breed raised his hand. He wanted to finish his thought. "Coleson's and the perp's murders were a warning. Now that I think about it in relation to what happened to Pepper, somebody was sending someone in the agency a warning, a damn strong message. I can get inside headquarters and get to you anytime, anywhere. See what I did this time?"

Aldie nodded. "Okay, I'm kinda following you, but let me play devil's advocate. Why not just kill whoever in the agency they were after? Why risk getting caught by doing Coleson and the perp to make a point?"

"Maybe the real target is too valuable and might still be useful. Or the target got cold feet and tried to back out of a deal, and somebody wanted him to know that isn't a smart thing to do."

Aldie nodded again. "I like where you are going, but it still leaves a lot of what-ifs."

"Yes, maybe, but it makes a clear connection between Coleson, Hilton, and how the men that night at the penthouse used live ammo and tranquilizers. We know Hilton is involved in selling government weapons. Maybe Coleson found out and wanted in. He was high up enough to cover Hilton's ass. I doubt either man would be stupid enough to risk losing their jobs, not to mention spending the rest of their lives in confinement to sell weapons to street punks. Those men that came after Jordon were packing government weapons, Aldie. What does that tell you?"

"Coleson was a pawn in the bigger scheme. Collateral damage. Like you said, his death was a warning to someone else. Somebody more valuable. Probably Hilton too, if that is the case. It kinda fits into the scenario of how drug dealers and the mob operate. You owe them; they don't kill you, but people around you to make a point. They would rather have what you promised, because dead men can't pay. Makes sense to me."

Breed started walking again. He called over his shoulder to Aldie, who followed. "Tonight, when we have our talk with Hilton, we mention our scenario. I'm sure when he realizes—if he hasn't already—he's dispensable, if he's bright as I think, he will sing like a bird."

He continued down the hallway with a determined stride. The target was deep in the agency, or at least government. Either way the bastard was going down.

The intricate pieces of the puzzle were coming together. There were still some things he hadn't figured out yet, like why the men tried to hit Jordon, or was it even the senator's son they were after? He still couldn't ignore that he and Aldie were there, and sent by Coleson. The perp didn't seem to have a place, but he hadn't delved into the man's background too deep. Aldie was working that angle. Hopefully, he'd find out something that would link him to the case.

Senator Sparks was still an issue. Breed believed the men carrying tranquilizers were his doing. He was after his son, but why? Jordon was probably blackmailing his father. He'd almost bet on that. Then there was Abramson's death. The senator wouldn't kill Abramson. He knew the financier's murder wasn't random, because it was too personal. Briefly, Jordon came to mind, but that was just a wild hair he tugged at. Jordon didn't have a history of anything suspicious that made him believe he was a murderer. He hadn't killed anyone, as far as he knew. Something in Jordon's head was screwed, but a man just doesn't wake up one day and become a psychopathic killer. Or does he? He'd have to check that angle more. Psychology wasn't his thing. He hadn't gotten his hands on Jordon's complete medical and psych files yet, so he couldn't count him out totally. There was the incident with the knife and his father he needed to consider, also.

Regardless, Breed felt comfortable things were falling into place. Not as fast as he would have liked, and the captain continued to be a dick about that, but it was only a matter of time before the truth came out. When it did, he didn't doubt it was going to be a whopper where the people involved were concerned. Who did what. Who was dirty. Who murdered whom. Some heavyweights, probably. Instinct told him that was a fact. Regardless, it wasn't his concern. He wasn't about to lose any sleep over murderers and dirty cops.

If you wallow in mud, you get filthy. His job was to cleanse the city of as much scum as possible, and he looked forward to mopping the floor with someone's dusty butt.

## **Chapter Twenty-One**

Yeah, it was wrong of him to leave Aldie on the first watch at Cherry's place, but there was no sense in both of them having a long and boring evening. Besides, if Hilton dragged his heels about going to see his girl, like after the wifey and kids went to bed, it might be late when he showed. If that happened, he would have to take the nightshift so that Aldie could get some sleep. Of course, that meant Aldie had to curl up in the back of the cruiser if he wanted to catch a wink. But, as far as Breed was concerned, that was more sleep than he would get tonight.

Breed took the steps to Monty's place two at a time.

He wanted to see if Monty had a chance to run Jordon's medical history by a psychiatrist. Yep, he was anxious to see him too, but let that thought slip by.

Before he could knock on the door, it opened. Monty stood there leaning against the frame, grinning and enticingly naked from the waist up. He said, "I was walking by and saw the pink glow filter underneath the door. So bright I could have spotted you coming down the street."

Breed smothered a chuckle. He got the point Monty made. He glided by, purposely making contact just to touch him. It had been a while. "This is business," he mumbled.

"I miss you too."

Monty walked down the hallway. He was barefoot, as usual, chest sans shirt, and wearing lounging pants that swayed around his ankles and hung low on his hips. He couldn't help but notice the band wasn't fastened and the zipper was half undone. Soft wisps of hair around his navel showed, and it was obvious Monty was naked underneath because he saw the dark tan of his butt through the light material.

Monty stopped and picked up a tray with a wine decanter, two glasses, cheese, and other edibles.

"If you're busy, I can come back later."

"What's on your mind?"

Breed followed him into the lounge area. He stopped at the door seeing an attractive blonde sprawled casually on the sofa. She smiled when he entered and then moved like a languid cat, making a modest attempt to cover exposed cleavage. Her skirt was riding up high on the thighs, almost revealing her crotch and displaying long, shapely legs, but she didn't bother trying to hide that fact. He noticed a lacy thong and pumps had been tossed carelessly beside the couch.

She smiled at him when he walked into the room. Her blue eyes were bright and clearly filled with that heavy, glazed-over look of languorous bliss you get when you've just been fucked good. Her slender fingers ran through her mussed hair, putting it back into some semblance of order. "Well, hello."

Monty walked over and set the tray down and then handed the girl a glass of wine. "Julie, meet Breed Uonaidas."

The girl's eyes twinkled with interest. She boldly looked him over appreciatively a minute. She held out a delicate hand. "So, you are Breed? Monty has told me so much about you I feel like I know you. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Thank you, but don't believe a word he says."

She tossed back her head, and laughter, light, fluttery, and seductive, bubbled from her lips. The move sexy, it did the trick and stirred his cock to pay attention. She stood up and shimmied her hips, moving the formfitting skirt that hugged her ass into place.

"Oh, he only had very nice things to say about you." She stared a minute, licking the tip of her tongue over her full bottom lip. "He didn't lie one bit. However, he left out some details." Her eyes settled on Breed's crotch before she met his eyes again. "Sweet."

Breed grinned, but didn't take the bait. When a woman looked at him like that, he knew what it meant. He wasn't interested in messing around with Monty's plaything, regardless if Monty joined in or not. When he got him naked, he intended it to be solo.

Obviously, she understood the silent rejection. She looked at Monty. "Well, I need to go anyway. Maybe another time." That comment was

directed at Breed. Then she leaned over, retrieved her panties, and curled them around her fingers. "If you will excuse me, gentlemen."

Breed followed the girl as she walked toward the bathroom before he turned to Monty. "I don't normally get my signals crossed, but your girl just came on to me. Right?"

"Julie is anything but subtle. I'm surprised she didn't come straight out and say she wanted to fuck us. Julie and I aren't exclusive. It's not that kind of relationship anyway. You want a glass of wine?"

"No, I have to keep my head straight. Later I have to go and join Aldie. We're working on a lead."

The girl entered the room intact, clothes neatly arranged, makeup flawless, and looking stunningly hotter than earlier. Breed couldn't help himself and stared his fill at the long-legged beauty before turning away.

She sauntered up to Monty, pressed into him, and planted a chaste kiss on his lips, took a sip of wine out of the glass he was holding, and then retrieved her pumps. She balanced a hand on Monty's shoulder and slipped into the shoes. She looked at Breed. "It was nice to finally meet you, Breed. Maybe next time I can stay a little longer and we can get to know each other better."

Breed thought, *Bold, brassy, and just my type*. A few weeks ago he would have jumped at the offer she obviously extended to be fucked senseless. It was eerie, but even though she was attractive, the idea of getting into her panties didn't immediately enter his mind. The reason why popped into his head. He wasn't interested. The idea of a harmonious electi with Monty and Pepper was growing on him.

Monty offered to escort the girl to the door. She declined. "I can find my way out. Thanks, though." A hobo was flung over a shoulder, and then she walked out like breeze and sunshine.

Breed looked at Monty. "If you weren't finished, I could come back later."

Monty munched on a piece of cheese, swallowed, before responding. "If you had arrived ten minutes earlier, you'd still be standing outside. So, you have a break in the case?" He walked over carrying the tray and then lounged on the sofa wide enough for two, but Breed didn't join him. He didn't have a lot of time and knew if he got anywhere near Monty he might be delayed. He sat in a chair across from the couch.

"Well? What's up?" Monty stretched lazily, resting a leg against the cushions, and planted the other foot on the floor, a pose that put his crotch on display. He popped fruit into his mouth, licked his bottom lip when juice dripped, and sipped his wine. Breed stared at him wondering if he was intentionally trying to drive him nuts, he looked so damned sexy.

Monty raised an eyebrow quizzically when he noticed Breed just staring at him. "I thought you wanted to talk about the case?"

"I do, but how can I with your crotch in my face?"

Monty laughed, his sparkling gold eyes brightened, an easy grin curled his lips. "Would it help if I closed my legs and put a shirt on?"

He asked, but Breed noticed he didn't do it. The little fucking tease.

"Did you hear about Abramson's murder?"

"Yes. I didn't particularly care for the man—we met at some social functions, and I got the impression he was a pretentious prick—but that was a horrible way to die. I wouldn't wish it on my enemy. Word is Senator Sparks still might pass the bill."

"I know. The man is an asshole. I found out some interesting news today about the weapons used at the penthouse that night. Tranquilizers and full blast."

Monty's eyebrows slanted downward. "Okay, so I'm really baffled because that doesn't make any sense."

Breed caught him up on the details of the case, including his theory about Coleson's and the perp's killings being a warning. When he mentioned about the hit on Pepper, Monty's mouth dropped open, and something Breed rarely saw in his friend emerged. His eyes darkened, his jaw clenched, and a lethal expression settled over Monty's features, hardening the lines of his face.

"Some bastard tried to kill Pepper? Tell me you're fucking kidding me," Monty said. He eyeballed Breed. "Why are you just now telling me this?"

"She's fine, Monty. I didn't think about mentioning it earlier."

"You don't just forget to tell me something as important as this, Breed. That's fucked up." A grape went flying through the air and landed center-forehead, bounced off, and rolled onto his lap. He hadn't known Monty to be temperamental, so his reaction caught him by surprise.

Breed cocked his head to the side. "Did you just assault me?" He was being dramatic. A grape splattering on his forehead wasn't actually an

illegal offense, but he was being facetious. A twitch curled his lip in amusement. Monty's reaction was a good sign because it showed genuine concern. The thought of what that meant exhilarated him.

"Be thankful that's all I did. You should have told me about Pepper when it first happened."

"I apologize. I feel thoroughly chastised."

Monty narrowed his eyes at him skeptically. He simmered down. "She is okay, isn't she?"

"Pepper's fine, but hardheaded. She won't let the case go with Cortez."

"Cortez is bad news."

"I know, and until she is off the case, I'm not going to rest. Hopefully, when I see her later, I can talk some sense into that thick skull, but I have my doubts." Breed shifted and then stared at Monty. "So, what do you think about my theory on the agency murders being a warning?"

"I think you're on to something. But you don't need me to confirm your suspicions. I'm surprised about Hilton, though. He's been at the agency, what, ten or more years? His record is squeaky clean?"

"Yeah, that's the story, but I'm still convinced he turned dirty for whatever reason. Hilton is working on his second wife. He is paying his first wife child support and alimony. The new wife came with a slew of children from what I heard. He is having some financial problems, and this wouldn't be the first time someone turned to the opposite side of the law to grease their pockets with extra cash."

"Is he your surveillance victim?"

Breed chuckled at Monty's choice of words. "In fact, he is. Aldie is at his girlfriend's place waiting to see if Hilton shows up. The girlfriend is a pretty thing with a bad and expensive drug habit. She likes glitter and gold, too, so Hilton might be playing both sides to appease her if nothing else. A girl like that isn't going to stay with Hilton out of the kindness of her heart. Hilton is two years her senior, and not that I'm knocking his appeal, but having that type of girl on your arm usually comes with a high price."

"True. True." Monty sipped his wine. "So, what if you find out Hilton is selling agency weapons?"

Breed's look was unyielding. "He's going down. I suspect he will cut a deal to keep his ass out of confinement for the rest of his natural life. He will sing like a soprano when I get finished with him."

"Should I stand by just in case you need a lawyer when Wheatland gets wind of your, ah, interrogation tactics?"

"I'm going to be gentle." He sounded and meant to be cynical.

Monty laughed. "I will wait on your call." He glanced at the clock. "How much time do you have before you have to leave?"

Breed stood up to his towering height, worked the kink out of his neck, rotating his shoulders back and forth. "Aldie is at the site and has called me twice already. Duty calls."

Monty sipped his wine. Breed noticed his eyes had turned dark, smoldering. His voice dropped to a husky level that raked over him like raw silk. "Too bad."

The sultry timbre of Monty's voice didn't go unnoticed. Breed's eyes darkened with carnal interest. Appreciatively his eyes roved over the enticing sight of the male form sprawled over the couch. Monty's legs were slightly gapped, one knee resting up and back against the lounger with the other leg leaning over the side with his foot on the floor. Food for the gods, sexy as hell with his golden orbs hooded and simmering with sexual awareness that said Monty was thinking about finally allowing him his wicked way. The sight sent mad crazy sensations drumming over his libido that he conveniently ignored.

Business before pleasure. "You are a fucking tease, you know that? I like it, though. I have to go."

Monty moved like a sleek panther, sitting forward and then standing and walking to where Breed stood. "Can you spare a minute? I have a confession to make."

That was all he said before he disappeared, but it was enough to pique Breed's interest.

The naughty expression on Monty's face when he returned heightened Breed's curiosity.

Monty held the dildo up like an offering. "I bought this the other day to try it out," he said sheepishly.

He took the butt plug, turned it this way and that, as if this was the first time he saw such a device. He looked at Monty quizzically. "How did you like it?" he asked calmly, ignoring the surge of desire rippling through his groin, turning his cock to granite.

"I didn't use it yet," Monty admitted.

"Interesting. I have to go, but that doesn't mean we can't experiment with your little toy. Of course, this isn't half as fun as the real thing, but we'll make do."

"I didn't think our first time would be a quickie."

Breed threw back his head laughing, a throaty rumble. "Baby, I don't even know what that word means. Besides, when you finally, blessedly, let me take your virginity, there won't be anything quick about it. An ass like yours deserves to be savored like a delicacy."

When he converged on him, pushing Monty backwards until they tumbled onto the lounger, he didn't resist. He stared up at him with a longing that made Breed's heart race like a hundred bees were inside his chest. His body sizzled. His cock screamed for release, so hard it ached.

The restraint he practiced sounded in his tone, making his voice strange. "I like these little sexual interludes we share, but frankly it's driving me a little crazy, Monty. A man can only fantasize and jerk off so many times. You have lube?"

Monty squirmed, raising his hips when Breed tugged at his pants. "The salesperson said it's filled with lubricant."

Breed yanked the pants off and tossed them aside. He parted the muscular thighs and held them open. He inhaled sharply seeing the wrinkled hole, tight, rosy. "Perfect." A quick and efficient tongue swirled over the anus, back and forth, quick swipes before he leaned back.

Breed prepared the plug, coating it generously with lubricant, and then eased the tip forward until it was submerged inside the man-hole. Monty yelped, squirmed, and moaned when he squeezed, filling the crevice with slick gel. "Preparation is everything."

"Having your mouth on me is everything," Monty said, ultra low. Then he closed his eyes.

"Relax...Take a breath." Breed's descents, slow and easy, helped the makeshift cock glide in and penetrate with little resistance. He stopped when he'd entered the full length of the dildo in Monty's ass. It was silly, but seeing the toy where he wanted to be made him irritated. Abruptly, he dipped low and sucked his bulbous head, sucking, drawing the bloated crown down his throat until he felt creamy fluid seep free. He licked at the ambrosia, smacked his lips, and then focused his mouth and tongue on Monty's cock until it was rock solid and standing up like a granite tower.

Breed let the head pop out of his mouth. He looked at Monty with a satisfied grin. "I have to go."

Monty's eyes popped open. "What? Surely, you aren't going to leave me like this?"

"Stay put. When I connect to your interlink, you will want to answer. Trust me. No playing with your cock, either," he called over his shoulder and then left.

\* \* \* \*

Breed waited until after he contacted Aldie to let him know he was on the way before he called Monty. He glided into traffic, let the auto control take over, and entered his loc-tag ID. He answered on the first ring, which meant he did as instructed and wasn't too busy jerking off to answer.

Before he could say anything, Monty said, "I thought you forgot about me."

"That is not possible. Is the butt toy still in place?"

"What do you think?"

He gave a little laugh. "I think you would enjoy my cock inside you more, but we will make do this time. Monty, I'm a semi-patient man, and I enjoy playing games, but eventually I will take control and make you beg me to fuck you. In fact, I decided not to touch you again until you surrender that sweet ass."

He could hear the sound of air rushing from Monty's nostrils. "Put your hand on your cock and stroke it. Tell me when you do." He messed with his controls while he waited on his response.

"Okay." The word came out in a rush, as if he had a difficult time talking and breathing.

"Real slow, work your palm along the entire length. Fondle your sac too. Masturbate while you remember the last time I sucked you off. You do remember that time, don't you? You were hot and horny and so excited I thought you would blow as soon as my mouth touched your dick. I enjoyed feeling the way you reacted to me, all uncontrollable, until you lost it and came in my mouth. Do you know how sweet you taste? I can't wait until you learn my flavor. Firm your grip, squeeze harder, pump your fist more and faster. Are you following instructions?"

Monty groaned. He took that as a yes.

"I fantasize about fucking you all the time. I've never jerked off so much in my life. In my dreams you are on your back, thighs spread, and you beg me to do you. I know to take it slow because you're untried, but the thought of being inside you gets me all crazy and bothered. I enter you slow, penetrate fully, and then fuck you in an untamed rhythm until you ease and mold around my cock. Then I lose myself in the sweet temptation and come within minutes."

"Breed..." he moaned.

"I know, baby. I know. Move the butt plug around in your ass. I want you ready to accept bigger and better things to come when I finally get inside you. You do want me to fuck you, don't you?"

Monty moaned into the earpiece. Breed took that as an affirmative answer.

"What you feel now is nothing compared to how much I will please you. I will drive you wild, Monty. I'm going to do you so good that every time you hear my voice, see me, or think about me, your sweet cheeks will gap open expectantly. Monty, I'm that good."

He heard choppy pants, the *thump-thump* of his butt hitting the couch, and knew he was pumping hard. Intentionally, he dropped his tone an octave so that his voice came out throaty and rough. He murmured, "Come for me, baby."

Monty made a strange sound as if he was torn between pain and pleasure. He shouted, "Fuck, Breed! Christ!"

Breed leaned back in his seat, reclined, and watched the other vessels whiz by while he waited for him to recover enough to speak. A minute passed before Monty spoke, saying, "I just ruined my satin couch...Cum squirted everywhere. Damn, how you make me climax on demand is baffling."

"I'm good like that."

"Did you orgasm too?"

"Nope, it was hard, but I kept my cock in my pants. I decided the next time I climax it will be inside you when I take your virginity. Have a good night. Sweet dreams."

He disconnected.

### **Chapter Twenty-Two**

The girl slapped his butt so hard he knew it would leave an imprint his wife would bitch about when she saw the mark.

"Harder, Big Daddy. Fuck me good. Oh, ah, you're such a stud."

Hilton kept on pumping, ignoring the false accolades. He wasn't doing Cherry to hear her lies, but to get off.

"I'm doing it. I'm doing it. Damn it, shut up."

The girl giggled and then started thrusting wildly, out of synch with his rhythm, and got into her own thing. She did this a lot. Forgot about who was supposed to bang whom. She took matters into her own hands and started playing with her pussy. Hell, he didn't care. He was going to get off sooner or later. She might as well too. If it was by self-pleasure, so be it. She took too much damned energy anyway. He could feel his chest constrict, burn, and his thigh cramped like a bitch.

Why lie to himself? He was well beyond his prime and too old for this nonstop fucking. He'd taken a hit of Twilight to increase his stamina. His lungs felt tight, sweat poured and drenched him, and his heart felt like it might explode.

Yeah, he might die tonight, but at least he'd expire a happy man.

He started pumping, driving deep, and concentrating on blowing his load. He didn't care about the girl because he knew she was hyped on the drug. He could pound her to eternity and she wouldn't get off, not with that stuff in her system. When Cherry was high on that shit, nothing seemed to satisfy the greedy little bitch. When he saw her reach for the dildo, he almost felt relieved.

The girl was beautiful, body like a goddess, and defined the word nymphomaniac.

"Come on, Big Daddy, fuck me harder."

She grabbed his balls and squeezed too damn hard. "Hey, watch it!"

Infuriated, Hilton shoved the girl away. She threw back her head, laughing, rolling over onto her stomach. She looked over her shoulder, a mischievous look in her eyes that were unusually bright and glassy. She wiggled her ass suggestively and cooed mockingly. "You need another pickme-up? Or are we done?" she said, clearly letting him know if he said yes she'd continue without him. Already she rubbed the dildo back and forth between her thighs.

"You little teasing cunt."

Cherry laughed.

He risked everything to pay her rent and bills, buy her a snazzy new cruiser coupe, and supply her drug habit. He suspected he was also supporting her young boyfriend because, when he sat outside her apartment one weekend, he saw the man visit and not leave until early morning. He was going to cut the cord with the two-timing user, but at least he deserved to get a last nut out of their arrangement. He might die in the process, but it'd be well worth it.

It was that or go home and try to get his old lady, who he hadn't touched in years, to blow him off. She would refuse, and the idea of putting his cock in the glacier pussy of his wife made his dick shrivel.

He grabbed the girl's hip roughly, but she liked it that way. Without warning, he slammed his hips forward and buried the length of his cock in her ass. He was unrelenting and animalistic. They mated like two primates. The harder he banged the girl, the louder her false shouts of praise got.

"That's it, Big Daddy."

Her mocking tone grated on Hilton's nerves, so he blocked out the theatrics and continued to plow until he lost it.

His entire body tensed, sweat popped out on his forehead, and then he groaned and collapsed, crushing the girl beneath him.

"Wow...you're the best, Big Daddy."

Hilton withdrew and jumped up from the bed. He went into the bathroom, barely making it his knees where so wobbly. He fell back against the door, closed his eyes, and tried to calm the thumping inside his chest.

Shit. He'd had enough. He called out, "We're done. I'm not up for this bullshit anymore. You and me are finished. You hear that?"

He'd made the threat before, but he was serious this time. He was going to find him a lonely old widow who would require a few licks and a pump or two to be satisfied.

"You're too much work." He blew out his breath. "I'm done..."

Normally when he tried to leave her, she would get all nuts on him, go into hysterics, plead and cry, so he was surprised when the girl didn't respond.

"I'm done acting the sap," Hilton said, looking out the doorway. The girl was sprawled on her back, head twisted oddly to the side. Her gaze, blank, stared up at the ceiling.

"Ah, shit. She's passed out." He walked to the bed and froze. The girl wasn't passed out. Cherry was dead. He stumbled backwards. The bitch had overdosed.

Great, just what I need.

Hilton was in enough hot water with the agency that he knew this type of crap on his record was going to be his undoing. If the agency couldn't get him on trafficking weapons, they would like nothing more than to hang his ass for a minor offense. Being caught with a dead girl high on Twilight was unethical and against the agency's regulations.

Hilton turned in a frenzy to grab his clothes and hightail it out of there. When he saw a shadow move, he stopped.

"Hey, Hilton. Long time no see."

Hilton whirled around hearing the male voice in the room. He stared, squinting to make out the form, as the man stepped from the dark corner.

"Wha-what are you doing here?" Hilton stammered.

An evil smile curled the man's lips. He said tauntingly, "I'm baaack."

The hairs on the back of Hilton's neck spiked. "It-it's be-been a long time."

"Yeah, but you knew one day I'd return, right? We have unfinished business, Hilton."

The man lunged forward, and Hilton tried to dive for his stunner he kept in his jacket pocket, but before he could reach the chair, the man was on him. He pounced on his back, knocking him forward, and pressed his weight into Hilton's back, shoving him against the bed. He pinned him like a caged animal.

"Wha-what's this about?"

The man leaned low and whispered in his ear, "The...boathouse."

Hilton stiffened. "Th-that was a long time ago..."

"Yeah, your hair is thinner and your ass wider. I guess some things have changed. Did you think I would forget about you, cocksucker? Memories don't fade to black like in the bullshit movies."

Hilton's head was jerked back when the man grabbed his hair. "You're not the pretty boy you used to be, but that's okay. It doesn't matter."

Hilton screamed in horror when an object was shoved between his legs. He struggled, attempted to fight, blubbered, crying like a bitch when the man jerked upwards.

"Jesus! Please!" Hilton screamed.

The man kept working the object in Hilton, staring emotionless, a wicked grin twisted his mouth crudely. "This isn't so bad, is it? That's what you used to say to me, remember?"

"I'm begging you...stop. Please...don't do this," Hilton cried out. He attempted to get free, but it was futile.

The man withdrew a stunner and pressed it to Hilton's temple. "Behave and be a good boy, and things will go much easier for you."

Hilton dropped his head, snot ran down over his lip, and dripped from his chin. He whimpered.

The man worked quietly, methodically, not saying a word as he twisted the garrote around Hilton's neck. He kept twisting, tightening the hold until Hilton's eyes bulged and his face turned an odd red hue.

"There now...not too tight." The man patted Hilton's cheek. "Almost done...I can't let you die just yet. Naw, choking is too good for you," he said and then shoved his knee between Hilton's beefy thighs, forcing them to spread.

Hilton's eyes widened, he started shaking his head, trembling.

The man withdrew a thin wire from his pocket and held it up for Hilton to see. He showed teeth, grinning. "This is going to hurt like a bitch." He laughed, grabbed the dangling appendage, and then wrapped the wire around Hilton's cock.

\* \* \* \*

Breed and Aldie entered the bar and headed for the back steps where they knew Hilton's girlfriend lived upstairs. As soon as they rounded the corner, a huge, grizzly-sized man stepped into their path. Stringy brown hair, a jagged scar over and through one of his eyes, and an off-centered nose made the man look like a disfigured battering ram.

"You two going somewhere?" He loomed over Breed and Aldie, leaning into their faces, blowing a putrid stench of whiskey and garlic in their faces.

"In fact, we thought we'd pay a visit to Cherry," Aldie said calmly, silky smooth. "We need to talk to her, if you don't mind?" He said politely, morphing the danger behind the easygoing mannerism.

The bear looked them up and down and sneered. "She ain't your type. Get lost."

Aldie withdrew his badge and shoved it at the bear. "Official business. Back off."

The man threw back his huge head and laughed. Then he glared at Aldie with his one good eye, piercing. "Take that badge and shove it. It don't mean flip here," he said, thumping Aldie in the chest. "I'll take it and shove it up your ass if you don't get the fuck out of my place."

Breed said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you. My partner doesn't like to be touched. At least, not by an ugly mug like you. Besides, we could consider what you just did an assault on a federal agent."

The grizzly turned on Breed. He jabbed him in the chest, emphasizing each word. "Fuck—you—too." He thumped Breed again.

Breed looked at Aldie. "I hate assholes, don't you?" He grabbed the bear by the throat, squeezed his fingers into his windpipe, and restricted the flow of air. The man's eyes bulged, and he turned crimson. Breed slammed his boot into the idiot's kneecap and made him crumple to the floor. "Now, we have official business with Cherry. We're going up to see her. Is that okay with you?" The bear nodded. "Thank you." He shoved the man away from him and stepped over his body.

He removed his stunner and moved cautiously up the stairs, keeping his back pressed against the wall. Aldie followed him, watching his back, easing up behind Breed.

"How do you want to play it?" Aldie asked.

"Real easy. If Hilton is aware we're on to him, he might get edgy." Breed tapped on the door. "Hilton?" he called out. When no one answered, he used the tip of his weapon to ease the door open.

"Too quiet," Aldie whispered.

Breed looked through the slit in the door. He moved back, holstered his gun, and connected to the agency interlink. "I need Hollis and her team at two-four-six Creekside...Devil's Cove bar...two down. DOA." He disconnected.

Aldie looked around Breed into the room. "Shit," he mumbled.

"Did you see anyone enter except Hilton?" Breed asked, leaning against the wall.

"It's still early for a crowd. A few people entered, hung around for a minute, and then left. I assumed the bar wasn't hopping enough for them and they'd come back later. Hilton didn't arrive until later."

"Somebody could have used the back door to come and go."

Aldie shook his head no. "When I arrived, I checked for other entrances. There is a rear entrance, but it was blocked by a trash bin. That's why I parked in front of the building next door so I could see the bar and if anyone came or went in the alley."

"The bastard got in here some kind of way or he was already here when you arrived." Breed went below stairs. He found the bear sitting on a barstool, resting against the counter, with a bottle of beer on his knee. "Did you see anyone go upstairs with Cherry other than Hilton? How many rooms you got in this dump?"

The bear glared up at him. "Hilton who?"

Breed snatched the man's beard, jerked hard. The bear grunted. He tightened his hold, twisted, and brought the man closer to his face. "What did you say?"

"Okay...okay. Shit, man, Cherry and that cop were up there alone."

"How many rooms?" Breed repeated.

"You mean besides the penthouse Cherry rents?" The bear smirked.

Breed eyed the man. He yanked down until the bear howled in pain. "Next time it's your balls. So I suggest if you ever want to use your dick again you stop with the wisecracks."

"Shit, man, there's one stinkin' room in this joint."

Breed released the man. "I might have some questions for you later. Keep your fat ass here. Don't move."

The sirens of the agency hovercrafts blared in the distance.

Aldie walked around Hilton's body, examining him, when Breed came into the room. He frowned and said, "Up close and personal. Just like Abramson. Looks like the same MO."

"Yeah, there's definitely a resemblance." Aldie leaned closer to Hilton.

"If you touch the body, Hollis will have your ass for dinner," Breed said, glancing at the expression of horror on Hilton's face, and then turned away.

Aldie took out his stylus and touched the paper that protruded from Hilton's lips. "There's something jammed in his mouth. There's writing on it, but I can't make out the words."

Suck this and die, you sick bastard, Breed thought.

Breed rubbed his jaw. "There's only one way in and out. Moving the trash receptacle would have been too much for one person, took too much time, if they wanted to be discreet. I'm assuming whoever did this was inside the room when Cherry came home. Maybe he stayed in the closet the entire time."

"Probably," Aldie said. He cocked his head, squinted, and tried to read the note the killer left.

"Aldie, quit screwing with the body." He took out his handheld and jotted down some notes, uploaded it to his IIM, and then snapped the device closed. "I added Hilton to the case board, what we've found so far, and hopefully the dots will start to connect. I also contacted the research division and have them digging up everything they can about Abramson, Coleson, the perp, and now Hilton. What schools they attended, starting with elementary and working their way through every place the men were enrolled. I don't care if they attended a course or not. Medical records, report cards, school physicals, and psychological evaluations. Not one stone is to be left unturned. What were their hobbies, social clubs, friends, neighbors, girlfriends? Hell, if they had a pet, I want to know its name. Nothing is off-limits. There is a damned connection, and I intend to find it."

"You two contaminating my crime scene?" Hollis announced from the doorway. She eyeballed Breed and then went to Hilton. "Ah, hell, not Hilton. Nobody said it was one of our own."

Breed said, "I wanted to keep it close to home given the nature of his death. He was an idiot, but he has a wife and young children."

Hollis nodded and then shook her head. "A damn shame," she muttered and walked over to the bed. Scanning the girl, she did a quick visual assessment. This wasn't the first time she'd seen this type of scene. "She's about thirty, but extensive drug use has aged her. Do we have an identity on her?"

"Her street name is Cherry Fresh. Her prints will probably be in the database because I'm sure she's been busted a couple times for drugs," Breed said.

Hollis snapped her fingers at a nearby tech. "Get her prints, and feed them to the database for processing."

"On it, boss." The tech started capturing the evidence.

"I don't see any signs of a struggle with the girl or anything that indicates she was strangled, but she died of something. What's your gut feeling?" Breed asked Hollis, who was examining Cherry. She swiped a cotton swab inside the girl's mouth and then sealed it inside a container.

Hollis held up the vial. "She overdosed. You see the lights on the container? All the different colors relate to a certain type of drug that might be present. The analyzer processes the data, and the hue that is most prevalent means a high concentration of a drug exists." She looked at Breed and Aldie to see if they were following. "The faintest color means a drug is present, but probably ingested within the last week or so. When I suspect an OD, I start with the most prevalent drug on the market. Based on the area, it is probably Twilight. I'm pretty sure, but we'll see what we get."

"Why Twilight?" Aldie asked.

Hollis looked frustrated at the basic question that should have seemed obvious. "If I find an overdose in an upscale townhouse, on the trendy side of town where the rich and famous and wealthy live...I'd use an analyzer and look for Bosh because it's the drug of choice for the elite. A dive like this, and given the girl's history, Twilight is a more plausible choice." Hollis raised the vial, eyed the colors, and then frowned. "Yep, it's Twilight, and an extremely high concentration, which means it was forced on the girl in one lethal dose. It's ironic, but whoever did it wanted the girl to die quickly, no suffering."

"A mercy killing?" Aldie asked.

"Collateral damage," Breed muttered, disgusted. The killer didn't have a grudge to bear against Cherry, but he or she couldn't afford to let her live either. He gave her a quick death as opposed to the pain and suffering inflicted on Hilton.

"Boss, I sent the digital of the text on the note from Hilton's mouth for an analysis. Tentative report, it's a match of Abramson's," the tech said to Hollis.

"No surprise there," she said. "This is probably all going to end up like Abramson. I will send you a message if anything different surfaces you need to be aware of, Uonaidas."

Breed got the hint. Hollis wanted them to leave and let her team process the crime scene. "I will be online all night. Contact me if you find something. I don't care what time it is."

Hollis waved a hand dismissively.

The sky was starless, a formation of clouds drifted by lazily and eventually covered the brilliant illumination of the moons, dimming the brightness. A subtle breeze blew by and cooled the air. The grates that ran below the street released pureaire into the night, temporarily refreshing the staleness that escaped when Breed opened the bar door.

Aldie inhaled deeply, filling his nostrils with the clean scent. "I don't think I will ever get used to the stench of death."

"If you do, then it's time to get out of the business. That is what I keep telling myself. Jordon is out on his own," he admitted quietly.

Aldie looked at Breed, concerned. "You think he could have done this?"

Breed shrugged and started walking toward his cruiser. He stopped and supported his body against the vessel, shoved his hands into his pockets, and scanned his surroundings. His thoughts wandered as he considered the case.

"I'm not taking anything for granted. Jordon definitely is unstable, but that doesn't make him a killer. We can't ignore this entire mess started that night at the penthouse. Jordon is involved—I would bet my ass on that—but just how deep is yet to be figured out."

Aldie moved his head up and down in agreement. "Jordon was at Monty's the night Abramson was killed? That could give him a neat alibi."

"Monty let Jordon stay at his place as a favor to me. He wasn't a prisoner, and nor did my friend monitor Jordon's actions. Besides, Monty spends more time in the city at his apartment than the townhouse in

Carpathia. Jordon was free to come and go as he pleased." Breed turned, faced the cruiser, rested his hands on the roof. He tapped the transport with his fingertips and then stopped abruptly. Whirling around, he looked at Aldie. "I will ask Monty to view the security streams that monitor the perimeter of his place. If Jordon left, at least we will know when, for how long, and what time he returned."

"If this and Abramson is Jordon's doing, what took him so long to start killing?"

Breed shrugged. "The hell if I know. Maybe that night at the penthouse triggered something. It's anybody's guess. What I do know is it's time to haul the senator in and have a talk with him."

"You think that is wise? We can't actually validate Senator Sparks has anything to do with this. It's all circumstantial, Breed."

"You think I give a rat's ass about that?" he said, testy.

"The captain is going to go nuts when he learns we brought the senator in for questioning."

Breed's expression said 'so'. "It's not an interrogation. If we want to officially question him, we need the captain's permission. Not to chat."

"If you think that will fly with the captain, which it will not. It doesn't matter, though. I'm with you on this." Aldie stretched, yawned, before continuing. Breed could tell he had reservations. "It's probably better if we don't go to the senator's private residence tonight. It's late, and his family will be there. I think we should wait until tomorrow and request Senator Sparks to come to headquarters. If he resists, that tells us a lot."

Not that he cared about what the senator thought about being questioned, but Breed admitted Aldie made a valid point. "Tomorrow is good. It's not like we don't have enough to keep us busy tonight. The research team has already sent some data to my IIM we need to review." He noticed his partner glanced at his watch. "It's going to be a long night," he said, answering his silent question.

"Great, just what I need. Can I at least get something to eat, java to wake me up? I know you, Breed, that 'long night' means we'll be going over the case until the wee hours of the morning."

"You got it. Hilton was dirty, but that was an awful way to die," he said. "I agree."

Breed wiped his hand down his face, weary. "Luckily the agency will make up some lie and tell his wife he died in the line of duty. She will get Hilton's pension. That's a plus."

Aldie seemed to be surprised by Breed's comment. "You think that is how the captain will play it? He seems too hard-nosed to me."

"I did some asking around. From what I learned, the captain is wound a bit too tight, but the last men under his command said he always took care of his own. Hilton's reputation will remain intact with his family. As it should be. His family shouldn't suffer because Hilton was an asshole," Breed muttered.

"Are we talking about the same man who has reamed my ass for the past few weeks so intensely I can't sit down? That captain? The man who threatened unspeakable punishments if we didn't get our asses moving and resolve this case?"

"Captain Foresight isn't a pushover, but he's not as rigid as he comes off. We have to remember he's in just as much hot water as us about this case. Wheatland is breathing down his back; not to mention the Feds are watching too. Apparently, he acquired some bad seeds when he took over our department. Nobody is saying who, but he's been ordered to clean things up or else."

Breed thought Aldie would ask him to elaborate, but he didn't. Maybe he already knew about the dirty agents?

"Have you heard from Pepper yet?"

"No, but I'm checking daily. You could say I've become a thorn in her superior's ass. I'm sure if anything stinks about the Cortez case he will let me know. If for no other reason but to get me off his butt."

"Pepper is good at what she does. She will be okay. Hey, I'm going to grab some food, java, beer, and meet you at your place in an hour."

"See you there," Breed said. He watched Aldie go, and was about to leave himself, when he saw Hilton's body being carried out on a gurney by two medics. Cherry was wheeled out next, and both bodies were loaded into the coroner's transporter. An officer deactivated the projected crime scene beam that surrounded the entrance to the bar.

He met Hollis halfway when she started toward him. She said, "Same method of operation."

"Same note?"

"Yep, exactly the same, but I don't have to remind you that's between you and me."

"You just did. Let me know what else you find."

Breed jumped into his cruiser with an odd sense that something wasn't right. The eerie feeling made the lining of his stomach rumble. He continued to maneuver through the traffic trying to ignore the sensation. What if he was wrong? He tried to connect to Monty's communicator. He wanted to ask him to review his security cameras now.

After Monty didn't answer, he left him a message, disconnected, and then stopped suddenly, hovered. Horns blared, vessels whipped around him to avoid a collision. He knew better than to ignore his instinct. He turned around and headed toward the Westshore district, where Jordon lived.

\* \* \* \*

"What the hell is he doing here?" Breed muttered to himself. He stopped a few houses down from Jordon's residence and dimmed his lights. Jordon's house was nestled behind a cluster of trees, but he knew high beams could cut through the dark and cast a reflection in one of the windows. A cruiser came toward him. Breed concentrated on the vessel unconcerned about being seen. He had activated the cloaking device that made his transporter blend into the darkness.

The man got out of his vehicle, looked around, before walking up the steps to the front door. He just stood there. Breed wondered why he didn't knock or ring the bell. Jordon was expecting him? The door opened, and Jordon's face appeared. Even from the distance where he was parked, he could see Jordon was smiling.

"Well, I will be damned. What's this about?" he whispered to himself as he watched both men enter the house.

A hundred questions surfaced about the scene he just witnessed. He ached to go and find out what the hell was going on, but refrained. There could be a valid reason why the man visited Jordon at his place. Maybe he was acting solo because he knew he could get more out of the senator's son without him present. The reason was plausible. Farfetched, but a possibility he couldn't ignore.

Breed waited to see just how long the visitor stayed. When Aldie didn't come out after thirty minutes, he activated his cruiser and started down the street.

Aldie was probably seeing what he could get out of Jordon without him breathing down the man's throat. Breed considered it a moment, let the thought fade, and continued down the road. He wouldn't come to any conclusions about why his partner was visiting Jordon without talking to him first. Aldie deserved that. He had just better have a damned good explanation when he questioned him.

# **Chapter Twenty-Three**

Senator Sparks sat at his desk listening to the reports that came over the communicator that was linked to the agency network. He was able to scan multiple channels and keep abreast of what was going on in the outside world. Being in government didn't necessarily mean you knew about everything. Sometimes that wasn't good because some things you learned too late. That's why he secretly had the network linked to his home service and spied on the other government officials' conversations.

He also had a media link, so that anything that came over the press communication he found out about firsthand. When he heard Hilton's name mentioned, and the word murder, a cold chill surfaced.

Just like Abramson, the thought of it sent sensations as if a hundred spiders were racing up his back. The senator shivered, visibly shaken.

When Sparks reached for the liquor decanter, his hands were trembling. He poured, filling the glass, sloshing some of the brown liquid on the table, his fingers were shaking so bad.

He gulped the drink down in one swallow, refilled the glass, and then slowly sipped to feel the burn. The news of Hilton's death awakened demons from the past he didn't want to think about. Fears he managed to push into the back of his head in an effort to forget, but ghosts never completely vanished.

First Abramson and now Hilton, and it made him wonder if it was a hit list. He considered he might be next. The sick bastard liked to taunt and wanted him to panic, but he wasn't going to. That would be a major flaw, something he couldn't afford.

He stood on the balcony and looked into the starless night. The area surrounding his residence—the well-manicured lawn, perfectly shaped shrubs, a blanket of lush grass—was picturesque. The full moons cast an illumination over the land, outlining it with a halo effect that made

everything quiet and serene, a direct contrast to the senator's turbulent thoughts.

"I see you still favor the view from the balcony when you can't sleep."

The senator stiffened. Slowly, he turned around to face his son. Casually, he looked over Jordon's attire. He was dressed in black slacks and a pullover. His hair was longer than normal and looked windblown or disheveled, an after-five shadow darkened his skin. His eyes were red, puffy, and hollow. No light shone behind the naturally clear eyes.

Jordon is having an episode, the senator thought.

"How did you get in? Past security?"

"Now, is that the way you greet your son that you haven't seen in a long time? After all, we both know you've been searching for me...Father." He slurred the title as if it was bitter on his lips. "All of a sudden, you seem disappointed to have found me. Maybe that's because I came to you. A little unsettling, isn't it?"

"What do you want, Jordon? I don't want you here. You are not welcome in this house. If your stepmother knew you were here, she'd be disturbed."

"More or less bothered if she knew about the boathouse?"

The senator kept tight control of his emotions. He didn't fidget or react, but remained rigidly calm and maintained the façade he wasn't affected by his son's comment.

"That happened a long time ago, Jordon," the senator said dismissively.

"Did you hear about Abramson's and Hilton's deaths?" Jordon asked, mimicking his father's act of superficial indifference.

The senator's eyes narrowed. "Of course, it's been all over the news."

"Horrible, wasn't it? They died cruel deaths." Amusement lightened his tone. Jordon's stare bore through his father. "What would make someone do such a horrible thing?"

"You're sick and need to return to the institution."

For the first time, Jordon reacted to the senator's statement. He tensed and then relaxed, the difficult moment passed, and he glared at his father. "Is that your answer for everything, Father? Lock me in the institution and keep me hidden away from the world? Keep the dirty little secrets buried behind walls, head doctors, and meds?"

"You need help."

"Help? Is that what you call it, Father? Were you trying to help me when you sent those men after me? They tried to kill me, you bastard!"

The senator sat down at his desk and slipped his hand beneath and activated the silent alarm that would notify security to be on alert. They wouldn't enter just yet, but would wait for his signal. He felt more comfortable knowing security personnel were right outside the door. He looked at his son, a person he didn't recognize and hadn't for a long time. Jordon had long been lost, it was disheartening, but out of his hands now. His son would be freer if he was put out of his misery.

"I was trying to help you, Jordon. Your mind is twisted. Remember how confused you get sometimes? You need to seek treatment and get all those thoughts of the past out of your head. All those memories that you *think* you have can be erased if you'd only check yourself into the facility. The doctors can make it all go away."

Jordon chuckled, a sinister sound that made the senator's hackles rise. His tone contemptuous, he said, "So, you think to just sweep everything under the rug with a convenient memory wipe? Does it matter my brain could possibly get fried? That I'll probably end up a vegetable, dribbling spit when I talk, and will need someone to wipe my ass for the rest of my life? You bastard, you would do anything to ensure nothing ruins your chance at becoming president of Sanguine! You're a self-righteous son of a bitch. If only people knew the real man that dwells behind that urbane manner you portray so well."

A little unease crept inside the senator. Things weren't going as expected. He wanted to demand Jordon return to the institution, but he couldn't afford to push him too far. He needed his son to be tucked neatly away, but he couldn't allow a scene that might get out to the public. Nothing that could mar his pristine image would be allowed.

"What do you want?" he said mildly as he contemplated his next move.

"I want you to confess your sins and repent for all to see."

The senator suffocated a smirk. "That's not going to happen."

Jordon grinned and then walked over to the desk. He withdrew a disc and tossed it on the table. "I think you will enjoy that little piece of stream," he said smugly. Triumph made his eyes brighten. "Go ahead, take a look."

The senator put the disc in the visual, sat back, and watched as the picture displayed. His stark manner faded briefly when heat rushed to his

cheeks as he stared at the incriminating recording. Otherwise, he didn't move, but sat fixated on the picture. The stream was grainy because the technology for recording wasn't as good as it was today, but it was clear enough the senator recognized the scene.

He sat board straight, shoulders squared, careful not to let his son know what he watched rattled him. He kept his tone tempered, even. "You recorded the incident at the boathouse?"

"I'm not as stupid as you believe. I captured several of your sick escapades, but found this one the most interesting. It's pathetic how you look, so enthralled, pure rapture on your expression while a man rides your ass." Jordon chuckled quietly. "The audio is interesting. You don't need to hear it. You might have been high that night, but I think you remember how vociferous you were."

The senator's face turned to granite. He forced the words between his lips. "You think blackmailing me will get you anywhere?"

Jordon moved back and stared at his father. He spoke firmly. "Leave...me...alone. Stay the fuck away from me, and stop trying to get me back to the institution. If you don't, I swear this video will conveniently end up in the media's hands."

The senator sat rod still in the chair and threw imaginary daggers at his son's back as he walked out the room. His hand twitched on the stunner he kept hidden beneath his desk, but he repressed the urge to use it. He could explain a lot of things, and even cover up most of his underhanded dealings, but he didn't think he could get away with quieting his son forever by putting a blast through his back. He'd bide his time. Some sordid deeds needed to be left up to the agency to handle.

As soon as his office door closed, he accessed his communicator. He drummed his fingers rapidly over the tabletop while he waited for the interlink to seek and connect to the loc-tag ID.

Bentley's voice sounded groggy when he answered.

The senator shuddered with fury, making his voice quake. "Jordon was just here. At my home! Just waltzed in free as a bird. I don't have to tell you it was an unwelcome visit. He is too far gone. Now, you get off your ass, and do what I ordered. I want my son to disappear. National security is at risk if you fail."

\* \* \* \*

"I'm on it, sir," Bentley said. He rolled to his back and counted to ten in his head waiting for the senator to finish his tirade. When the only sound was the communicator disconnecting, he rolled to his side, wrapped his arm around his wife, and snuggled her closer.

He'd get on it in the morning, if then. He knew where Jordon was and why. He also knew what the senator's son had showed him that got the bureaucrat so shaky. Bentley grinned. He thought about sending the information to agent Uonaidas, but thought tomorrow was soon enough. Let the senator squirm.

## **Chapter Twenty-Four**

Breed rocked back in his chair and blinked at the monitor. He watched the security stream from headquarters for a minute before he called Aldie over. He angled his body away, giving his partner room to see the visual display.

"See how whoever hit Coleson and the perp entered the building? He keeps his head down, his body positioned just right so we can't get a good look at him. It's as if he knows where the cameras are positioned. The bastard knows the building and something about the security setup. The resolution is bad. Everything is fuzzy. Whoever screwed with the cameras knew what they were doing. We might as well be watching a blizzard the view is so damaged."

Aldie pointed his finger at one of the pictures where the person faced the cameras. "We can't get anything from that? Even with the man's face and head being shielded by the cap, we should be able to capture something."

"I already ran that image through the face recognition module. So far, not squat is coming up."

"What about the access records for every person who came and went into headquarters that day?" Aldie said tiredly.

Breed should have felt drained himself. They'd been at it for hours, but the adrenaline rush had kicked in, and he was on his third wind. "I fed that information through the database, and everybody accounted for had a reason to be there. Hell, even you and me are on the report." He looked at the case board, were a distinct red line ran from Aldie's picture to the perp's. It wasn't something he identified. The database just did what it was programmed to do.

"Do you remember anything strange the day the perp got hit? Remember seeing any unfamiliar faces?" Breed asked.

Aldie rubbed his red eyes, making them blearier. He shook his head no. "As far as I recall, it was a normal day at the office like any other day. Agents, perps coming and going...regular business."

"Hmm...you want another beer?"

"Where the hell do you get your energy? I'm loath to admit it, but I'm dead on my feet. Those dots on the screen are beginning to float before my eyes."

Breed stood up, walked to the kitchen to retrieve another beer. He called from the other room, "What's up with you and Jordon?"

"What?"

He came back to the room, twisted the top off the bottle, took a swallow, and then looked at his partner. "I said what is going on with you and Jordon?"

"You spying on me?"

"Interesting choice of words. No, I went to Jordon's place on a hunch the night of Hilton's death. I couldn't reach Monty to ask him if Jordon left his place, so I went to see for myself. You just happened to arrive a few minutes after me."

"Brilliant minds think alike. I decided to check out the same thing."

"What did Jordon have to say?" Breed asked and then took another drink. After Aldie didn't respond, he added, "I saw you go into his house. Jordon seemed happy to see you."

"He was." Aldie sank down on the couch. He stretched his long legs, entwined his fingers, resting his head back against the cradle his hands created. "When you pimped me out to Jordon, we made a connection. By the way, you terrify the man." He smirked. "He feels more comfortable with me, so I decided to see if he would open up and tell me about what the hell is going on."

Breed raised an eyebrow. "You expected him to spill his guts? Admit to what?"

Aldie lifted one shoulder. "I had low expectations, and that's what I got. Jordon was happy for my company. Frankly, I think he thought I was there to screw him, if that isn't a kicker. God, he's so twisted." He waved his hand in the air. "Anyway, I listened to Jordon run his mouth about how much he despised his father, but otherwise, I didn't get anything out of him. I think he is playing with us, though. That is one sicko."

He sat down at the desk and typed something before he looked at Aldie again. "What's your gut feeling? You think Jordon is a murderer?"

"I mentioned Abramson's and Hilton's deaths. He didn't but an eye or flinch. He just said, 'That's fucked up,' and started burning my ears with nonsense about his childhood. Petty things that every adolescent experiences when they have strict parents. He bored me stiff. After a while I stopped listening, made my excuses, and headed over here."

"We know that Abramson and Hilton were killed by someone who wanted it to be up close and personal. They wanted the men to suffer. The method of their deaths exact, notes the same—"

"What exactly did the messages say?"

"Eat this and die, you sick bastard."

Aldie gave a low whistle.

"Coleson and the perp were killed as a warning, we think. The senator, Coleson, Hilton are all connected because they worked for the government. In different capacities, but a link is a link. I'll take it. The perp's involvement may be coincidental, farfetched. He was just a gopher, maybe, somebody paid to do a job. The two men killed that day when the perp was apprehended, their backgrounds are still nonexistent. It's like they were ghosts. I'm still checking some angle about them, though." Breed continued, summarizing aloud the report he would give to his captain in the morning.

He would leave out a few details because he still hadn't solidified in his mind that some high-level agent man wasn't involved. That pissed him off because it defied everything he believed in when he took the Elite Forces oath. Right, wrong, or indifferent, he knew, in the bigger scheme of the justice system, it was run by human beings, which meant anybody could turn dirty if given the right temptation. In his mind, nobody was saintly enough to be infallible. That meant everybody was under suspicion until he deemed otherwise.

Even when he did a stint on traffic detail, there were agents taking payoffs from motorists they stopped for violations. Instead of making the offender pay the fine, they'd worked a deal, lined their pockets with half the fee it cost for a ticket, and let people go on their merry way. As he moved up the ranks, the offenses got worse—kickbacks bigger and bigger. It sickened him when he found out what some of officers were doing. It opened his eyes too.

When Breed's interlink bleeped, he answered.

"Baby, I'm damned glad to hear your voice. You're where?" Breed grinned and walked toward the door. He opened it to find Pepper standing there. She was smiling, and a welcome sight. He felt a sense of elation jolt through him seeing his woman alive and well. He into Pepper's presence he forgot Aldie was there until he spoke.

"Hey, your timing is superb. Nice to see you, honey. Damn happy you are here because that means I can leave and get some sleep. Your man is a slave driver, you know?"

Pepper wrapped her arms around Breed's neck. She kissed his cheek. "I know, but now that I'm here, he can give it a rest for a minute."

"How's the Cortez case going?"

"It's on track," Pepper said.

"You watch your back. The DEA has been after him since I was on the force. We came close to bringing him down once, but the snake slithered his way out of it. That was years ago. He's been elusive ever since."

"Thanks, Aldie, I'm being safe as possible."

Aldie turned to leave, paused, spun back around. "Cortez rarely does his own dirty work. Trust no one, Pepper."

\* \* \* \*

Breed shut the door, picked up Pepper, and whirled her around before he pressed her into the frame. He kissed her hard, demandingly. "I missed you." He let her slide to the floor until her feet touched.

"I missed you too. What the heck did you do to Aldie? He couldn't wait to hightail out of here."

He smothered a chuckle, worked the buttons on her blouse. He looked up, his expression wolfish. "I do what I do. We need to solve this case."

She tried to wiggle, he stayed her, holding her in place. With the last button undone, he pushed the material aside, cupped her breasts, and worked his thumbs over her nipples. He gathered her skirt hem and slowly raised it above her thighs until it was bunched at her waist. His fingers slipped underneath the elastic band of her panties, moved the material aside.

Pepper squealed in delight when Breed picked her up and wrapped her legs around his waist. He continued to hold her back against the wall, balanced her in one hand while he undid his zipper with the other.

"Why didn't you contact me some kind of way? Let me know you were okay?"

"You know why? When you're undercover, you're incognito for days—

Breed surged, penetrated her in one thrust, slammed his mouth against hers, suffocating Pepper's surprised yelp. She melted around him. He bent his knees for a better angle, and with his other hand he gripped her waist to hold her still as he slowly withdrew to allow her to feel the entire hard length of his cock. Then he pushed up and in, rocked his hips in an easy tempo.

He felt her writhe. Her pussy squeezed his cock, thigh muscles flexed, holding him snug, relaxed, before she started trembling. He backdrew, almost withdrawing, and thrust forward.

She would have collapsed when she climaxed if he wasn't holding her tight. He moved leisurely as she rode out the last of her orgasm before he balanced on his tiptoes, buried his cock deep, and lost control, shattering with his own release.

"Fuck," he groaned. His voice broke, a throaty moan escaped, he spilled an endless amount of cum inside her until he felt empty.

Pepper wiped the sweat from his forehead. She teased, "Maybe I should stay gone more often."

"Damn..." Breed looked at her. "I was so anxious to get to you, baby, I didn't use protection." He held her until she could stand on her own.

"I know." A sly look crossed her face. "That's okay. It's not the first time, remember? It happened one time before. A few weeks ago. It's okay."

"You saying it's safe because you're out of cycle for fertilization?"

Pepper quickly adjusted her clothing, putting herself back into some semblance of order before looking up. "Nope. I'm afraid it's not that simple. I have to go. I shouldn't have come tonight, but couldn't resist." She kissed him, a quick brush against Breed's lips.

He caught her hand. "Wait a minute. I want to talk about your comment."

Pepper slipped out of his grasp. "I have to go. Think about it. You're an ace detective, so I'm sure you will figure it out."

Breed's eyebrows furrowed, and then his mouth dropped open. No, surely she wasn't trying to tell him she was pregnant. Was she? He called out to her, but she was already gone.

### **Chapter Twenty-Five**

Afraid even the faintest reflection would give away his location, he killed all the exterior and interior lights of his vessel. He sat quietly in the darkness, clutched the controls tightly to keep his fingers from shaking, as he waited for Breed's woman.

When he caught a glimpse of Pepper driving by, he slouched in his seat, careful to keep his head down, and monitored her movements using his perimeter visual. She passed him without looking in his direction. Slowly, he pulled away from the curb and followed her down the street. He knew she would be on alert. Working the Cortez case, she'd be stupid not to be. Her head was in the clouds, though. Not that he was sure, but a visit with Breed probably meant she wasn't paying attention to her surroundings as much as she should be. *Bad girl, Pepper. Dumb move*.

He kept her in his line of sight, but hung back enough to appear inconspicuous as Pepper stopped at a crossing point.

At this late hour, the street was empty except for a few cruisers. It would be foolish to try something with potential witnesses around. When she entered the part of the neighborhood where the houses sat farther back from the street, nestled behind towering trees, and the landscape raised high enough anybody standing on their porch wouldn't have a decent view of the road, he'd make his move.

\* \* \* \*

An upbeat tune filtered into the interior of the vessel, Pepper hummed to the snappy tune, bobbing her head to the beat. She came to a stop at the intersection, checked for oncoming vessels, and then eased through the residential neighborhood with one thought on her mind. Breed's expression when she hinted about the baby. Priceless. She grinned to herself and

considered connecting to his interlink to see if he'd picked himself up off the floor. She decided to wait until tomorrow. One, because she wanted to believe he was happy about the news. Two, a small part said he might be upset, and she wasn't ready to deal with that reality if that were the case.

A cruiser pulled up beside her when she stopped at another light. She ignored the driver. She moved forward and then gave the man beside her a second look when she realized he was keeping pace with her. She admitted the Cortez thing made her leery, and she needed to be extra cautious. She turned to eye the man to let him know she could identify him in a lineup if need be. She made direct eye contact. That usually thwarted a potential rapist, burglar, or whatever his intentions might be, think twice if he knew she could identify him. Just in case, she put her stunner on the passenger seat.

The man waved at her. She started to smile, but froze instead when she saw the stunner pointed at her.

Pepper reached to activate the shield that would surround her cruiser in an impenetrable force field.

It was too late.

The mechanism started to rise, stuttered, and then deactivated when a round of blast disabled the device.

She reached for her stunner. A barrage of laser blasts shattered the window, ripped through the exterior of the vessel door, piercing the cavity. She felt the sting burn up her side and explode, sending sharp pains shooting through her body. The second laser beam punctured her chest just below her breasts. It felt like a hot poker seared her flesh. Blood seeped between her fingers when she pressed her hand against the wound to try to stop the flow. With her other hand, she grabbed her stunner, it slipped in her bloodied fingers. Finally, she managed to get a good grip. She raised the weapon and aimed.

Another round of beams sprayed the vessel until it was riddled with holes. Pepper felt her body sway, and then she slumped to the side. Her cruiser spun around, did a zig and zag, and jumped the curb when she lost control and ran into the high cement edge.

She slipped in and out of consciousness, but heard the man open the door. She heard her shallow breaths, pants, as she struggled to fill her lungs with air.

The man grabbed her arm and pulled her from the cruiser. He hoisted her over his shoulder, carried her away, walking toward a small hill. She groaned pitifully. Her body screamed in pain as each step he took jostled her body when he climbed the incline. The motion of his body, sudden movements, made her bleed more. She was thankful when he stopped. He laid her body on the cool mound of grass. She could tell he was leaning over her because she could feel the heat of his breath hit her face.

"Please..." she whispered.

"I'm sorry this had to happen." His tone sounded remorseful. "I tried to warn you to back off Cortez, but you're as stubborn as Breed said."

A sharp pain exploded inside her body when he tugged down her skirt. "Please...no. Breed—"

"Yeah, he isn't going to like this one bit. I hate to do it to him, but having Breed after me as opposed to Cortez seems the lesser of the two evils. Didn't I tell you not to screw with Cortez? Can't you take a hint? I aimed for your back that day because I knew you were wearing your vest. You're a very obstinate woman."

Pepper struggled to see his face. She wanted to look in the bastard's eyes, but he intentionally kept his head turned.

Her panties were ripped, legs spread...

"I have to make it appear like a random rape and murder. Cortez doesn't want the Feds coming down on him any harder than they are now. I told him it's a stupid ideal to kill an agent." He shrugged. "Cortez runs a billion-ducat drug empire, but sometimes he doesn't think things through. He lets his temper get the best of him. You really pissed him off." Finally, he looked at Pepper. "But, you know that, right? You know a lot about Cortez. He knows you are aware of more than you pretended."

Pepper tried to speak. Her voice came out ultra low, forced between shallow breaths, wheezes. "You don't have to do this."

"Unfortunately, I do."

The man finished, stood up, and pulled the latex from his pocket. He opened the sealed bag, carefully removed the plastic that contained a semen sample, and pushed it inside Pepper's vagina. He leaned close, whispered in her ear. "If it's any consolation, I'm truly sorry."

The man stepped back, withdrew a stunner, put his hand up, and spread his fingers in front of her face. He kept his hand an inch from her forehead, turned away, to keep the blood splatter from hitting him.

He fired.

### **Chapter Twenty-Six**

He'd done a stint in the military, so he knew the drill. The senator sat rigid in the chair. He smiled in an insolent manner when he noticed the seat they directed him to was shorter than the others in the room. A trick used during an interrogation to make someone feel small and inferior. He sat low, while the agents loomed over him. He shifted, adjusted his weight, and planted his feet firmly on the floor for balance.

He didn't care how long the agents intended to keep him there. He wasn't going to fidget, resist, or make a fuss even though he wanted to. It didn't matter he resented being interrogated in the first place. He was a senator, for god's sake!

The interrogation, informal meeting, whatever they called it was an insult. He was determined to suffer through the meeting with all the aplomb he could maintain. No wet-behind-the-ears peon agents were going to break him. No matter how many cheesy maneuvers they tried. The bright lights in his face were blinding and made his head throb. The temperature of the room was sweltering and made him sweat like a pig, making him damned uncomfortable. They offered him something to drink, but he refused, knowing eventually he'd have to use the facility. They would make him risk soiling his pants, to further humiliate him, before they allowed him to go to the restroom. Not to mention his DNA would be on anything he drank. He flatly refused any liquids.

The blond agent was personable, smiled occasionally, and tried to put him at ease as if he respected his position of authority. He spoke calmly. A couple of times he inquired about his comfort. A tactic used to give someone the impression he gave a damn. He imaged the agent's fair looks, boyish appeal, gentle blue eyes gave him the perception of innocence. No doubt, Agent McMahon played the good agent.

The senator eyed the other officer with contempt. Agent Uonaidas didn't try to pretend he wasn't a predator. He was muscular, thick across the chest and arms, with a honed physique that said ex-military even though he knew that wasn't the case. He'd read his personnel file. He kept his dark hair short and neatly trimmed. His brown eyes were intense and shrewd—a hard, bad ass. He held Agent Badass's gaze, concentrated, unblinking. They played the staring game. He finally blinked when his eyes dried out and burned. Agent Uonaidas apparently didn't have that problem.

Agent Uonaidas didn't play games. He was sure the man didn't have a qualm in his body about letting him know what he thought about his authority. It was amusing, but the agent maintained a measure of restraint and didn't immediately try to rip his head off like he did the other time. So the agent was on a leash, after all. It was a short one, but it existed.

The disdain Agent Uonaidas felt for someone in his position bled through his pores. The senator secretly relished the fact he deemed himself superior to the two agents, and they knew it. He wanted the two agents to know. With his constituents, he maintained a docile, even humble façade because it was necessary when dealing with the public who repeatedly elected him to office. Out in public, he smiled, turned on the charm, and used practiced suavity because it was necessary for a man in his position.

That wasn't the case with the agents. He allowed his ruthlessness and condescending manner to shine through. He wore it like a badge of honor, all brassy and bold, and didn't care the agents knew he thought they were smart, but not as intelligent as him.

"Can we make this brief? I do have business to attend to," Senator Sparks said.

"We have evidence we believe implicates your son Jordon in two murders," Breed said.

"If it is my son you are interested in, why am I here?" Smugness slipped and surfaced. The senator directed his question at Agent Uonaidas. They were in a pissing contest that he intended to win.

Breed walked over to the desk and retrieved a folder. He could have pulled the images from the crime scenes up on the visual, but there was nothing like an eight-by-ten glossy to get someone's attention. He opened the folder, pulled out the pictures of Abramson and Hilton, and tossed them on the table in front of the senator. Then he leaned forward, and one by one, he spread the gruesome photographs out for the senator to view.

"Strangled, sodomized...their cocks were practically severed." He shoved the photos closer. "A very disturbed individual did this. We think Jordon might be involved. What do you think, Senator Sparks? You think you screwed your son up in the head so much he's capable of such vile acts?"

The senator looked appalled at Breed's accusation, and then his expression changed to furious.

Aldie stepped in to defuse the situation. Breed pushed the senator too hard. He smiled a devil-may-care grin and looked at the senator sympathetically. Casually, he rested his hip on the corner of the desk. He moved the photos away, not too far, but enough to give the impression he disagreed with Breed's bullish tactics. "Senator Sparks, we know this isn't an easy matter to discuss, and we appreciate you giving us your valuable time. However, it's imperative we find out exactly what Jordon is capable of."

The senator relaxed his folded hands in his lap. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Did you send assassins to kill your son?" Breed asked abruptly.

Senator Sparks brushed a piece of imaginary lint off his tailored suit. "No, I did not. Why would I do such a thing?" he said mildly.

Breed asked, "Would you be willing to take a lie detector test?"

Senator Sparks stared at Agent McMahon boldly, ignored Agent Uonaidas. "I didn't send assassins to kill my son. I will testify to that under oath. If you insist I take a test, fine," he said, calm as a breeze. He knew they didn't have grounds to force him to do anything. He called the agents' bluff.

"Is Jordon mentally unstable enough to commit murder? He was institutionalized several times, once because he tried to kill you. Isn't that right?" Breed asked.

The badass was like a rabid dog. Once he latched on to something, he didn't let go. The agent's persistence was annoying. "I don't deny Jordon spent time hospitalized."

Breed was quick to counter the senator's statement. "What was his diagnosis? Schizophrenia? Multiple personality disorder? Just how nuts is your son?"

The senator eyed Agent Uonaidas. "My son's records are sealed for a reason. He was underage when committed. As far as I'm concerned, he has been fine since his release."

Breed scoffed rudely.

"I'm not sure what you want me to confess, Agent Uonaidas, but I really can't provide more information about Jordon that might help your case. If you think my son is responsible for those hideous crimes, then bring him in for questioning. Otherwise, we are through here." He stood up. "Unless you intend to do something foolish and try to detain me."

"You aren't under arrest, Senator Sparks," Aldie said.

Senator Sparks smiled triumphantly. He could see it irritated the other agent. Giving both men his back, he withdrew an embroidered handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands as if being in their presence had tainted him somehow. He cleansed his fingers and then tossed the cloth onto the table. He looked at the agents. "Well, I think we are done. I have more important matters to attend to, gentlemen. If you will excuse me."

"What happened at the boathouse?" Breed asked.

Breed saw the senator's hand waver over the doorknob. He hit a nerve and kept on digging. "The mentioning of the boathouse seems to set Jordon off. Why is that? Is he blackmailing you?"

Slowly, the senator turned around. Breed saw fear in his eyes for the first time. The carefully masked expression he maintained faltered. The movement was subtle, but noticed. "I'm not sure what you're talking about."

Breed said, "Jordon mentioned the boathouse and the unspeakable acts that went on there. Now, he didn't elaborate on all the unsavory details, but I'm assuming whatever took place left a bad impression on a young boy." He lied. He was making assumptions, but the senator didn't know it. He pushed harder. "Abramson and Hilton were in on these little episodes at the boathouse, weren't they? What did Jordon witness that's got his head so screwed up?"

The senator forced a cool pretense. He squared his shoulders, jutted up his pretentious chin, and settled his cold, unwavering eyes on Agent Badass.

"I think you are making assumptions. Ridiculous accusations that you can't validate, Agent Uonaidas. That isn't wise," he said sharply.

Breed motioned to Aldie, who removed a disc from the desk drawer. He put it in the side slot on the monitor, swiveled the screen around so the senator could see.

Senator Sparks's body tightened as he watched the monitor and saw the same stream Jordon showed him. He slammed the door closed. His body shuddered. Quaking, he pointed at the monitor. "Turn that damn thing off!"

Aldie intentionally froze the stream just when the man jerked the senator's head up, grabbed his cock, and the lustful enthrallment showed all over the senator's face.

"Can you stay a minute more, Senator?" Breed said sarcastically.

"You-you...bastards," the senator blustered, turning beet red. "Do you think to blackmail me into turning over my son?"

"Not at all, but we do want our questions answered. Bullshit aside," Breed said.

Senator Sparks puffed out his chest. He glared at Agent Uonaidas with all the disdain he felt for the man. "I have friends in high places. They won't take your street hustling tactics lightly. I could have your badge for this."

Breed said, "Would those same colleagues care if they saw this stream? I think so. You see, when you spend your time fucking over people, sometimes they relish in screwing you back. I think the release of this video would make many of your enemies happy as a hooker at a wealthy man's bachelor party—she knows she's going to get paid well. I could see your colleagues salivating and rubbing their hands together gleefully *if* they see this stream."

Aldie stepped in. He spoke calmly to placate the senator. "Of course, the last thing the agency wants is to let this get out. However, if it should accidentally get into the hands of the media, there is nothing we can do about it," he said, smiling. "Would you care for a cup of coffee?"

The senator's nostrils flared. His eyes narrowed, shifting between both agents. "You sons of bitches." He fumed, stalking back into the room. His shoulders sagged, and his chin dropped to his chest. His voice was low, barely audible. "What I'm about to say is off the record. When I finish telling you about my son, I want that damned stream."

Aldie removed the disc, slid it over the desk toward the senator as a show of goodwill.

"When Jordon was twelve, he was diagnosed with an adjusted social disorder. He started talking to invisible people, stayed secluded in his room for hours. When my wife or I tried to talk to him, he went into a rage. We thought he was going through a phase of childish temper tantrums. After I separated from his mother and married, Jordon became very despondent for long periods. When he wasn't sulking, he would lash out in angry episodes at whoever happened to cross his path. I assumed it was because he was upset that I'd had left his mother. Children do that. As soon as Jordon started acting irrational, I sought professional help. The doctors recommended therapy and medication. It seemed to help for a while."

"What did Jordon do to make you think the sessions and medication weren't helping anymore?" Breed asked.

The senator sounded weary. "Jordon taunted his sisters with threats about killing them. He'd break off the heads of their dolls and stick pins, objects, between the legs. One time, when I punished him for fighting with his sister, we found her cat hanging from a tree. We sent him away to an institution for six months," he said soberly.

"Well, it's apparent your son has more issues than I assumed. He masks his mental disorder very well." Breed glanced at Aldie and then focused on the senator. "I don't have a clear timeline between when Jordon first started acting out, became 'cured,' and then started with the strange behavior again. When did Jordon snap again? After the incident at the boathouse?"

The senator didn't respond. He suddenly turned off as if someone had put his vocal cords on mute.

"Senator?" Aldie prompted him.

Senator Sparks's expression hardened. His face contorted grimly. The lines above his eyebrows deepened into grooves and slanted downward. His lips pinched so thin, it gave the impression they had been sucked into his face. A straight, tight line replaced his mouth.

"That damned boathouse incident was an accident. Jordon never should have been there. I had no idea he was in the room until it was too late," he said bitterly.

"What...happened?" Breed asked. When the senator didn't respond, he stepped up the pressure. "We don't work for the SCIU, Sex Crime

Investigation Unit. Nor the DEA. So, if you fear punishment for anything you may have done years ago, we aren't interested. We are homicide investigators. Your son is possibly responsible for two deaths. If you have information that can help us solve this case, we want to hear it. Now."

The senator shuddered violently. He sank low, collapsed his lanky frame in the chair. The restraint and stiffness disappeared from his body. The hard exterior the senator wore vanished and was replaced by the scarecrow man. He went limp and appeared spineless.

"My wife and daughters went out of town for the weekend. I had a few friends over, and things got out of control. Too much liquor, drugs..." He shifted uncomfortably. "I didn't realize Jordon was in the building until it was too late. He saw everything. The orgy..." His voice faltered. Senator Sparks lifted his head and stared at the agents. "I'm not proud of what my son witnessed. I tried to talk to him, but he was so upset he ran out of the room. Afterwards, Jordon made it his life's pursuit to destroy me. When I acquired my senator seat, he insisted I resign. I refused. He swore he'd make sure everybody knew about the boathouse incident."

"Is that why you sent assassins after Jordon?" Aldie asked.

Breed said, "To silence him?"

The senator dragged his eyes toward Agent Uonaidas. "Those men were sent to *subdue* him, not kill. My intention was to send him away to a medical facility on Earth to keep him quiet."

The interrogation went on for hours. Breed and Aldie continued to question the senator. They drilled him repeatedly, posing the same questions in different ways, trying to trip him up. The senator never deviated from his story.

\* \* \* \*

Aldie sipped a drink and then looked at Breed. "You think he is bullshitting us?"

"I think he was pretty straight with us except for a few details. What he said happened at the boathouse seemed true, but he conveniently left out certain facts. I think Jordon was there, but as a participant."

Aldie grimaced. "That would make the senator one sick fuck."

"Yeah, it would. Think about it, Aldie. Jordon isn't messed up in the head for no reason. Yes, he has a mental disorder, but if what the senator said is true, he wasn't born that way. Something triggered Jordon into becoming a psychopath. Continuous sexual abuse by his father would do that."

"Okay, I'm following, but why Hilton and Abramson?"

"The senator admitted to having an orgy. I don't think it happened one time. The senator probably played his twisted games all the time with his buddies. It's obvious the senator is in the closet. What makes you think it's just about doing men? He's probably a child molester too. For all we know, he could be a part of the underground society Boys to Men."

Aldie made a gagging motion. "Those are bastards who have a network that markets and trades young boys for sex."

"Bingo," Breed said. "I would bet my ass if we check that angle out all three men are members."

"The SCIU have been trying to break that ring for years. They can't get close. No member records, access to the online site, nothing. They can't even get a judge to issue a warrant to search the company who host the Web site, which to me means somebody with a lot of clout is involved in the sicko society."

"You are probably right. That's why I'm not going to waste my time trying to legally bust the ring."

"I'm afraid to ask what that means. If you obtain data illegally, it won't hold up in court, Breed. A judge will toss the evidence out like yesterday's news."

A feral grin crossed Breed's face. "I'm not SCIU, remember. I need those records to provide a link between Senator Sparks, Hilton, and Jordon. Now, once I can validate there is a connection in the information, members' identifications will conveniently end up in the right hands. Hopefully, SCIU will know what to do with it. If not, I'm sure the media will."

"How do you intend to get your hands on the membership database if our own technical forensic team can't?" Aldie asked.

"I have a friend who is a wizard at hacking systems, but you didn't hear that from me."

Aldie chuckled. "Man, you are scary sometimes. You have contacts the agency would bend over and take it up the butt without lube to have on their side."

Breed didn't think it necessary to confirm or deny his partner's claim that sometimes he used unsavory resources to solve his cases. "Even if we prove all the men are connected, the murders related, we still need solid evidence Jordon did it. Then there are the odd pieces that fit the case, like why Coleson and the perp were hit."

"I have no idea about the perp, but Coleson was into men. Remember I told you how he harassed me?" Aldie reminded Breed.

"Coleson might have been into men, but that doesn't mean he was into boys. A gay man and child molester are not necessarily the same. People believe that falsehood, but in actuality, a majority of gay men is that way because they were molested. The thought of doing it to someone else turns their stomachs. Others are gay just because. Personally, I think they are born that way, but nobody wants to hear that. A few are molesters because of suffering physical abuse themselves. Statistics show that. However, men who are into men are 77not perverts and shouldn't be put in the same category as the deviants." Breed was leaning against the wall. He pushed away, stood erect, and faced Aldie. "I'm going to put my friend on the Boys to Men angle and—"

The door to the room burst open. Captain Foresight pointed at Aldie. "Out," he said before turning to Breed. "I need to talk to you."

"Okay, what's up?" Breed asked. He noticed the captain held himself reserved. His entire body tensed, a troubled expression covered his face.

"There has been, ah, an occurrence that involves you."

The captain's manner immediately alerted Breed something was wrong. He could tell his superior worked hard to maintain a stoic composure. He did that same thing when he faced parents and had to inform them their child was dead.

The captain's mouth was moving. He could see the motion of his lips. Why couldn't he understand what he was saying? The last thing Breed heard was the words "murder" and "Pepper." Everything else was white noise, garbled.

## **Chapter Twenty-Seven**

Hollis stood in front of Breed and tried to block his path. She put her flattened palms against his chest. She spoke, a soothing utterance. "I don't think this is a good idea, Uonaidas. I can have her body displayed on the visual."

"I prefer it this way." Breed maneuvered around Hollis and entered the morgue.

Hollis motioned to a technician to remove the sheet that covered Pepper's body. Her voice sounded like it came through a wind tunnel. "I cleaned her up..."

Breed held himself rigid. He looked over Pepper's body, leaned down, and kissed her lips. His forehead fell gently against hers. He kissed her tenderly, stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. He stood erect. "What happened?" he asked.

"I'm still working on the report, but—"

"Hollis, cut the bullshit. Give it to me straight."

"Preliminary findings show she took two hits, one to her left side, below the shoulder, and the other in the upper chest, beneath her breasts. The exterior of her vessel slowed the first blast. There was residue from the paint from the cruiser mixed with the blast that leads me to believe she was shot through the door first. We haven't located her vehicle, so I can't validate that yet. The next shot was a direct hit. Damn it, if only she could have gotten the defense shield activated in time."

"So what you are saying is Pepper had a chance of surviving if someone hadn't put a blast in her head?"

"It's all speculation until—"

"Was she pregnant?"

"Eight weeks," Hollis said softly.

Breed spun around on the balls of his heels and stalked from the room. He moved past the observation window, stopped, and then slammed his fist into the windowpane. The sheer force with which he hit the glass made it shatter on impact.

"Shit!" Aldie shouted, racing to Breed. He grabbed his arm, but he was flicked off as easily as a piece of lint.

Hollis stood there trembling and then moved into action. Blood was everywhere. She ran to get supplies to stop the flow before he bled to death.

Aldie reached for Breed again. He held up his hand to say stop. His partner froze. "I'm fine," he said.

"Hell, man, you are not fine! You just put your fist through a plate of glass. Jesus, at least let Hollis look at your hand."

When Hollis and her team advanced, Breed roared, "Don't fucking touch me!"

Aldie wiped his hand down his face in frustration. He tried to reason with him. "Your hand could be broken; not to mention the lacerations are deep."

"The way you're bleeding, you could have severed a major vein," Hollis added. She motioned toward the techs.

The two men hesitated, slowly advanced forward, periodically glancing apprehensively as they approached him.

As soon as one of the men touched him, Breed went into a rage. He grabbed one man by the neck and flung him across the hall. The next one groaned when Breed picked him up and tossed him away as easily as throwing a ball.

Aldie ran up on Breed to try to subdue him. He grunted, slid down the wall when his back slammed into the hard surface.

A few other men were in the hallway and witnessed what happened. They hurried over to assist.

"Leave him alone." Captain Foresight looked at Breed. "Get yourself together, Uonaidas. Don't make this personal. Hell, I know it is, but let the agency handle this one. Get yourself cleaned up. Put that fury you feel and use it to catch the bastard who killed Pepper."

"That is exactly what I intend to do," he said, ultra low.

"I don't mean for you to go off half cocked and think to do something stupid. You follow the books on this one. Have I made myself loud and clear?"

"Clear as ice, Captain. I will find the bastard who killed my woman, but I can't promise he will be alive when I bring him in." Breed fumed.

"That's not how we do things in the agency, Uonaidas," the captain reminded him.

Breed froze, whirled around, and stomped back over to where the captain stood. He withdrew his badge from his jacket pocket and tossed it at the captain's feet.

Aldie watched Breed leave. "You want me to go after him?"

"No, let him go. He needs time to cool his heels. As far as I'm concerned, he just went on a temporary leave of absence. I will smooth things over with the department head. Under the circumstances, I'm sure they will follow my lead on this. Damn it, how did this happen? Who would be stupid enough to hit Uonaidas's woman?"

"Obviously someone who is a lunatic," Aldie said.

"Yeah, a damned fool. Whoever did this will be one sorry son of a bitch when Uonaidas gets his hands on him."

"Pepper was working on a case that involved Cesar Cortez. Maybe he had something to do with it."

Captain Foresight scratched his head, puzzled. "Not his MO. Maybe if Pepper was done execution-style, Cortez might be a prime suspect." He glanced at Aldie. "You worked a stint in the DEA. You know Cortez better than most. Come on, we need to talk and see if we can figure this crap out. We need to find Pepper's murderer before Uonaidas does. If we don't, I'm going to have a damn good agent up for premeditated murder."

## **Chapter Twenty-Eight**

For a moment he cruised aimlessly around, hadn't a clue where he was going, just continued to drive.

He, who was always keenly aware of his surroundings, didn't allow things to get by him. People, faces, places, the smallest detail didn't escape his notice. The scenery passed by him in a blur. Had he been so emerged in his thoughts that he wasn't aware where he was going until he ended up in front of Pepper's apartment?

Numb, woozy, he felt disorientated as he got out of the cruiser and stood at the bottom of the steps to the entrance. For someone who was always conscious of what he did, every action carefully planned, he was clueless about how he ended up here.

His legs felt anesthetized, but he must have been walking because he was at the top of the stairway, keys in hand, working at the lock of the door.

When he entered the living area, the unique scent of Pepper invaded his nostrils. He inhaled deeply, wanting to suffocate on the fragrance and forever have it branded in his brain.

Slowly dragging his body about, he went from room to room. He wasn't looking for anything in particular. He just wanted to touch her things: a hairbrush with a strand of curls, a bottle of bright fuchsia nail polish, a black lacy thong, and a pair of silver and turquoise earrings they'd picked out together at the flea market. She'd harassed him into going with her that day. He smiled remembering she'd been relentless until he agreed. It wasn't his idea of a great Saturday afternoon, but admitted he'd enjoyed himself. They'd had fun. Pepper always brought out the best in him.

One by one, he walked through the apartment rooms and touched items to seal a memory in his head. The quiet enveloped him, drowned out all other sounds, as if he'd entered another realm when he stood in the center of her bedroom. For a brief moment, nothing existed except the need to never

leave this place. He felt compelled to stay forever, turn back time, and wait until Pepper came through the door.

He was a realist. He dealt in black and white, not what-ifs or false hopes. No matter how ugly the outside world seemed, he dealt with it head-on. This reality was a bitch, a swift kick in the head, a gut-wrenching pain that made him feel nauseated to his stomach.

Breed scanned the apartment a final time before he left. He slipped the earrings, a keepsake, into his pocket and turned his back on the only woman who ever meant something special to him.

\* \* \* \*

Monty opened the door so Breed could enter. "I got concerned after Monty phoned and told me what happened. He's searching for you. Nor did you answer my calls."

Breed stood comatose, not moving. Monty encircled his elbow and ushered him down the hallway into the den. He sat Breed on the couch. "You're bleeding." He fixed him a stiff drink, put it in his hand, and left the room to find tweezers, suturing adhesive, antiseptic, and something to bandage the wound.

When he returned, Breed hadn't twitched, not even an inch. He sat frozen in the same spot. The glass was in his hands, but he hadn't touched it. He remained in a void.

"I will clean you up as good as possible, but being a medical physician is not one of my fortes. You're going to need to see a professional. Here, let me see what I can do." Monty examined Breed's hand. He grimaced, shook his head. "Would you consider seeing a doctor? I can have one come—"

"No."

"Somehow I knew you would say that. You might want to sip that drink. The glass embedded is deep. It's going to take some digging."

"Just do it, Monty."

Monty started prodding the shards of glass with the tweezers. He concentrated on what he was doing while he talked. "I sterilized everything, so hopefully what I'm doing doesn't make things worse. Bacteria or an infection isn't anything to play with." He looked up to find Breed was staring somewhere off in the distance. He continued to work. He pulled the

large pieces of glass that were easy to get out first. Then he removed everything else he could see with the naked eye, rubbed on the antiseptic, sealed the cuts with the adhesive, and wrapped his hand with the gauze.

He gathered up all the items and put them away. He stood in front of Breed with his hands on his hips. "If your hand doesn't start to look better and you're still pale later, you go to the doctor whether you want to or not."

Breed eyed the bandage and then dropped his hand onto his lap. "Thanks," he mumbled.

Monty inhaled and then exhaled slowly as he tried to think of what to say. What did you say to someone at a time like this? The normal "I'm sorry about your loss" seemed too generic.

"I should have stopped her." Breed's voice was barely audible.

"From what you told me, you tried. She wouldn't listen. You can't beat yourself up for that. You did everything you could to get her removed from the case. It's not your fault Pepper died, Breed. Don't make yourself sick over guilt."

"I should have tried harder to keep her safe."

He sat down beside Breed on the couch. He studied his friend for a long time, seeing how destroyed he was. Understandable, he could only imagine how Breed must feel. Not that his anguish equaled his friend's, but there was a hollow place in his heart that wouldn't stop hurting. He imagined Breed's heart had stopped beating.

"I'm sure you did everything you could to protect—"

"Damn it, it wasn't enough!" The glass Breed held went flying through the air, hit a wall, and shattered on impact.

Without saying a word, Monty went over and began picking up the pieces of glass. He wiped the liquor that dripped down the wall, the spill on the floor, and then emptied everything into the trash. He fixed another drink and handed it to Breed. When he didn't take it, he enclosed his fingers around it.

"I'm sorry for what happened. God, I'm damned sorry. I know this sounds common, but eventually, once you catch the bastard, and justice is served and time passes—"

"Don't you dare give me that bullshit that time will heal everything."

Monty dismissed his angry lash with a wave of his hand. "I didn't mean you will ever forget Pepper. Time does help ease the pain."

Breed's nostrils flattened. His eyes constricted and darkened. "No, killing the bastard who murdered Pepper will numb the pain. Especially when I choke the life out of the asshole with my bare hands."

He threw up his hands. "Please, as your lawyer, I don't need to hear this. There is a big difference between temporary insanity and a premeditated plea in court. Not that I'm advocating you take matters into your own hands, but I completely understand. Just save me the details, okay?"

Breed slowly turned to Monty. His eyes were glossy, distant. "Pepper was pregnant," he said. "The bastard shot her in the head like an animal."

"Oh, God, I don't know what to say."

"There's really nothing you can say or do to make me feel better. I just thought I'd let you know. I quit the force today and don't feel an ounce of remorse. In fact, I should have done it sooner."

"That's not true, and you know it. You're upset and venting and need to take out your wrath on any- and everything right now. You loved that job. When you start to feel better, you will change your mind about the agency. Besides, if you quit, how can you help find Pepper's killer? Is that what she would have wanted?"

The container Breed held snapped under the pressure and burst.

"Damn it, Breed! Hell, if it will make you feel better, you can break every piece of damned crystal, glass, and mirror in my place if that's what you need to do. It's not going to bring Pepper back. Focus your anger on finding out who killed her. Don't let this break you. If you do, the bastard wins. Is that what you want?"

Breed growled. He shoved Monty. "Fuck you. I don't know why I came here anyway." He was up on his feet and heading to the door when Monty caught up to him.

He tried to catch his elbow. Breed slammed his fist into his chest, snarled, saying, "Back the fuck off, Monty."

Monty held his own. He grabbed Breed by the shoulder, spun him around, threw his chest into him, and forced him back against the wall. This time Breed found a finger jabbed into his chest as Monty emphasized each word. "Let's get something straight. What happened is so fucked up I'm still trying convince myself I'm not in some horrible nightmare. I can't begin to know how you feel, but I'm smart enough to realize it has to hurt like a bitch. You can rant and rave, throw a few punches at me if it will help.

Whatever you need to get it together. What you will *not* do is let this eat at you like an infestation."

Breed studied the floor a long time before he dragged his eyes to him. "I should go."

"Yeah, like I'm going to allow that to happen. Come with me." Monty took Breed's arm and led him to the staircase. "I have a spare bedroom. You can stay here tonight. Tomorrow, if I think you're in any condition to be alone, you can go home. I'm not taking no for an answer."

The room was dim. There were a couple of recessed lights on in the ceiling, and on the walls were two sconces. The floor-to-ceiling windows were closed behind heavy drapes. As soon as they stepped over the threshold, the curtains opened, sliding along the tracks, illuminating the area in a soft glow. The moonlight filtered in. The temperature was comfortable, not too hot or cold, cool. Fragrant scents, eucalyptus and woody, coming from the diffusers bathed the room in a calming aroma. A soft, lyrical tune sounded, piped in from hidden speakers somewhere in the room.

"The cleansing chamber is over here."

Monty opened the French hand carved doors to reveal the bathing area that had a sunken tub large enough for four. It was semi-encased behind a stained glass divider, quatre shower heads pointed down toward the tub, mahogany steps led up the basin, and the textured wood base that enclosed the tub completed the modern design. Slender crystal vases sat on the surface, decorated with illuminating rocks and long-stemmed water lilies.

The countertop ran the length of one wall and had three bowls, one with a waterfall head, the others raised spouts made of porcelain that complemented the rich cherry finish of the wood surface. There were shelves, fluffy cotton towels, a pair of slippers, and two robes neatly tucked in each bind. Toiletries for both males and females were available. Everything was provided for someone who didn't come prepared to spend the night but needed to. The room was well equipped like an upscale hotel suite. A chair and ottoman, plush carpet that molded and massaged the feet, and controlled air completed the cozy room.

"Shower or bath?" Monty asked. When Breed didn't respond, he chose for him. "Bath on." The voice-activated faucets on the tub enabled. "I think a good, relaxing soak will do some good. The tub is very comfortable; seat cushions, headrest, and jets should do the trick. I have fallen asleep in it

more than once. Don't worry if that happens because the infrared sensors will sound an alarm if you slip beneath the water line."

He assumed Breed was listening because he nodded occasionally.

"I will be downstairs. If you need anything, contact me by the intercom."

\* \* \* \*

Breed stood there in a daze, still, silent, unable to move even to undress. Periodically, his thoughts drifted to Pepper, and a surge of fresh anguish engulfed him.

Finally, he forced himself to start undressing. The entire effort seemed laborious, but he managed. Naked, he stood in front of the mirror and stared at his reflection. An eerie sight looked back at him. Bloodshot eyes, puffy and swollen, dark circles beneath, and skin, pallid and sweaty, met his gaze. He ran his fingertips back and forth over the after-five shadow on his chin. He needed to shave. He didn't, the mere thought of doing the menial task made him weary.

He turned away from his reflection, unwilling to face the reality of guilt that showed through. A face that was culpable and silently chastised his conscience gawked back at him. He should have done more to get Pepper away from Cortez. The self-ridicule coupled with the emptiness inside made the lining of his stomach burn—he vomited in the basin.

He sank into the tub, submerged beneath the water until it reached his chin. He stared at the square Art Deco blocks of wood and ceramic on the wall in front of him. He flipped on the jets. Concentrated on the sound of steady rushing water, he tried to forget, if only for the moment. He listened to the noise that helped to drown out the voice inside his head.

The tension in his body started to ease. The heat of the water soothed him physically, but helped little to fade the constant pain in his heart. Every time he thought about Pepper, his heart stuttered.

Breed leaned back and rested against the pillows, closed his eyes, and tried not to think. He forced himself to lie there and block any thoughts that tried to surface. Even something mundane, like he really needed to shave, he forced into the back of his head until he felt like a zombie. He existed, could function, but was dead inside.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed when a cool breeze washed across his face when the door opened. He heard the pitter-patter of bare feet move across the floor. He felt Monty standing beside the tub, looking down at him.

Monty set the tray on the side of the tub. "I thought about using plasticware until I realized I don't own a piece of it."

Breed opened his eyes, peered at the glass decanter, and grinned. "I owe you a set of crystal. Sorry," he mumbled.

"Accepted. I brought you something to nibble on. You probably can't remember the last time you ate. Fruit, cheese, chicken salad, just in case you're hungry. There is water, juice, and wine. Do you need anything else?"

"Yeah, a large bottle of scotch and to collapse in bed in a drunken stupor in hopes that, when I wake up, the nightmare will be over."

"If what I said earlier about time healing the pain, et cetera belittled how you feel, I apologize. Pepper was special to me too. Of course, what I feel can't scratch the surface of what you are going through. I know that. It was a stupid thing to say."

Breed halfway opened his eyes and studied Monty. "I didn't take offense." He closed his eyes.

The room remained quiet as Breed and Monty became absorbed in their own thoughts. Not sure what Monty was thinking, he tried to deflect his own thoughts to something besides the uneasiness that suddenly fell between them like a blanket. It separated them, forced a boundary, made him think there was a reason his friend appeared uncomfortable.

"What is it? Feel free to speak freely," he said.

Monty stalled, opened his mouth to say something, and ended up stammering, which told Breed he wasn't about to say what he thought, but abruptly changed, for whatever reason. "I-I was wondering about the water. I mean the temperature. Everything is set to my specifications." He ran his fingers through the water as if testing the heat level. "If it's too cool, I can add hot water." He reached for the spigot.

Breed caught his wrist.

"What if I say I need you?"

There, it was out. The unspoken question that lingered between them since Monty had entered the room spoken. The implication of his question was clear, lay heavy between them, and increased the disquiet in the room.

Breed opened his eyes and watched Monty, keenly aware he'd caught him off guard. He also saw reluctance, maybe hesitation. What did it matter? The unreadable expression surfaced on Monty's face. For a second he wondered if he'd read him wrong until Monty forced a smile.

"Well, that would certainly heat things up?"

He stood up, braced one hand on Monty's shoulder to balance himself, stepped from the tub, and leaned in. "I'm not interested in getting into anything hotter except you. Answer my question."

"I don't know. It doesn't seem right," Monty blurted out. He looked immediately contrite. "I didn't mean to say that. It's just—what do you think?"

Breed understood his concern. "We were going to be together sooner or later. I told Pepper about us. She knew. Don't you want me?" He twisted his fingers in his belt loops, jerked him forward, soaking Monty from head to toe when their bodies collided. "How we feel is not new—I need you."

Either Monty never responded to his earlier question, or he was too impatient and consumed with what he wanted to hear an objection. Regardless, he led them into the bedroom. If Monty didn't want this, he would say so.

Breed kissed him, backing into the bedroom before he stopped. He grabbed the bedspread, snatched it off the bed, and tossed it to the floor. Then he was back, standing toe to toe, working on Monty's shirt. He yanked it from his pants, lifted it, and pulled it free. He threw it somewhere behind him. Next, he unbuckled the belt, unzipped his pants, and tugged them down his muscular hips until the trousers pooled at his feet.

He cupped Monty's thickness, encircled the hard cock, stroking back and forth. With his other hand, he outlined his full bottom lip with his thumb. "If this isn't what you want, you'd better say something now," Breed murmured. His gaze met his as he leaned in for a kiss. "There's no turning back."

Monty captured Breed's strong jawline, cupped his face, whispered over his lips, saying, "I'm not running anymore. I'm here. Take your pleasure—use me. I wanted this for a long time. I've always loved you."

The sensual intensity of his stare shook Breed to the core. His words threatened to knock him on his butt. He trembled, wobbled with the

significance of Monty's admission, and burned with fire that ignited hearing the declaration.

He lifted Monty, fell forward, and tumbled onto the bed. He landed on top, their foreheads pressed together, mouths within kissing distance. He finished tugging his pants off, whispering, "I know I need to take things slow, but I really, really need to fuck you now."

A luminous smile curled Monty's mouth. "Patience was never one of your virtues."

Breed chuckled, reached into the nightstand, rummaging around. He looked at Monty. "You don't have any protection."

"I do, but it's not necessary."

He lifted his eyebrow. "You want it raw?" He always used protection with males, detoxified regularly. He knew he was clean.

"I don't want anything between us. No barriers. I trust you." Monty spread his thighs like an offering.

The sight was an enticement, and seeing the innocent rosebud made Breed suck in air. Quickly, he used lubricant to coat his cock and moisten Monty's ass to make entry easier. With each being prepared, he moved the tube aside, rolled on top, looming over and between his legs. Breed framed his face in his hands, pressed down until he felt the tip of his cock meet the puckered entrance. "Don't move," he murmured, gliding his cock back and forth to further mix the lube over his dick and wet the snug hole. "Not an inch," he uttered, pushed forward and screwed the thick crown about until he felt the head break the virgin seal. He thrust his hips, surged up and in, at the same time he crushed his mouth against Monty's to inhale his startled grunt that escaped when he penetrated.

"Christ..." Monty pushed his flattened palm against Breed's chest to hold him back. He inhaled sharply, released the air from his lungs slowly. "Give me a minute."

Anxiousness for his surrender made Breed simmer with red-hot anticipation. He clenched his thighs, flexed, and held still, forcing himself not to move while he waited for Monty to put him out of his misery. The tight band squeezed what little of his cock he had in, driving him nuts with the insane desire to fully plunge and satisfy the maddening urge to consummate. He waited impatiently for the cue to continue.

"I'm dying here," he said, captured Monty's arms and raised them above his head. He held his wrists in one hand. With the other hand, he worked the swollen crest of his penis and pushed through the resistance. The pressure was unbearable, sweet torment that locked his cock in a vise grip of searing heat. Slowly, he continued to work his cock inside the tight ass. He swayed his hips, gently pushed, entering the untried territory until he felt the passage distend and mold around his entire dick.

He nibbled his chin, nose, along his shoulders, taking tiny bites before he washed his tongue over the areas he just assaulted. He kissed Monty hard, demandingly, slanted his mouth repeatedly, intent to devour him whole. When Monty started kissing him back, he rocked his hips, started a slow gyration, back and forth, picking up a succinct tempo of beats that rippled pleasurably through his body like sparks as he drove the entirety of his length into his succulent ass.

"Ah, there. Right...there," Breed said. His voice quivered as he threw back his head, closed his eyes, and savored the initial quickening that started in a man's groin and built to a frenzy just before he ejaculated.

A low moan of pleasure sounded, rumbled through Breed's chest, erupted with a rush at the same time he felt his cock spill his seed inside his man.

As soon as he could feel his legs, Breed carefully withdrew, rolled onto his side, gathering Monty in his arms as he shifted position. He kissed him lightly, brushing his lips tenderly over the soft and moist mouth. The first time a man took him, he remembered being so enthralled with the totality of it all, he didn't climax. He slipped his hand between them and masturbated the firm length straining between Monty's thighs until he gasped, shuddered, and filled his palm with cum.

"You okay?" Breed asked.

Monty nodded. He said, "Do you mind if we bathe together? I feel raw." Breed frowned. "I tried taking it easy and to not hurt you. Was I too rough?"

"It felt like I expected a cock inside me to. I used the butt plug to get ready for our first time together. Of course, the dildo size was nothing close to your fat cock. My ass burned when you first penetrated. The pressure of being crammed full hurt. I didn't care because I knew the pain would be insignificant compared to the pleasure I'd experience. Relaxing is the key. After that, my flesh naturally loosened and accepted you inside me. I'm not disappointed. Sore"—he laughed, wrapped his arms around Breed, and kissed him—"but not disappointed. How about that bath to help soothe my ass?"

The strength of Monty's fingers massaged oil into Breed's neck, shoulders, and back, working out the knots of tension. Enclosed in Monty's powerful arms, they lay chest to back, and let his friend work what he considered magic. His long, thick fingers kneaded the kinks out, made Breed feel sedated, temporarily at peace.

"I enjoy the feel of your skin beneath my hands. Your muscles are soft enough to appeal to the sensitive sensors in my fingertips. The muscles"—he stroked the expanse of Breed's arms, lingered on his biceps—"firm and strong make me feel protected wrapped in your arms. You provide something a woman cannot, a sense of security," Monty said. He kissed the back of Breed's head, laid his cheek there.

Breed didn't respond. He already knew what Monty had just figured out.

Monty pressed his lips against his damp hair. He whispered, "Why so quiet? Have you fallen asleep on me?"

"Monty, I prefer not to talk—" The words ended abruptly when Breed realized he came close to repeating the exact words that led to his last argument with Pepper. She wanted more communication, to share feelings, and him to stop being emotionally dysfunctional. Now that he thought about her request, it didn't seem like the end of the world. Unfortunately, hindsight was not foresight.

He should have told Pepper he loved her.

Breed drew up his legs toward the center of his body. He curled forward, wrapped his arms around his thighs, and rested his chin on the top of his knees. His tone sounded off-key, strained. "When I got shot in the chest, I thought that was the worst pain—I was wrong. I'd rather get hit ten times than feel the way I do now," he admitted, burying his face between his knees. He stared at the small ripples in the water until it blurred. A quick swipe with the back of his hand cleared his vision. "I'm hurting, Monty..."

Monty listened, understanding what his friend needed the most. He secured Breed in his arms once again, encircled his body in a cocoon of solace, offering a place for him to let go and grieve openly.

# **Chapter Twenty-Nine**

"Come on, Jordie, don't start freakin' out on me now. We have places to go, people to see, business to take care of," the voice said, singsongy, intentionally taunting.

Jordon sat Indian style in the center of the bed, hands clamped over his ears, rocking back and forth in a feverish tempo. "No. No. No," he cried pitifully, "you promised no more killings."

"Ah, I lied, you baby-shit. Don't I always?" The voice chuckled, and then the tone turned stern. "Don't you dare start wimping out on me now. You got that? Now, get your pansy ass in gear. Time is wasting."

Jordon sniffled, wiped his nose with the back of his hand. "I can't do it anymore."

"Remember the boathouse!"

He started flailing his arms wildly in front of his face, all around him, striking out at the voice that existed in the dark and murky depth of his mind. "Leave me alone! Go away!" he screamed, slamming his hands back over his ears.

The voice laughed, a sinister sound that made tiny bumps pop out on Jordon's arm, and curdled his blood.

"Okay, baby-shit, if that's how you want to play it. I'll take care of things like I always do. My treat. Just for you, panty-wipe."

Jordon curled up in a fetal position, squeezed his eyes tight, and started humming to block out the horrible voice inside his head. He struggled not to listen or obey the terrible things the voice demanded he do. The voice was persistent, a nagger, constantly urging and nipping at his conscience until he preferred his head explode than listen to anything the voice said. The voice was bad. A Satan incarnated his next victim's worst nightmare.

The voice was quiet a long time.

Jordon released his ears, scanned the room with his eyes, searching the darkness. Nobody was there. Finally, blessedly, he was alone.

"Hey, baby-shit, guess who called? Your buddy Aldie," the voice whispered.

The abrupt interruption in the silence made Jordon flinch.

"If that ain't a kicker, huh?"

"You leave Aldie out of this."

"Feeling compassionate, are we? After all I did for you, you cozy up to an agent who is using you. You know that, right?"

"Aldie has nothing to do with this."

"Aw, Jordie, don't tell me you falling for his bullshit. You know what I think about bullshitters, right? They just like them cocksuckers."

"No...please, don't hurt him," Jordon said softly. He tensed, waiting for the voice to deny his request. Mock, taunt, and give him hell for having the balls to ask for mercy for Aldie.

Not a peep or squeak sounded. The room grew silent, still.

The voice was gone this time. Jordon knew because he didn't feel the powerful hold he had on him. His body slumped, he relaxed—then he broke out in a cold sweat and started to shiver thinking about where the voice had gone.

\* \* \* \*

The house was empty and quiet and made the click of his boots more pronounced as Captain Foresight made his way down the hallway path toward the back of the house toward the kitchen.

"Hey, Benny! Here, boy!" he called, listened, waiting for the sound of the chain that jingled around his golden retriever's neck when he ran.

No noise. Nothing.

That was odd. The captain's features hardened. If that damned housekeeper locked his dog in the linen closet again, she could kiss her job good-bye. It wasn't that she cleaned that great, but fucked like a champ. He could replace her with a snap of his fingers.

He whistled for Benny.

"The bitch," he cursed under his breath.

He entered the dim room and looked around. "Lights on." The room remained dark except for the fluorescent bulb over the stove. He repeated his command and then manually flipped on the light switch.

Golden, hairy paws stuck out from behind the counter. Captain Foresight walked to his dog. He kneeled down. "What's the matter, boy?" He ran his hands over the furry coat and then abruptly jerked his fingers away when he touched something wet. When he raised his hand, he saw the blood on his fingers.

"What the hell?" He whirled around, searching the room. Listened for sounds an intruder might still be in the house. All was quiet except the tick tock of the clock hanging on the wall. He bent, ready to pick up his dog, when a shadow moved in his peripheral vision. The captain whirled around. Somebody slammed the butt of something hard into the side of his head.

Captain Foresight moaned, shook his head, trying to ward off the woozy feeling.

"For a second I feared I hit you too hard. You were out for a few minutes."

The captain looked up at the man standing over him. He tried to rear back, but realized he was tied to one of the barstools at the counter. He struggled with the binds that were around his wrists. He looked up, glowering. "What the hell is this about?"

The man snapped the latex gloves in place before he responded. "This, I'm afraid, is business. What else?" he said, reaching into his pocket to retrieve the garrote. He dangled it in front of the captain's face. A smile that looked more like a leer curled his lips. "Now, I know you are surprised to see me even though you are fighting to hide the shock. I can see it in your eyes." He leaned in, sniffed. "I smell the fear too."

"Are you insane? You think you can just break into my house and get away with this?"

"I feel pretty confident. Oh, by the way, your furball is useless. He came right up to me and tried to lick my face. I gave him an affectionate pat and then shoved an ice pick in his belly."

The captain struggled, straining against the restraints. "You bastard. You ungrateful prick, what is this about?"

"The abuse has to stop."

The captain narrowed his eyes, glared at the man. "I knew there was something twisted in you—"

He shoved a wad of paper into the captain's mouth. "We've had enough conversation. It's time for action." He started working methodically, put the noose around the captain's neck, and started tightening the wire. He screwed and screwed until Captain Foresight turned beet red. He let go, took a step back, and examined his handiwork.

"Not too tight. I need you to live long enough to suffer before you die. I'd like to just put a blast in your head, but Jordon seems to favor long and tedious torture. Oh, by the way, he told me about your little parties in the boathouse. You are one sick fuck. I believe he called you all cocksuckers, the men who attended the orgies, sucking and fucking, banging each other." The man grinned. He pulled out another piece of paper-thin metal from his jacket pocket. He stretched it, entwined the ends around the tips of one finger on each hand, until the wire was taut.

The captain spit the paper out. He gagged, coughed out air. "That happened a long time ago. I was young and into some crazy shit. Okay, I admit that," he rasped, fighting against the band around his neck.

The man picked up the paper and crammed it back in place. He patted the captain's cheek. "So, you think because time has passed that sicko memories are forgotten? Or should be forgiven? I don't think so. Besides, you haven't stopped your little perverted games, just changed the target."

Captain Foresight kicked his legs wildly and strained to get free.

The man unzipped Foresight's pants and pulled them down and around his thighs, as far as the trousers would go, before stopping at his knees. He whirled the chair around, shoved the captain forward, removed the long, slender bat—

Unable to cry out, a muffled scream sounded from the captain.

The man hummed to himself, continued to force the object up and up...

## **Chapter Thirty**

With Breed AWOL, Aldie had no choice but to take over the case and handle matters. That didn't necessarily mean he wasn't sick about what he had to do. It was just business, as far as he was concerned. So why did he almost gag and have to swallow quickly to keep the bile from erupting when Jordon put his mouth on his cock?

He had gotten into character before with no reservations. It was an act, a performance necessary to get what he wanted, and had never bothered him until now. This time his stomach protested, feeling queasy, and he forced himself not to puke as the senator's son's head bobbed up and down between his thighs.

He knew why. This was bullshit, Aldie thought. Breed had quit, acted like a coward, and now he had to suffer the attention of Jordon to keep the agency off his ass while Breed got away scot-free and wasn't held accountable. Pepper's death was difficult, and he understood this, but still a twinge of animosity surfaced that Breed wasn't here to take the heat because the case remained unsolved.

Disgruntled, Aldie shoved Jordon away. He stood up, shoved his flaccid cock inside his pants, and stormed into the cleansing chamber. He ignored Jordon, who hurried behind him like a flunky. He halted, spun around, and pushed his palm in his chest to keep him back. "I need to take a piss. I think I can handle that without you," he said, slamming the door in Jordon's face.

"Jesus..." He fell back against the doorframe, threw his hands over his eyes, and told himself to get it together, or his chance of arresting Jordon tonight for murder was lost. Wheatland was after him for neglect of duty regarding the perp's shooting, forcing the issue, and the department heads were starting to listen to the prick's recommendation for suspension and a thorough investigation. He didn't need another red mark on his already

marred personnel record. What he had to have was an arrest of a lunatic who was responsible for hideous crimes to vindicate himself in his superior's eyes.

The media overexposed the Abramson and Hilton murders until the public was terrified a serial killer was on the loose. Anybody could be a target, nobody was safe, not until the force apprehended the maniac. The citizens wanted somebody to hang for the horrible crimes. It was up to him to apprehend Jordon for the murders. He couldn't afford to fail.

The mere thought made Aldie's fingers tremble when he tried to turn on the faucet. Finally, he managed to start the water flowing, cupped his hands beneath the chilliness, and doused his face a couple of times.

Aldie stared into the mirror. He looked like crap. He felt like it too, all jittery, as nervous tension ran through his body. He withdrew a small vile from his pocket, opened it, and took a couple of sniffs. When he faced his reflection again, his eyes were brighter. He actually grinned as the drug took effect and left him feeling hyped. He took another hit just in case. His hands were still shaking.

The icy water stung his face, but he kept splashing the frigid water because it helped him feel alive and made his ashen skin rosy. As he dragged the bath towel over his face, he kept telling himself to get into character. Everything depended on pulling this off. When he finished, he looked somewhat like himself. More calm, cool, and collected, the old "happy-go-lucky" Aldie who kept a smile on his face was back.

He put the Bosh back inside his pocket. After this case was over, he told himself, he'd stop using. *Yeah*, *right*.

The drugs took care of his head. Now, he needed to do something to get his body to react to the whacko standing outside the door. Jordon had been after him for weeks. Everybody wanted a piece of his ass—literally, he thought with a smirk. Being a pretty boy could be positive and a curse. Aldie shrugged off the thought. One step at a time, he'd deal with Jordon and then the other dogs nipping at his heels. Wheatland was at the top of his list now that he'd permanently crossed through the other names.

Just thinking about boning Jordon made his cock shrivel and hang like a wet noodle.

He had a cure for his deflated penis. His high was working like a charm. He felt elated, electrically charged, ready. What he needed was something to get him in character to hammer the whiny sicko and get things finished.

"Come on...Come on," he said, chanting to himself. He pumped his cock, demanding it to rise. Aldie looked down at the limp appendage dangling between his thighs. "Shit," he cursed. He sat on the toilet lid, grabbed his dick, closed his eyes, and conjured up the image of the one person who could make a eunuch horny. The mental picture of Breed surfaced—his erection was instantaneous and came to life so quickly it startled Aldie.

Eager, Jordon jumped from the couch when Aldie entered the room. "Are you okay? I was starting to get worried."

Aldie gritted his teeth at the childlike pitch of Jordon's voice. He stalked over to the couch, stopped, and studied Jordon, thinking how innocent he appeared. As the old adage says, "a wolf in sheep's clothing," Aldie thought.

Without any warning, he grabbed Jordon's arm, whirled him around, and put his palm on his lower back and shoved him forward. If he had to fuck Jordon, then that's what he would do. He jerked down his pants to his knees, spread his ass cheeks, and slammed his hips forward.

"Ouch," Jordon shrieked. He reached behind and held Aldie still. "So rough..." Jordon looked over his shoulder with a wounded expression, and then his lips curled crudely until the smile turned malicious. "Okay, buddy, if that's how you want to play it. Let's do this. Go ahead, give it to me hard. Just remember turnabout is fair play when I finally get to nail that pretty ass," Jordon said, and winked at Aldie.

The sudden metamorphosis of Jordon's tone and manner startled Aldie. Gone was the timid, spineless wimp. He remained fixated on the man in front of him, cocked his head to the side to view what Jordon had become, as if it baffled him. He asked, "Jordon?"

"Ah, come on, buddy. It's me, Jordon—Jordie. Hell, it doesn't matter what you call me. We're one in the same in here." Jordie-Jordon pointed at his head. "Capiche?"

Aldie stared, dumbfounded. The possibility Jordon had multiple personalities had come up more than once during the investigation. After what the senator admitted about his son's history, the likelihood that Jordon was capable of committing murder no longer could be considered speculation.

Jordon was certifiably insane, a schizophrenic. A fact that Aldie realized, but still, seeing him transform before his eyes unsettled him to the point he just stood there a minute, unblinking.

Jordie-Jordon snickered. "What, you not interested in fucking anymore? I can respect that, buddy. My cock would probably shrink too if I just realized what is going on." He jerked his pants up around his hips, fastened them, and plopped down on the sofa. His expression blasé, he lifted an eyebrow at Aldie. "So, since we ain't fucking, now what? You want to talk about what happened to Hilton and Abramson, those cocksuckers? Yeah, I did them."

Aldie withdrew his stunner and pointed it at Jordie-Jordon. "You just confessed to murder. You're under arrest."

Jordie-Jordon scoffed. "Clean out your ears, buddy. I said I *did* the two cocksuckers. You know, we bumped uglies, know what I mean? Hey, you got a recording going? Yeah, probably, so for the record—*I said I* did *the assholes!*" he shouted.

"You're going in anyway. Let the prosecutor work out the details of the evidence. I'm sure when the investigation is complete and we get all the forensics back, your DNA will be all over Hilton and Abramson. Not to mention we can do handwriting analysis on the notes you left in their mouths. Remember that, nutcase. 'Eat this and die, you sick bastard.' Even if we don't get a DNA match, proving that was your writing will seal the case. That's enough to hang you." Aldie grabbed Jordie-Jordon and forced him to stand. "So, Jordon, Jordie, whoever the fuck you are, is going down."

Jordie-Jordon whined, his tone high-pitched. The theatrics of his actions obvious, he pleaded, "Oh, please, Mr. Officer, don't turn me in. I'm innocent, I swear." Tears streamed down his cheeks. He sniffled, trembled, looked up at Aldie with wide eyes, begging. "I'm innocent," he said, and then just as quickly he morphed again. His voice thickened, came out raspy. "You're a piece of work, you know that, buddy? I can turn the tears on and off like this." He snapped his fingers in front of Aldie's face.

"I don't care if you can force a flood of tears out your ass, you nutcase. You're under arrest, and I'm going to make sure you never walk the streets again." Aldie started dragging him toward the door.

"Hey, buddy, you think your arrest will stick when I get in front of a jury, bawling my eyes out, speaking about the hideous abuse I suffered under my father? He's one sick bastard. Yeah, he's been doing me since I was six. When I turned ten, he started sharing me with his friends. All cocksuckers that were a part of the Boys to Men society. The illustrious Senator Sparks pimped me to his cronies in return for favors that helped him ascend in his political career."

"I'm sure all that will be taken into consideration by the courts. If you're lucky, you will spend the rest of your life in an institution."

"What about your involvement, buddy? You think the courts will be interested in knowing that, even though you knew about my *delicate* condition, you continued to screw me? You suspected abuse, knew I feared authority, but you continued to use that against me. You rather coerced me, don't you think? The pansy-ass Jordie would have done anything you asked because he was too stupid to know you were playing him. You used Jordie's disability and vulnerability against him. Filled his head with nonsense. Not to mention all that physical—that would be you banging him—attention kept his head twisted. Jordon was starving for attention. You played a major role in exacerbating his illness until he snapped. Hell, he didn't know if he was coming or going. The proper thing to do when you realized how disturbed Jordie was should have been to get him some professional help. What do you think the courts will think about that?"

Aldie jerked Jordie-Jordon's arm to get him moving. "I did what I had to do." He stopped at the door. He kept his eye on Jordie-Jordon, his weapon pointed at his head, as he spoke into his communicator. "We're coming out." He left the agents on the other side of the door know not to start blasting.

Jordie-Jordon actually smiled as the officers converged on him. He held up his wrists willingly and let an agent put the loops on and activate the bands. He smirked at Aldie. "This isn't going to stick, but I will play along."

"It will *stick* once the evidence is processed. DNA, handwriting analysis, as I said earlier...you're toast." Aldie leaned into Jordie-Jordon, he said, "You are sick, I admit that, but our conversation will convince a prosecutor you're aren't as whacked-out as you want everyone to think. Even in your delusional state, you carefully planned and executed the

murders of Hilton and Abramson. That shows awareness that you knew what you were doing. Not to mention you had a motive...revenge."

"I like your confidence, buddy. You're real slick, like a snake." He winked.

Aldie didn't know what he meant by that statement. Not that he really tried to figure it out. As far as he was concerned, nothing Jordie-Jordon had to say from this point forward mattered. He was going to burn for killing Hilton and Abramson. He might get tossed in a mental hospital, and that didn't sit well with him, but he had to admit the man was insane. Whatever happened to Jordie-Jordon, confinement or an institution, he would make sure he never saw the light of day again. He shivered thinking about someone as nutty as him ever getting free.

Aldie looked up when Jordie-Jordon called his name. The man showed teeth, a wide grin from cheek to cheek, his expression eerie as hell that it made him shudder. He started to turn away when he said, "Hey, buddy, I thought you were an ace detective. Hell, man, if you think you got evidence on me, at least get it correct. The note said 'Suck this and die, you sick bastard.' Get it right, donut muncher." Jordie-Jordon laughed shrewdly. He chatted up the agents who escorted him away.

## **Chapter Thirty-One**

Breed started to ignore the caller when he displayed the identification number and saw the text "Anonymous" on his IIM display. He stared at the word a minute, mumbled a few unsavory words, and then connected. He didn't say anything. Whoever was on the other end of the communicator wouldn't respond, give him his name, or answer any questions. He listened.

"I was sorry to hear about your girlfriend's death."

Breed tensed. Pepper's death and the circumstances hadn't been released. The DEA was holding information back until they could thoroughly check out Cortez. *How the hell does he know?* Breed thought. He heard the man moving, the sound of papers or something shuffling, and then the caller started talking again.

"I know things because I'm in a position to," the caller said, as if he read Breed's thoughts. There was a long pause. The man said, "There's been another homicide, and you need to be at the crime scene. There are things going on you should know."

"I'm no longer employed with the agency."

"I haven't known you to be a quitter, Agent Uonaidas. In fact, I counted on you to be your tenacious self and work the case until it is solved to my satisfaction. Otherwise, I wouldn't have wasted my time with you."

Breed looked around him into the vessels close by. He tried to figure out if someone was tailing him, watching. Nobody seemed particularly interested in what he did. The other drivers and passengers didn't even look in his direction. He studied one man who was talking on his interlink, he could tell because he saw his mouth moving, hand gestures, things people did when they were having a conversation. The man shifted in his direction. Their eyes met. Breed stared at him for a long time. The man frowned, activated his privacy shield, and then zoomed forward and disappeared into the traffic ahead.

"I'm still trying to figure out why you keep contacting me. Providing hints, information. What's this all about?" He didn't expect the man to respond, so it caught him off guard when he did.

"Me and my, ah, superior have a vested interest in seeing that Senator Sparks is brought down a peg or two. It's not just because of the Abramson Bill, but there are other things about the senator the public needs to be privy to. Sordid details a presidential candidate shouldn't be allowed to keep secret."

"Then why not just leak it to the media like the government normally does?"

"If it was up to me, the information about Senator Sparks would have been released a long time ago, when it was discovered something wasn't quite right about the man. During the vetting process for senator, things, ugly circumstances, came out about the senator and his son. Some people in high places let it slip by for their own selfish reasons. You know, one hand greases the other. However, as soon as he made his intentions known about running for the presidency, my superior became leery. My superior would like nothing more than to expose the senator, but fears the backlash if we go after the senator's throat. It will seem like a cheesy ploy to discredit the man."

"That means your superior has aspirations of running for the presidency his- or herself? Since when has an opponent not played dirty? It's the political rule book," he said cynically.

"This person is different. They actually have a conscience, if you can believe that. They want to win on their own merits and not because they slung the most mud during the campaign. That, and Senator Sparks is highly regarded by his constituents, some peers, and the public. If people took offense to my superior playing nasty, it could backfire."

"What do you want?"

"For you to do your job. Solve the case, and everything else will fall neatly into place."

"So what I'm hearing is you are using me to put the nail in the senator's coffin so you and your boss's hands can remain pristine."

He spoke rhetorically. The law forbade people from burying people in coffins. Now, bodies were cremated, and the remains housed in memorial buildings that could house thousands of what he called elaborate jewelry

boxes. The small bins were held in slots, assigned a number, much like safety deposit boxes in bank vaults, except you didn't need two keys to gain access. People were allowed to come and go and visit loved ones whenever they pleased. Just like mail stations, you had access twenty-four hours. The government enacted the law to preserve land. Why waste property on dead remains? They swore it had nothing to do with the fact that Carpathia and surrounding cities' populations had reached a limit, housing at a premium, and land developers were always looking for new ways to buy and develop prime areas, which meant prime rent.

"Agent Uonaidas, are you still there?"

Breed pushed back his thoughts and focused on the present. "I'm listening."

"Your involvement in this case is crucial. Without you—"

"My partner, Aldie McMahon, is capable of solving the case."

The man didn't say anything for a long time, and Breed thought he'd lost connectivity.

"Things aren't always what they seem. Do you remember me saying this before?"

"I do."

"I wasn't just saying that to hear myself talk. Time is wasting, Agent Uonaidas. Like I said, there has been another murder, and it's imperative you are at the crime scene."

"I didn't hear anything come over the agency network."

"That's because they want the murder of one of their own kept private."

This made Breed hold his breath and wait to hear the name of the victim.

"Captain Foresight's body was found in his house this morning by the housekeeper," the man said.

When he released the air in his lungs, it whooshed out in a rush. "Son of a bitch," Breed muttered. He did a three-sixty and headed north toward the captain's neighborhood.

\* \* \* \*

He took the steps two at a time, broke through the crime scene beam an alert sounded—and entered Captain Foresight's house. As soon as he came around the corner, an officer stepped from the room, threw up his hands, and pressed them against Breed's chest to hold him back.

"This is a restricted area," the junior officer said.

"I'm with the Elite Forces. I'd show you my credentials, but I don't have it on me."

"Yeah, you and every other media personnel got the same story. I'm going to have to ask you to step outside, sir."

"Run my name, Breed Uonaidas, through your handheld and access the agency database. Validate I'm who I said I am. Isn't that protocol?"

"Yep, in fact it is, and you would be the fifth person who'd pulled the same stunt. I'm sure if I wasted my time searching for your records, it would be nonexistent, just like everybody else. Now, you need to step outside. This is the last time I will ask you politely."

"Hey, Uonaidas, it's about time you showed up," Hollis called out, sticking her head into the hallway.

The officer stammered, "I-I didn't know." He scrambled backwards to let Breed pass.

Hollis stood in the doorway and waited until Breed entered the room. "You look like death warmed over."

"Thanks. What the hell is going on?" he said, looking over the top of her head into the room at his captain. The forensic team still worked on processing the body, so it remained uncovered.

"He got hit just like Abramson and Hilton," Aldie said, coming up behind Breed. "Welcome back."

Breed nodded. "Exact MO?"

"Yep, but the good news is we know who did it. I brought Jordon in yesterday. Man, he's one sicko. Our theory about multiple personalities correct. All the time we dealt with Jordon not knowing Jordie existed as well. Actually, if you look at the irony of it, we never met Jordon, but Jordie, the entire time we was around the psycho. I met the real Jordon last night." Aldie shook his body to emphasize his next words. "He's one scary bastard, trust me."

"Nice work, Aldie," Breed said.

"Just doing my job. I mean, I know you were pretty messed up in the head after Pepper's death, so I stepped to the plate. It's how friends help each other, right?"

Did he detect some bitterness in Aldie's tone? He followed his partner's back, wondering, and then shifted his attention to Hollis when she tugged his shirtsleeve.

She dropped her voice to a whisper. Breed leaned forward to hear her. "The captain got it just like the others. Everything was the same except one detail." Breed arched his eyebrow. Hollis looked to her left and then right. "The message on the note isn't the same." This made him slant his brows downward. "Whoever did this is a copycat killer, Uonaidas."

"What did the note say?"

"Eat this and die, you sick bastard."

Breed stood there and blinked. "What?"

"You heard me right. 'Eat this and die, you sick bastard.' Not 'Suck this and die, you sick bastard' like the other two messages left."

"Someone tried to mimic the other homicides. Interesting."

Hollis looked Breed up and down skeptically. He knew she expected him to say more given the bombshell she just dropped. He remained silent.

"Is it me, or isn't this a major thing?" Hollis asked.

"Yeah, it's one fucking major *thing*, and I appreciate you sharing it with me."

"Okay, you are acting way weird. There had better be a damn good reason why you aren't jumping at this information. Maybe later you will trust me enough to let me know why you don't seem very surprised. Hey," she said, taking his arm. She moved them farther away from the others who might overhear. "I need to tell you something else. Not that I should or feel generous. It's curiosity to see what you have to say about what I'm about to reveal. That, and I want a damned good explanation. The semen on the note didn't match either."

"If you're saying no match, does that mean period or it's not the same as the others?"

"Out of thousands of names, I got one hit—yours, Uonaidas."

"I will be damned and fucked. This is bullshit."

"My sentiments exactly. That's why I didn't feed the results up to the internal evidence database yet. I can probably hold the information back for a few hours. A day or more if I push it, but eventually the system will send an alert that no DNA was entered. My boss will want to know why."

Breed raked his fingers through his hair in frustration. He sighed, disgruntled. "Thanks, Hollis. I owe you one."

"I like you, Uonaidas, and I'm good at reading people. My instincts are telling me you are being screwed on this one. Don't let me down. Get your ass in gear and solve this damn fiasco before I'm forced to turn over the DNA match evidence," she said and then walked away.

Cox called out, "Hey, Uonaidas, how does it feel to know the guy you protected hit the captain? Now that's some real fine detective work." He chortled. He chewed on his toothpick, removed it from his mouth, and pointed it at Breed. "You might as well drove Jordon to the captain's house and help him twist the garrote around his neck. You are something else, you know. Maverick my ass," he scoffed. "You protected the perp, got some good agents killed, maybe even your girl—"

Breed growled, charged across the room, and put Cox in a headlock. He withdrew his stunner and shoved it into his thick head. Everybody in the room heard the stunner set, knew the canister of blasts were loaded, ready.

"I'm technically not on the force anymore, asshole. Do you think that makes me more or less lethal? Because you know a rogue cop on the edge is one dangerous man, right?" He increased his hold, jerked his arm up, and tightened the vise grip on Cox's neck.

"Ah, hell, man he's choking," Aldie said.

Breed leaned into Cox's ear, he whispered, "You keep fucking with me, and I will shove my stunner so far up your fat ass you will taste blast in your throat. In the future, don't say one word to me, not a hello, excuse me, or nothing. In fact, when I step into the room, I expect you to turn in the other direction. If we cross paths again, you get one to the head. Just because. That's how far gone and twisted I am in the head right now. Do we have an understanding?"

Cox squirmed, coughed, when Breed let up. "Da-damn...ca-can't you take a joke?"

Breed narrowed his eyes and then shoved his gun down Cox's throat. "Not...one...word."

"Breed, Jesus, back off," Aldie said.

Hollis looked up from her handheld. Calmly, she spoke, saying, "Uonaidas, you're not thinking to contaminate my crime scene with Cox's

brain splatter, are you? That would make me real upset," she said and then continued with what she was doing.

The oxygen in the room was sucked up when everybody inhaled when Breed didn't move for a long time.

Breed slammed his knee into Cox's groin. He shoved him aside with his foot and left the house.

\* \* \* \*

Aldie went over to Hollis. "What did you say to him that put him over the top?"

Hollis looked indignant. "Cox was stupid enough to mention his girlfriend. I think that would do the trick. Hell, I wanted to pop the asshole myself." She ignored Aldie, turned her back, effectively ending their conversation.

Aldie went after Breed, but by the time he got outside, he was long gone.

"Fuck, I hope this doesn't screw up Jordon's indictment," he mumbled to himself. He'd missed something about the captain's murder. He was sure of it. He went over the crime scene in his head. Nothing seemed different, but he couldn't be sure. Breed wasn't talking. Hollis, the hard-ass, stayed tight-lipped. Something was going on he wasn't privy to. He needed to know what. Jordie-Jordon had to go down for the murders. He had to, or his ass was grass, Aldie thought.

## **Chapter Thirty-Two**

Cesar Cortez's celebration was a small affair. A few vehicles stopped in front of the restaurant, and one by one a line of sleek cruisers, solo-minis, and coupes rolled to a halt, and couples emerged. The guests were all dressed in after-five attire. The men wore suits and ties. The females dressed in slinky formfitting gowns that covered little and revealed a lot of skin. The women draped over the men's arms like comfortable silk bathrobes. It was clear the men were considerably older than the *dates* who accompanied them. That told Breed these were not wives, but girlfriends. He ignored the people as they walked inside the restaurant.

Three more vessels arrived and pulled up to the curb in front of the building. Breed studied the perimeter monitor, watching, as Cortez's goons got out of the first two vehicles. They scanned the area and then walked to the third cruiser parked between the other two.

He took note of the buffed, steroid-packed, bulldog-faced man who kept his back to the car. He continuously looked around. His hand stayed in the inside of his jacket. Breed made a mental note; the main guard was the most lethal. He began to analyze the situation. The surroundings, entrances and exits, number of people already inside, calculated the numbers, and then added the staff to the estimate. The odds were stacked against him in goons-to-agent ratio, but that didn't mean what he intended was insurmountable. Nothing seemed impossible when you wanted to kill the man responsible for Pepper's death.

He just had to wait for the opportunity to reach Cortez. A trail of henchmen followed Cortez wherever he went. The man was never alone, and after he watched him for two weeks without one chance to get him alone, he began to wonder if Cortez took a piss by himself. The surveillance had been boring as hell and tedious enough to make his teeth chatter. Cortez stayed inside his penthouse most of the time. If he had meetings or

entertained, the people came to him. Nobody just dropped by for a visit with Cortez. They were summoned to do his bidding. Breed suspected none of the visitors paid social calls. Everything Cortez did revolved around conducting business. Other than running one of the biggest drug import businesses on Sanguine, his life seemed mild and boring.

Establishing a routine of his activities made it difficult because the man kept himself secured inside his home, as he found out, a well-protected residence. Cortez chose his location well. He resided on the twenty-fifth floor of a high-rise with no direct buildings across the street. The height, distance, and angle of the building meant nobody was going to set up a powerful scope and peek through his windows. The DEA tried damned hard to get an audio stream of his conversations. To date, all they had was a bunch of garbled streams that were useless, making him wonder why the DEA wasted their time. Cortez had sophisticated scrambling mechanisms installed in the walls of his place, devices that made the entire perimeter, a floor above and below, soundproof.

This was the first opportunity he had to get Cortez. It had been a long time in coming, and Breed enjoyed the thought of finally coming face-to-face with the bastard who callously murdered Pepper.

Cortez moved into the single dim light from the lamppost, giving Breed a full view of him. He immediately sized up the bastard. A little surprised that the drug czar, whose name alone made people tremble, resembled a grandfather. He held himself upright, his shoulders and back squared, had a confident gait to his walk, but otherwise he seemed harmless if you went with his looks and not instincts. A medium build, slender figure, and a swarthy complexion that contrasted with his silvery-white hair made up the gentle-looking man.

Just before he entered the restaurant, he turned toward his direction. The overhead light cast enough brightness that Breed clearly saw the cold, detached obsidian eyes, soulless pits.

Casually, Breed strolled down the street and stopped in front of the building. He glanced at the "private" sign hanging on the door, a clear warning he ignored. He didn't bother to knock. This wasn't a social call. No etiquette seemed required. He opened the door, walked in, and started firing.

That someone would have the balls to enter the establishment and start shooting momentarily stunned the overconfident goons from moving. He dropped four of the six before they knew what happened. By the time the other two recovered, Breed stood over Cortez with his gun pointed in the center of his forehead. The lead guard who'd been closest to Cortez flinched like he was going to make a dumbass move. He aimed the weapon in his other hand in his direction, steadily moved it back and forth between Mr. Beef and the other remaining goon.

"Twitch, bat an eye, or fart, and your boss gets it in the head," he said and then looked at the other occupants huddled in their seats. "You, you, and you, get out, and take your playthings with you." Cortez's guests hightailed it out of there without looking back. He faced Cortez. "If I were you, I would consider choosing my friends more wisely. Not an ounce of hesitation to leave your sorry ass."

One of the flunkies moved. Breed fired. The man clutched his chest, toppled over, dead as a doornail. He pointed at Mr. Beef. "You feel unlucky? Toss your weapon across the room, and sit your steroid ass down."

Cortez finally spoke. His voice smooth and silky, he said, "Whoever you are, you're a dead man."

"I'm Breed Uonaidas." He saw a flash of recognition, maybe fear, in Cortez's eyes. It was there briefly before he resumed his glacier manner.

"Ah, so this is about Pepper Syms. She was a lovely girl. I enjoyed her immensely. Quite talented," Cortez said, smirking.

The implications of his words, meant to hit a nerve in Breed, went over his head. "In fact, you are right. She was a wonderful woman, talented, and worth more than the ground you walk on. That's why I'm here. You killed someone very dear to me. That makes me pissed," he hissed.

Cortez waved his hand in the air dismissively. "She was DEA, collateral damage, someone I could easily replace."

Breed moved swiftly, fired a blast into his kneecap. Cortez howled in pain. "You-you bastard!" he spurted, nursing his leg. He glared, breathing hard, fire burned in his eyes. "If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to make sure you suffer a long, torturous death!"

"My sentiments exactly." Breed pointed at Mr. Beef, who tried to slide a weapon from his boot. He shot him, center forehead, and then shoved the second stunner into Cortez's head. "Now, where were we? Ah, yeah, I was agreeing with your bullshit threats. Albeit, I meant every word you said.

You will suffer a lengthy, tedious death. I promise you. In fact, making such happen has become my life's pursuit."

Cortez shrieked, screamed in pain when another laser beam pierced his thigh and ripped it open. Blood, skin, and charred flesh lay open on his leg that he tried to keep together, but it just oozed through his fingers.

"The next time it's your cock. I'm going to keep picking you apart until I'm satisfied that even the best team of surgeons can't repair you." He aimed between Cortez's thighs.

"Okay, okay, what do you want? Information about the business? Names, dates—what!"

"People like you make me sick with your willingness to bend over and take it like a two-bit hooker to save your own skin. You think I give a fuck about your drug dealings? I'm not DEA, asshole, but homicide. Today, however, it's just one angry man in front of you seeking revenge."

"I-I ca-can tell you things. Not just about the drug business, but the government too. I have politicians, judges, lawyers, agents...people in high places in my pocket. I even have a few Feds sucking up to me. I know who is dirty, likes men, underage girls, even boys..."

Breed leaned forward and growled in Cortez's ear. "Here is news for you. We could compare lists, asshole." He loaded a canister.

Cortez threw his hands up. "Wait...wait. I didn't kill Pepper, but I know who did. I will give you his name. He is—"

He grabbed a fistful of Cortez's hair, yanked down, and snarled in his face. "Again, your bargaining power sucks. I know who killed Pepper. Rest assured he will be dealt with, but you first."

"Money—ah, ah, I have millions. Whatever you want!"

"I never took you for a crybaby. Jesus, what would your associates think if they saw you blubbering like a bitch? And, oh, by the way, I decline your offer to pay me off." He fired into Cortez's shoulder. "That's for the insult. I wouldn't work for you if you were the last person on this planet who could save my ass. Besides, I don't need your dirty money. Contrary to what people know, my family has enough funds to buy scum like you ten times over." He showed his teeth, growling. "I could pay someone with your money to wipe my wealthy ass. That's why my father and me have a difference of opinion about whether or not I'm wasting my time with assholes like you. He doesn't understand it even though I've explained that

money doesn't do shit for me, but seeing a prick like you dead gives me a fucking rush. A high better than that shit you sell to kids."

Another blast echoed in the room.

He looked at Cortez, tossed a piece of paper on the floor, and left. Without a backward glance, he walked from the building into the breezy, crisp night air. He inhaled the fresh scent that helped to cool the heat of fury that raged inside his body because he hadn't dealt with Cortez like he wanted to. Instead, he did what Pepper would have expected of him.

"Is there anything left of Cortez to haul in, or do I need to call the ambulatory transport to cart the remains to the morgue?" Aldie asked.

Breed looked at him. "He's not ready for an autopsy, but damn close."

Aldie swiped a hand down his face in frustration. "Damn it, Breed, you were supposed to get the stream of names, dates, and information on his operations and partners. We made an agreement with the DEA if we got to Cortez first we'd find out what we could about his connections. You weren't supposed to play prosecutor, judge, and jury."

"If I did, the son of a bitch would be dead." He maneuvered around Aldie and headed down the street where he left his cruiser parked.

"Did he say anything about who killed Pepper?" Aldie asked, shouting.

"Not anything I don't already know," Breed shouted back and then gunned the engine and left Aldie to work things out with the DEA. He'd left Cortez alive, barely, but enough so that he couldn't be questioned. He was sure the idiot would turn rat. Once the word got out about what happened, nobody in his circle would believe that Cortez hadn't told the DEA something.

Breed thought he should have killed Cortez. He was as good as dead anyway.

\* \* \* \*

Breed cruised along the highway. He was flying using autopilot, so he could lean back and watch the landscape. The part of town he travelled through was trendy, scenic, and attracted tourists for its buildings and architectural appeal. Everything he noticed resembled flashes of light, one big blur.

His thoughts too focused on Pepper, nothing else could penetrate his mind. Hurting Cortez wouldn't bring her back, but it felt damned good and offered a measure of satisfaction that one person hadn't gotten away with murder.

He closed his eyes and focused on his and Pepper's last moments together. The way she felt, hot and moist, wrapped around his cock when he moved inside her. Her soft coos or the way she purred when he hit that spot just right. The sexy look she gave him, pure elation that covered her features just before she climaxed. Even the way she smelled that night, a sweet, heady, intoxicating pheromone surrounded her body. Mostly he recalled the impish, girly smile she gave him when she hinted about the baby. Priceless.

"I was happy about the child, Pepper," he whispered aloud.

Breed turned up the sound system to drown out his conscience. He had missed another opportunity to tell Pepper how he felt. Maybe he was the detached, emotionally dysfunctional type she accused him of being. He admitted that now. If only to himself, he confessed he lived the entirety of his life fighting to keep people from getting to close. Emotional attachment made him too vulnerable. When you cared about someone, it made it easier for people to use them against you. Not that he was heartless, but being in the agency, the cases he worked, and the risks he encountered made him not want to take responsibility for anybody else. It was easier just to worry about himself. Now that he examined his dumbass belief, he realized why he refused to commit anything more than his body to a person. Never his mind. Never his heart. Not until now.

## **Chapter Thirty-Three**

Monty barely got two words out before Breed moved them backwards and up against a wall. He crushed his mouth, swiped his tongue and outlined his lips, and then slanted his mouth, kissing Monty with intensity close to ravenous.

Finally, he let him up for air. He kept his body molded to his friend's, rubbed his cock against the hard length he felt that stretched and tented the crotch of Monty's pants.

"Well, hello to you too."

"Are you still having reservations about us?"

Monty looked at him, baffled, as if he wondered why he would ask such a ridiculous question. "I'm not sure what you are asking? We had sex, remember?"

Breed reached between them and cupped his cock, slowly dragged his palm back and forth over the thickness. His voice was husky. "How do I know that wasn't a mercy fuck because you felt sorry for me because of Pepper?"

"That's a fucked-up thing to say, Breed. What the hell is wrong with you?" Monty said, shoving his hand away.

"Well, did you really want me or not?" Breed groused.

"I don't like this dominant bullshit. Knock it off."

He tried to move away, Breed held him still. "You didn't mind the other night when I screwed you. Answer my question."

"Go to hell. Stop being a jerk."

He captured the strong cords of Monty's throat between his fingers. Raising up, rocking forward, he ground his dick against the hard length, rotated his hips, meshing them together. He cupped his nape, entwined his fingers in the blond curls, forced his lips over and in between the moist

folds. He murmured into Monty's mouth. "Answer my question," he requested between nibbling Monty's bottom lip. "Say it."

Breed waited with abated breath for his response. Every nerve ending in his body tingled. The sensation new to him, it surprised him until he recognized the feeling as nervousness. The thought almost made him grin. He, the emotionally dysfunctional type, had the jitters his deep-rooted feelings for his friend might not be returned. He didn't fear anything, not even death, but the thought of rejection made his heart constrict.

"Tell me what I need to hear, baby." He hummed over Monty's lips. He ran his hands up and under his shirt, along his spine, and stopped to caress the firm, powerful back. Kneading tenderly, he leisurely massaged his fingertips around and about, slipped lower, and cupped the swell of Monty's butt. He beckoned him forward. He wanted to get closer than close. The heat, instantaneous sizzle and burn, when they made contact set off a reaction like two charges sparked, and electricity ran wild through him.

A low, satisfied grunt escaped when Monty responded. He wrapped his arm around his waist and arched his hips, magnifying the intense allure that existed between them. Strong and potent, Breed felt the chemistry down to his toes. Just his touch, the brush of his fingertips beneath his chin when Monty tilted his head back, made something inside him quiver. Monty's mouth searched tenderly, ever so softly, teasing his lips to part. His kiss defined fever, passion, and desire all rolled into one. The enormity of the sensation overwhelmed Breed. It was as if the floodgates opened, and a rush of emotions that he restrained for too long destroyed the dam around his heart.

The intense feeling of wanting, to be wanted, drummed through Breed hard. "Damn, I need you bad."

They tumbled onto the bed. Breed sat on his knees, almost ripped his shirt off, tugged his pants down, and stripped naked. He pulled Monty's shirt off, tossed it behind him. When he arched, raised his butt to wiggle out of his pants, Breed helped, yanking at the trousers, all but ripping them free.

"A little eager, are we?" Monty moved Breed's hand away. He unfastened his pants, slipped them down his long legs, and then kicked out until he divested himself of the cumbersome clothing. "There," he said, opening his thighs. "Is this what you want?"

Breed loomed between the spread legs, eagerly gripped his thighs, and spread him wider. Unaware of his frenzied state, impatiently he moved the tip of his cock over the wrinkled hole. He surged forward. Monty locked his thighs, holding him back.

"What?"

"Lubricant, or you will shred me raw."

"Shit. Sorry, I forgot."

The preparation taken care of, he grabbed his cock and guided it between the butt cleavage. He tightened his stomach muscles for control, with a measured forge, he penetrated until his bulbous head was completely submerged. The slick passage clenched around his cock. He held, blew out air to calm the urgency to thrust. He felt undomesticated, uncontrollable.

"What?"

He dropped his forehead against his friend-lover. His voice ultra low and throaty, he said, "I don't want to hurt you."

Monty stroked his jawline soothingly. "I want you. It's okay."

He continued to hesitate.

Monty became the aggressor, lifted up, forcing more of his cock to sink deeper. Powerful legs wrapped around his back, drew him down, a swirl of his hips worked the entire shaft deep, to the depths, until he sank to the hilt.

A primal sound rumbled from Breed as he felt the hot band squeeze and milk his cock. He grabbed Monty's waist and propelled forward until he landed solidly inside the welcoming heat.

A funny noise, partially of pleasure and of pain, escaped. Monty squirmed, wiggled over his cock as if asking for more.

All manner of restraint ceased, his surges were potent, fiery repetitions of a succinct tempo that sent their bodies colliding together. They rocked—Breed drove down and Monty up—in tune to the primitive beat that pounded inside their bodies. A hedonistic rhythm ensued that turned to untamed thrashing of heat, sweat, and need as he succumbed to the increased passion building.

This feeling, being inside Monty, his total surrender, made Breed acutely aware of his own body and how damn wonderful it felt. Sex had always been fucking. Not some steamy hot act that left his body transformed. His skin, fingertips, tongue, and cock desensitized to the irresistible feel of his friend-lover's body. That each touch, rise of his hip

that drew him deeper, hum of his tongue over his lips sent a shockwave of quakes rippling through Breed's body. There, just at the cusp, he felt the world spin like a whirliging toy, teeter-tottering on its axle, he experienced pure rapture and lost himself in the totality of it all. This newfound bonding, to lose himself in another, defined incredible.

Breed surrendered it all, mind, body, and soul. He tensed, paralyzed with anticipation, his eyes squeezed shut, and a deep, low, animalistic growl escaped as his seed filled his shaft and bloated and expanded the head before he shot jet after jet of cum inside his man.

Carefully, Breed slowly withdrew, lay on his back, and tossed an arm over his eyes. He puffed, blowing out air. He felt Monty move beside him. He welcomed him in his arms, placed a palm on his butt, and pulled him closer. He peeked between his folded arms to find Monty grinning at him.

"What?"

"Is that a satisfied grin on your face?"

"Baby, satisfied doesn't begin to describe how I feel. I never lost it like that before."

"You were rapacious."

"You bring out the animal in me. I thank you." He patted his ass.

Monty chuckled, threw a leg over his thigh, rubbed back and forth like a well-fed cat. He snuggled closer. He ran his fingertips over his chest, toyed with the dark hair that surrounded his nipples. He dipped his mouth low and sucked the peaks until they flattened like pennies. Slowly, he ran his tongue over the small swells and began teasing with his tongue.

"Mmm," Breed murmured.

Monty licked his tongue back and forth over the nipples, moved down along his torso, and stopped to taste the fuzz of hair just above his groin. His hand slid farther south, grasped his cock, and started to pump, rub, squeezing the loose, sticky skin between his fingers.

Breed moaned, arched his hips into the diabolical motion of the fiery hand working over his cock. Monty palmed the head, cupped his sac, and kneaded both until his cock thickened. He felt the white-hot warmth tease his cock when Monty dipped his head lower.

"You're getting hard again."

Breed laughed. "Imagine that. It might have something to do with your mouth so close to my dick. You think?"

Monty looked up from between his thighs, and Breed saw the mischievous glint brighten his naturally gold orbs. "Show me how to deep-throat you."

Breed made a funny noise that was half nasal, half throaty. "All right. Let me freshen up," he said, rolling to his side. He stood up and walked toward the bathroom.

\* \* \* \*

Monty watched, enthralled, concentrating on the muscles in his back and butt that flexed and released with his movements. The man had a sexy swagger. Everything about Breed exuded strength, virility, and a grace that made his actions a fluid motion that screamed "sex."

"You starting without me?" Breed entered the room.

He blushed, unaware he'd been playing with his cock. He removed his hand and looked sheepish. "I was fantasizing."

"Why do that when you can have the real thing?" He eased onto the bed, loomed over Monty, encircled his waist, and maneuvered him into the desired position.

He sat back on his knees and rested his butt on his heels. He held his cock, sliding his hand over his shaft, back and forth, pulling the head until he turned rock solid. Monty leaned in front of him, acutely aware of his sizable length. The head was thick and wide, resembled a large strawberry—pulp around the bottom with a tapered top. It grew fatter the more he watched. Doubt that he could take it all in his mouth surfaced, a moment of trepidation crept inside him. What if he couldn't take it all and please Breed?

As if he read his mind, Breed answered his silent question. "We'll go slow," he said, continuously stroking the cock that seemed to grow to unbelievable proportions.

Monty eagerly opened his mouth when the tower of power eased between his lips. He braced his forearms against Breed for balance. He opened wide to accommodate the massive head as it pushed past his tongue and teeth. His mouth felt stretched, ached, but he ignored the discomfort because he wanted to suck on the gorgeous dick.

Breed touched just underneath his jaws, massaging to help Monty relax his throat. "You may not be able to take it all."

"Mmm...let's see. Shall we?" Monty ran his tongue over the flaring head, flicked the heavy vein that ran underneath the shaft. He felt Breed quiver. He smiled, slowly licked a path down to the underside where he knew the nerves were most sensitive. Breed entwined his fingers in his hair, jutted his hips, and gave an approving grunt. To be able to please him excited Monty. He moaned, rose to his knees, and gobbled greedily. He sucked hard, harder, hungrily the more Breed responded to his attention.

He squeezed his ass, encouraged Breed to give him more. His entire body shook slightly in anticipation. The excitement made his own cock swell until it was almost painful, as inch by inch more of the delectable penis invaded his mouth and sank down his throat.

"Fuck me, and be damned. If you keep that up, you're going to get a mouthful." Breed's voice was strained, every nuance of his body tense with restraint.

Monty didn't respond, but let Breed know that's what he wanted, to taste him. He slipped a finger up his ass, found that special spot, and caressed.

Breed trembled, plummeted deeper, started oscillating his hips.

Monty welcomed the intense friction, repeated thumps of the bloated head against the roof of his mouth. His own sex swollen, overly sensitive, and heightened as the carnal need inside him escalated at Breed's brute coercion. His tone rough, demanding, as he commanded him take more, suck harder and faster.

"Swallow it!"

Monty almost gagged when the unexpected amount of fluid suddenly burst free and filled his mouth. It was more than he anticipated, and Breed most have sensed his surprise. He tried to pull back, but he wouldn't allow it. He continued sucking, lapping at the tangy flavor until the cock was empty. Satisfied there was nothing left for Breed to give, he sat back on his knees and smiled with satisfaction.

"How was that for a first?"

"How do you think?" Breed said gruffly. He grabbed him around the waist, forced him back against the covers. He looked wolfish. An expression that said he was about to devour him. "Now we try another first."

Monty raised his eyebrows quizzically. "What does that mean?" He didn't answer, but did the eyebrow thing.

Breed pushed his legs together, enclosed his cock in his hand, holding the turgid length straight up. The first instant he realized what was about to happen, his entire body shuddered, a moan escaped, as Breed lowered over his cock and descended until he felt his crown delve through the anal cavity.

His powerful thighs clamped him in place. Breed balanced over him and guided his penis up and inside his ass. The sheer madness, pleasure that engulfed him feeling the slick moistness hug his cock, was almost unbearable. He lifted slightly, drawing out Monty's cock halfway, before leisurely screwing his anus down and around his cock until he stuffed him completely inside the channel.

Monty almost lost it and blew.

He clutched his waist, arched up to drive deeper, desperately wanting to feel more, he hammered his cock repeatedly in the sweltering hole, intent on fucking himself silly. Breed clenched his anal muscles. Monty went insane and erratically rotated his hips, driving with an insatiable need, he grabbed Breed's sweaty frame to draw him closer. He panted, gasping for air, he clung to him, immune to anything except the lust-filled desire he had to release.

"I know, baby. I know," Breed whispered in his ear. His tongue licked and outlined the earlobe. His mouth moved down to the base of his throat, where he put his teeth. He nipped him and then sucked the hot area.

"Fuck-Breed!"

"Yeah, do that. Fuck Breed," he growled.

Monty bucked and groaned, feeling the quickening rush beneath his veins. Then his body stiffened when he ejaculated, sending a flow of cum to fill the toasty ass that relentlessly pumped him dry. He basked in the aftermath of a mind-blowing climax, shimmering in pleasure, and held Breed firmly to his body. He showered his face with kisses, finally settled on his mouth, Monty slipped his tongue inside and tantalized his tongue with a heated kiss until he felt that great body shudder and a warm flow of cum coat his stomach.

They lay in a lovers' embrace. Monty curled around Breed's body. His chin buried against his neck. Breed ran his hands up and down his back, massaging. Occasionally, he would lift his head and brush his lips over firm

lush lips. Their eyes would meet. He would hold the stare, notice the sensual longing in the bold brown eyes that looked down at him. His gaze, endearing, as intimate as a caress, drew him further into Breed's trance. Monty touched his thumb to his lip and lazily drew it over the fullness.

"I love you, you know?"

Breed watched him silently a minute. He said, "You don't have to say that."

"I know," he murmured, planting kisses over his chest. "I wanted to so you would know."

He welcomed his embrace when Breed folded him into his arms, rotated their bodies until he was on his back. There was a pause, Breed continued to make direct eye contact, and again he wondered if his friend would respond to his admission. Silence ensued. Gingerly, Monty raked his fingers through his hair, touched his cheeks softly. "You don't have to answer. It doesn't matter," he whispered.

Again, he thought Breed might respond, but he didn't. Instead he flipped him over on his stomach. Monty looked over his shoulder, eyebrows raised.

"I'm greedy," Breed said, offering an excuse as he entered him in one swift invasion.

They made love into the late hours of the night. At times, they fucked like primates, and then the next they shared each other's bodies with slow, pleasurable attention, tenderness, heart-wrenching lovemaking that displayed the sensual embodiment of two men who shared a unique union that expressed the love they had for each other.

Time passed until they finally succumbed to pleasant exhaustion. Sedated, they lay in a languorous pose with Monty draped over Breed, his leg rested on a thigh, an arm thrown over his waist.

\* \* \* \*

Breed listened to Monty's light snoring, each breath he inhaled and exhaled, watched the rise and fall of his chest. A sense of completion, peace, eased inside his body. He knew why. He loved Monty. He wanted to feel this way forever. Stay in his man's arms for eternity. Realistically, he knew that wasn't possible because outside their world lay a brutal ugliness. He

thought about that bleakness briefly and then forced it to the back of his mind. Tomorrow was another day. His thoughts drifted to what came next. Eventually he would have to deal with the daunting task of righting the wrongs that consumed his life.

He glanced out the window into the serenity of the sky. He concentrated on the moons, twinkling stars that seemed brighter tonight. The sky seemed clearer than normal.

The calm before the storm.

### **Chapter Thirty-Four**

"Why didn't you wake me?" Monty said, and yawned. He ran his fingers through his tousled hair, set it back off his face, and then looked at Breed with his eyebrows arched. "Well?"

Breed followed the sinewy hips as Monty moved about the kitchen. His lounging bottoms hung low on his hips. His feet were bare, as usual, and made a soft patter sound as he walked around. He cocked his head to the side to get a better view of his butt as he bent over, opened the refrigerator, and looked inside.

"I was being considerate. After a night of nonstop fucking, the least I could do was let you sleep late."

Monty gave him one of his Hollywood smiles that made him look adorable. So sexy he fought the urge to bend him over the counter and have his wicked way with him. He concentrated on the bowl of cereal in front of him.

"Make that night and early morning, remember? You woke me twice during the night and again this morning. I feel thoroughly ravished."

Breed chuckled. He spooned some of the sugary puffs into his mouth. "You complaining?" With his mouth full, he mumbled.

"Nope."

Monty collected juice, eggs, butter, bacon, sausage, bread, and milk before he closed the refrigerator. He hummed as he put all the contents, except the beverages, into the food processor that would cook each item at different temperatures, to perfection, in ten minutes.

"A little hungry, are we?"

Monty moved a few dusty blond strands of hair out of way, revealing hazel-gold eyes that sparkled. He looked twice as handsome, appetizing, and made him horny as hell. He scooped more of the cereal into his mouth and concentrated on the news stream that displayed on the flat screen mounted

in a cabinet wall. The sound was low. He couldn't hear the newsperson's report, but he didn't need to. He already knew what happened with Senator Sparks.

He shifted his attention when Monty moved to his side. He looked up at him, paused at his naked chest, before meeting his gaze. "I'm very hungry because you gave me thorough workout. I'm starved. This isn't all for me, though." He motioned to his bowl. "That stuff is good for a sugar rush, but otherwise, you will be ready for a real breakfast in an hour," he said, swooping down for a quick kiss. "Good morning."

"Morning."

"I keep a box of Puff 'n' Stuff on hand for when my niece stays over. She won't eat anything else." He wrinkled his nose. "How can you eat that stuff?"

Breed shrugged. "It was available and easy."

"Uh-huh." Monty poured himself a cup of coffee, swallowed some, coughed, and tossed it down the drain.

"First you insult my choice for breakfast, now my coffee?" He grinned.

"My niece makes better java than that."

"Ouch. That's hitting below the waist, isn't it? I didn't know you could play so dirty." He laughed softly.

Monty finished making more coffee. He walked up to Breed, caught his chin, pressed his mouth to his, and kissed him hard. He released him, winked. "If I have to go anywhere below your waist, it's for that gorgeous cock."

Breed inhaled sharply. "You had better be glad I have to get to work, or—"

"What?" Monty said, holding his stare.

"I'd toss you over the counter and fuck your brains out," he said, reaching out.

Monty laughed, shooed his hands away when the processor dinged.

"I'm not that hungry. The food can wait."

"I could eat a seven-course meal. Remember, you have to get to work."

"Thanks for reminding me," Breed said dryly. "Aldie has already called me six times, but I refuse to answer his calls. I can't deal with him right now."

"Why not? What has he done to you?" He fixed two plates, cups of steamy fresh coffee, and handed one serving to Breed.

If Monty realized he didn't respond, he gave him a pass. Breed said, "Senator Sparks was found dead in his boathouse this morning. The coward bastard committed suicide. He put a blast in his mouth and blew his brains out. He left a note. He told his wife and daughters he was sorry. Then he explained why he'd fucked up royally. Those are my words. Apparently, Jordon admitted to everything when he was questioned. Not that I'm surprised, but the asshole had been molesting Jordon since he was five and continued through his teenage years. The idiot also shared Jordon with men he thought could help him with his political aspirations. He actually advertised Jordon on the Boys to Men Web site, and that's where Abramson and Hilton came into play. The sick fucks were all having sex orgies with Jordon." Breed exhaled slowly to soothe his anger. "No wonder the man is so screwed up in the head."

Monty shook his head in disgust.

"You know, what I can't figure out is, if Jordon hated his father so much, why he didn't do something about it except make threats that he never followed through with. He had every opportunity to tell me, somebody, what was happening. Why not spill his guts and hang the old lecher? Expose the creepy senator and bring him down."

Monty offered an explanation. "Jordon is probably suffering from Alward Syndrome, named after a renowned psychiatrist who discovered the symptoms in young, sexually abused patients. On one hand, the abused hate their molesters, but they also crave their acceptance and even love. It happens in very young children mistreated by a parent or older sibling. Inside, they know they should love this person. They get conflicted about their emotions because they hate their abuser too. That's when most people develop dual personalities to help cope with the good and evil feelings inside. The malicious characteristics help deal with the hatred that manifests in many ways. Like in Jordon's case, he lashed out and eventually murdered. Probably something he wanted to do for a long time. The evil side, alter ego, finally overrode his conscience."

"Why didn't he kill the asshole first?"

Monty lifted one shoulder. "He would have probably gotten around to his father if he wasn't arrested."

"Hmmm." Breed forked food into his mouth, chewed, and swallowed before he spoke again. "Foresight's death was a copycat," he said matter-offactly.

Monty almost dropped his fork. "What?"

"Jordon didn't kill Foresight. I knew it the night of the homicide. Hollis ran the sample of the semen found on the note, and I hit the lottery. She held the evidence from the agency for as long as she could. I guess my time is up." Breed sipped his coffee. He raised the cup to Monty. "I admit you have way more skills than me when it comes to brewing coffee. Wheatland wants me to come in and talk to him. Unofficial, of course. Yeah, right."

"Oh, no, that is not going to happen. You will call Wheatland and let him know you will come in and talk with him with your attorney. I know Wheatland. He is a snake."

"I don't need a lawyer, Monty. I didn't kill Foresight."

"I know that." Monty narrowed his eyes, looking at Breed. "What are you thinking? I don't like that 'Wheatland can kiss my ass' expression on your face. Are you going to see Wheatland or not?"

"Yep, when I get around to it."

Monty rolled his eyes and groaned. "This is nothing to play with, Breed. The DNA match on a dead man you knew, worked for, is enough for Wheatland to force the prosecutor's office to bring up charges. I wouldn't dick around here if I were you."

Breed relaxed back in his chair. "I intend to speak with Wheatland, but on my time and terms. I still have Coleson and the perp to figure out. Not to mention Foresight's death."

"You are obviously not going to listen to me on this Wheatland thing. How is it going with the shootings, since you brought it up? Coleson and the other man."

Breed drank his java, finished off a piece of toast, and started on the eggs. In between bites, he told Monty about how messed up the security stream was and that he was having XO work on it. XO was making progress. He had managed to clean up the video a lot, but not enough to identify the shooter.

"If anybody can do it, XO can."

"I agree. That's why I unofficially gave him a copy of the stream."

Monty turned up the volume on the television when a picture of Cesar Cortez's face appeared on the screen. "It seems Cortez's son is making a stink about his father. You almost killed him. The family is claiming agency brutality and a lawsuit. Is there anything I should know?"

Breed pretended he was clueless about what Monty asked.

"Elite Forces, with DEA public relations, read a statement saying that, when they went to apprehend Cortez with an official warrant, they found him near dead. As far as they know, a rival drug lord got to Cortez before they did."

"I admit we had a little chat. It didn't go so well for Cortez."

"Spare me the details, please. I want to be honest when I tell the judge I had no prior knowledge of how Cortez died *if* I have to defend you in court."

"Unfortunately, I left the bastard alive. Not that I felt benevolent, but I semi followed the law and didn't outright kill the asshole because it's what Pepper would have wanted."

"I understand. Well, he is dead now. After they found him close to death, his son got a court order approved to move his father to a private medical facility. He feared for his safety. Somebody leaked to the press that Cesar turned rat and had struck a deal with the Feds."

"You know, Monty, I'm having a hard time feeling any sympathy for the man," he said cynically.

"Neither do I. I'm just telling you what's all over the news. Normally when I watch the television, especially news, I listen to the sound."

"I don't because usually I know firsthand the twisted, sickening stories the news reports. In fact, I have more details. What the media report is what happens in my world, my job, remember?" he said testily.

Monty raised his hand for a truce. "They got to the senior Cortez anyway. His ears, eyes, and lips were removed and sent to Manuel Cortez in a gift box on the day of his eighteenth birthday."

"Hear, see, or speak no evil. It's a warning to him to keep his mouth shut."

"Maybe that's why Manuel disappeared and went into hiding?"

"Smart boy." Breed stood up. He wiped his mouth with a napkin, folded it, and laid it on the counter. "I have to go."

"Will you call me when—"

"Hold on." Breed tapped his interlink to connect. He listened, and then cursed under his breath. He turned to Monty. "Something told me not to answer that. It was from someone I know in dispatch. Apparently, Wheatland isn't a very patient man. He's sending a team to apprehend me for suspicion of murder if I don't show my ass in twenty minutes. Great, I just went from a top agent to a fugitive. Not to mention a homicidal maniac. This is bullshit."

"Give me a minute to get dressed, and I will come with you."

Breed waved his hand to let Monty know he heard him. He promised nothing. As soon as Monty left the room, he walked out the front door.

## **Chapter Thirty-Five**

Breed ignored the discomfort of the chair, bright lights, everything else in the room intentionally set a certain way to make him uncomfortable and waited impatiently for Wheatland to get around to the questioning. Not talk, he knew that was bullshit from the beginning. As soon as he walked inside the building, Wheatland treated him like a perp. He could have acted out, showed his ass, and made a stink about it, but then why give the zit-popping wonder boy the pleasure of knowing, beneath the calm exterior, he wanted to rip him a new one.

Wheatland had to know he was the best at interrogating people, so why he insisted on playing these games was beyond him. He guessed it made Wheatland feel in control of the situation. Whatever, he would go along with his antics until he got tired, and then there was no telling what would happen.

"Would you like a drink, Agent Uonaidas?"

Breed lifted one corner of his lips. "No, thank you. I'm not thirsty, and my DNA is already on file."

Wheatland's nostrils flared.

A slender guy with a homely face, inconspicuous eyes, and a mild manner sat in the corner of the room silently until his sarcastic slip. Breed noticed he coughed to disguise a chuckle. He looked the man over. He didn't recognize him and had no idea what agency he reported to. Wheatland didn't bother to make introductions. They way he sat in that disciplined stiffness, with his store-bought, off-the-rack dark suit, white shirt, and dull blue tie and quietly observed said he was a Fed man. Breed wondered, if that were the case, why was he present? Senator Sparks was dead, and along with his death, the Abramson Bill quietly got killed. As far as he could figure, there was no need for the government to be involved.

Breed glanced at the Fed man and watched him underneath the cover of his lashes. The man toyed with his handheld, paying more attention to the gadget than Wheatland or him. In fact, he found it interesting the way he paid too much attention to the electronic, which told him the man absorbed, recorded, and heard everything going on. He had a purpose for sitting in on the meeting. Breed shifted his attention to Wheatland, who was scanning notes on the visual screen. Maybe the watcher of the Elite Forces, Internal Oversight Affairs, had a watcher.

IOA specialist Simon Wheatland was the perfect picture of a good cop with his boyish haircut, wire-framed glasses, and baby-bottom-smooth face. He resembled a choirboy, or could easily be mistaken as a nerd, in any case, his unassuming demeanor gave people confidence to relax around him and openly share. That's what made him so effective in his job, people trusted Wheatland, at least those who fell for his innocent act, and didn't notice the shrewdness in the large blue eyes behind the thick lenses. Wheatland didn't look like much, but he knew he could get down and dirty, if needed. Not in the sense he would survive in a street brawl, but he used a soft tone, eloquent dialogue to catch you off guard, and then he would punch you in the gut and rip out your jugular when he wanted to break you.

He had known once the word got out that the captain's death was a copycat he would be at the top of the list of suspects. Having your DNA found on a death-threat note rather puts you in that position. As soon as he left Monty's house, he decided to cooperate, get the song and dance over with, and hopefully be on his merry way to find Foresight's real killer.

Wheatland finally started. "How was your relationship with Captain Foresight prior to his death?"

"He was my superior. I respected his position. I didn't know him on a personal level." Breed kept his answers brief.

"From what I heard, he was known as a hardass."

"He could be."

"I'm very familiar with your personnel record. You tend to do what you want and regard authority as a guideline and not rules and regulations you should follow."

"Is there a question in there?" Breed asked.

"Captain Foresight was on you and your partner pretty tough. Did that upset you? I know if I was busting my ass to solve a crime and my boss wouldn't let up, I'd be disturbed."

"The captain did his job. I did mine."

"Did you and Captain Foresight frequently have disagreements about how you were handling the case?

"Yes."

"And that didn't upset you?"

"It irritated me, but Captain Foresight isn't the first manager I had who got under my skin. I'm sure he won't be the last."

Breed sat quietly and watched, disgusted, as Wheatland popped a zit and scanned through his notes. The man had a serious case of acne, and he wondered why he didn't have it taken care of. He focused on the tabletop when Wheatland rubbed his pant leg, smearing it with puss.

"Are you in a relationship with your partner?"

"Not at the moment."

"Were you ever?"

He knew Wheatland knew the answer to the question. He wanted to see if he would lie. If a perp lied about a personal matter, then it was believed he would lie about anything. He'd used the tactic a time or two himself. Asked a question that was irrelevant to the case just to see how a person would respond. Sometimes people lied about things that made them feel uncomfortable. Once they did, it made them a liar, and anything they said going forward was scrutinized more closely.

"How long did you and your partner screw around?"

Breed managed to hide the amusement he felt. Wheatland wanted to get his ire up. Get him hot and bothered under the collar in hopes he'd slip up and throw a temper tantrum. People often messed up during interrogation when they let things get under their skin. His tone remained neutral. "We had a relationship up until a few weeks ago. I ended it."

"It's rumored that Agent McMahon and Captain Foresight were at each other's throats. Do you know why?"

"No." He knew the captain was giving Aldie hell, but he had no idea what about. They often met in private, and Aldie never disclosed what they talked about except to say the captain reamed his ass for this or that. He suspected why. Aldie was messing up lately, and the captain probably threatened his job, but he never validated his suspicions one way or another.

"Did you brutalize Cesar Cortez in retaliation for your girlfriend's death?"

Wheatland was good at shifting topics to try to keep him off balance. "There was an altercation when I went to apprehend Cortez. He was alive when I left him."

Wheatland narrowed his eyes. He wanted to drill him more about Cortez, but he knew he was more interested in getting something on him about the captain. He just threw in Cortez to try to rouse him.

"Where were you the night of Pepper Syms's death?"

"At my house. Alone. No alibi," he said before Wheatland asked.

"So, for all we know, you could have been involved in her death?"

Breed gritted his teeth. He flexed his fingers beneath the table to calm the urge he had to wrap his hands around Wheatland's scrawny neck. "I had nothing to do with Pepper's death."

Wheatland studied the screen and then eyed him. "Your semen was found inside her the night she was found."

"That happens when two people are intimate."

"So, no argument that night? You know, maybe she was upset about you interfering with her case. You two might have argued. You wanted to make up. She said no; you said yes. I hear you aren't the type of person to take no for an answer."

Breed stared at Wheatland. "Is there a question in there somewhere, or are you making a statement?"

"What happened after the Fugua case?"

Ah, he wondered when he would get to that.

"What about it?"

"Your records indicate suicidal thoughts, drug use, extensive therapy...Did you tell your therapist you wanted to rid the planet of scum? Put a blast in every psychopath's head? That you were on the edge and felt dangerously close to snapping? What about the comment, and I quote, 'Sometimes I don't think it's worth my time with the bullshit I have to endure, all the hypocritical rules and regulations, to solve a case while the bureaucrats sit on their asses and preach what they don't practice. Sometimes I wonder how the commanders get their positions with their

inadequate qualifications. It would make my job a hell of a lot easier if my superior didn't exist.' The doctor made sidebar notes, putting the words in parenthesis. 'He is referring to revenge, killing, renegade tendencies—perhaps agent Uonaidas might be suffering from DD.' That's distress disorder."

"That was a long time ago. I might have said those things, maybe not in the exact words, but frankly I don't remember."

Wheatland swiveled the monitor around so he could see. He pointed at the text. "I read it verbatim from the doctor's report."

"Then I must have said it."

"Did the Fuqua case get to you more than you're letting on? I know how it is. The stress, the day-to-day bullshit street officers endure. The murders, sickness, it is enough to turn my stomach sour. You worked hard to solve the case, and here comes Captain Foresight riding your ass, throwing his weight around, pushing too hard. Maybe you resented that and snapped. Before you realized it, you killed him. When your thoughts cleared, you realized what you did. You tried to cover up your crime by mimicking the other murders. It would make sense."

"Maybe in a really distorted, asinine thought process," he said.

The Fed man, quiet up until now, smothered a snicker.

Wheatland fumed, blowing air through his nose. "You can't deny there was resentment towards authority you felt impeded your progress. That, and didn't you personally hold your superior responsible for Waverly's death? It's all starting to come together, Agent Uonaidas."

"For the sake of getting this bullshit interrogation over with, let's see if I can respond to your maze of questions and innuendoes to meet your satisfaction. First, the agency forced me to see a therapist. That is what happens when a fellow agent is shot and/or killed. Second, the drugs you mentioned were prescribed for pain due to the hole they had to repair in my chest when I was shot. Third, yes, things would be a lot better if all the whackos were off the street. Waverly never should have been on the case. He was a rookie two weeks on the force." Breed leaned forward. "Now, as far as anything else you said, it's purely speculation on your part. I don't intend to address your assumptions. What I will say, for the record, is, if I 'snapped' as you claimed and killed Captain Foresight, I'm intelligent,

savvy, and knowledgeable enough about the interworkings of the agency, forensics, et cetera not to botch it by leaving my DNA all over the victim."

"Hollis said she only shared the note's contents found on Hilton and Abramson with you."

"Then I think I would have gotten it right." He relaxed, leaned back in his chair, and folded his arms over his chest.

The fact he discounted everything Wheatland threw at him didn't stop the man from asking the same questions six different times, six different ways. He continued to throw accusations, mixed with truths, to try to trip him up. He remained truthful, steadfast, and waded through Wheatland's bullshit until he exhausted the man. Rattled him too, he knew, because the bridge of his nose sweated, and his glasses kept sliding down. He'd shoved them back in place, go at him again, until finally, frustrated, Wheatland snatched the frames off. He tossed the glasses across the table.

"Is that like you're tossing the towel into the ring?" the Fed man asked. Wheatland spun around in his chair and glared at the man. "What?"

"He—" he started.

"Staff Assistant Bentley," the man said.

"Mr. Bentley is using an analogy for a boxer who is getting the crap beat out of him in the ring by his opponent. His manager throws in the towel to stop it. He gives up because he knows there is no comeback," Breed said, and stood.

"Sit...down. This interrogation is over when I say it is," Wheatland said, seething.

"Am I under arrest?"

"Is he? If so, for what reason do you have to hold Agent Uonaidas?" Bentley asked.

Wheatland grinned like a Cheshire cat. "Were you aware Captain Foresight had a record of an ongoing investigation on you, Agent Uonaidas? When we searched his house, we found a safe. In that lockbox was a folder that contained a report on Agent Breed Uonaidas. In the report, it said he suspected you were using drugs, sexual harassment of your partner and other officers. That you threatened a fellow agent's...ah, I believe his name is Cox...life on more than one occasion. He also wrote about how you 'lost it' when your girlfriend was murdered and put your hand through a plate glass window and then refused medical attention. This furthered his belief

you where hyped on something to take that kind of abuse to your hand and feel no pain. You went AWOL; then there was the entire Cortez fiasco. Need I say more?"

"I'm sure I'm not the only agent the captain had a file on. We all know there is the agency personnel file, and then there is the secret secret file that every superior keeps on an agent. It contains every offense you ever made. Even if you spit on the sidewalk, jaywalked, or showed up late by five minutes, the data is collected. That doesn't make me a murderer."

Wheatland stood to his unassuming height. "Maybe, maybe not, but you are the only one whose DNA was found on his body. You're under arrest for Captain Foresight's murder. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you if necessary to build a solid case. You have the right to an attorney. If you can't or refuse to secure one, you will be supplied with a lawyer to oversee and assist with your case if you decide to defend yourself. Everything discussed in this room will be transcribed, and you will be asked to provide your signature to its authenticity. If you refuse to sign, the entire transcript can and might be used against you in court. Do you understand these rights I have stated to you, Breed Uonaidas?"

"I do."

When he removed the loops from his jacket pocket and activated them, Bentley intervened. "I don't think those are necessary."

"There are rules and regulations for handling perps. A rogue agent is no different."

Breed held out his wrists and let Wheatland cuff him. The bands were too small and tight. They would probably cut off his circulation if left on too long, but he refused to complain.

When Wheatland took his elbow to lead him outside to the holding chambers, he removed his arm and shrugged him off. Wonder Boy looked as if he might grab him again, but Breed growled.

"What is this about, Wheatland?" Aldie asked. He stepped in front of Wheatland, glanced at Breed, and then, fuming, he insisted Wonder Boy give him an explanation.

"Your partner is under arrest. Isn't that obvious?" Wheatland said smugly. He sidestepped Aldie and continued down the hall.

Aldie wouldn't let up. He caught up to them. "This is bullshit, and you know it."

"This is not personal, Agent McMahon. I'm just doing my job. Now, if you insist on intervening, I will haul your ass in for obstruction of justice. Do you understand?"

"Aldie, this is not your battle. Let it go," Breed said.

Bentley spoke up. "Agent McMahon, it's best to allow due process." He looked at Breed. "Matters will be handled according to the strict rules and regulations of the law. Agent Uonaidas can count on it."

"What the hell does that mean?" Aldie asked.

"Things aren't always what they seem," he said, glanced at Breed, and then walked off.

Breed followed Bentley's—aka the anonymous caller's—back, wondering what the hell was going on.

\* \* \* \*

Monty was on Breed's heels when he left headquarters. He kept pace with him as they walked down the steps and over to Breed's cruiser.

"You want to talk about it?"

"No." He activated the vessel's security module and let it scan his image. The doors unlocked. He reached for the handle.

"The charges are trumped up and will be left up to the prosecutor's scrutiny. Wheatland is grabbing at straws."

"I'm not worried about Wheatland." He opened the door, ready to get in, when Monty continued talking.

"Will you at least give me a call later and let me know what was said in there? I will get a copy of the transcript now that I'm actively your lawyer, but I'm sure Wheatland will make sure I don't get that information for a day or so. I prefer to know what happened in there now."

"Sure."

"You wouldn't consider coming by my place to discuss this now, would you?"

"No."

Monty stood there and watched Breed zip into oncoming traffic until he heard footsteps behind him. He turned around to find Wheatland there.

"You work fast. I heard you were good, but I thought Agent Uonaidas would stay behind the force fields long enough to think about if it was worth it to be dirty."

"Excuse me?"

"Come on, we work opposite ends of the law. We catch perps, you set them free, but we're both honest people when it comes down to it. Agent Uonaidas has snapped. It's a sad thing to witness. I admit that, but he is not the first, and I'm sure not the last, agent to go whacko."

"Is there a reason you are talking to me? You know I represent Breed, so therefore you know what you say to me, or vice versa, about my client is not permissible without a judge present. Excuse me." Monty continued down the street and headed to his vessel.

"Hey, how do you think it will end for your boyfriend?"

Monty stopped mid-stride. He whirled around and stalked back to where Wheatland stood. "What did you say?"

"It's no secret you two are doing each other. Not that it's my concern, mind you, but ethics can come into play here. Did you know what was going on with Agent Uonaidas?"

Monty smirked, refusing to allow Wheatland to rattle him. "If that is your belief, feel free to make your case. Otherwise, we don't have anything to say to each other. Now that you've done your dirty work, it's up to the prosecutor to handle the case. That means you can butt out. If you do not, you're seriously close to harassment charges."

"That sounds like a threat."

"It is." Monty started to turn away when Wheatland caught his arm.

"I was just wondering how you think it will end for your boyfriend. DD makes an agent go loopy, especially after he gets himself in a bind with no way out. Most agents put a blast in their heads, drink themselves to death, take a dive off a twenty-story building. How do you think Uonaidas will handle getting caught with his hands in the mud?"

Monty snatched his arm away. "You're a first-rate dick," he snarled. He leaned into Wheatland's face. "That, and if you ever touch me again, I will shove your fingers so far up your ass you can bite your nails. Have a nice day."

# **Chapter Thirty-Six**

Thrashing wildly, Breed mound and then ground his hips forward, sending his cock repeatedly into the moist heat.

Bubbly laughter sounded, faint perfume, alluringly sweet, teased his nostrils, a soft wisp of curls wrapped around his fingertips when he ran them through Pepper's hair.

He felt the smoothness of her full lips kissing him. He moaned at her taste and devoured greedily as he continued to sink into the depths of sweltering pussy that had his cock on fire.

"Ah, Pepper..." he moaned. Then he grunted, shuddering, feeling the hard rod slip between his ass cheeks and penetrate. "Monty?" The hardness rode higher, unrelenting, churning deep with enough powerful thrust to send his cock deeper into Pepper's pussy.

A combination of strong arms and slender, silky limbs encircled his body. He relished the feel of the uniquely different touch of being held by the soft, luscious woman and hard, powerful maleness.

Breed increased the pace of his strokes...grinding his cock against the temptation.

Sweet lips captured his in an endearing kiss. Licking, tasting, and teasing along the outline of his mouth. The slender, honey-laced tongue swirled around, sending him into a heated abyss of urgent desire.

A firm grasp, strong hands turned his face from the tender assault. He felt the roughness of stubble rub against his mouth, searching. He tasted a male and felt the thick tongue create wicked lashes inside his mouth. He held Monty's jawline and devoured his lips as feverishly as he ate at him.

Pepper joined them, and they shared a ménage a kiss. Dueling tongues, savoring, thirsting, as if parched, invaded his mouth at the same time,

appeasing both his desires for feminine allure and male demands—the best of both worlds.

Breed groaned, and slammed his hips forward into the enticing pussy wiggling all over his cock. He heard himself call out Pepper's name, and then she responded by arching up into his next descent into heaven.

Monty held his hips, driving, and plundering his ass in a wicked tempo that matched the voracious craving in which he fucked his woman. Their bodies rose in synch, he drove downward, slicing his cock into Pepper's pussy while Monty rocked his hips, bucking, sending the entire length of his cock into the depths of his ass continuously until he felt as if they were all fucking as one.

Pepper cried out in pleasure. Her mouth clasped to his, she kissed him wildly as the rapturous bliss consumed her. He felt Monty's mouth return. He ate and devoured, and then a low guttural groan of satisfaction tore from his lips. Monty's climax quickly followed Pepper's. He felt the wetness fill his ass. Finally, blessedly, with both his lovers satisfied, he allowed his restraint to slip. His entire body shuddered with the force of his release. He cried out...Monty, Pepper, as the last of his orgasm rippled through his body.

He sat straight up in bed, wiped the sweat from his face, and tried to calm his breathing. His entire body felt live and humming. He was perspiring. Choppy pants escaped and sounded loud in the quiet room. Breed rolled to the side of the bed, threw his legs over the side, and scooted to the edge. He raked his fingers through his damp hair. He threw his head back, filled his lungs with air, and then slowly released it. He'd been dreaming.

His fingers touched the creamy residue on the sheets. Damn it, he hadn't had a wet dream since he was twelve. Frustrated, he grabbed the covers and yanked hard, pulling them off the bed. The linen was soaked, soiled, and he wanted to change it. He balled the sheet in his hands and went to toss it to the floor when Pepper's scent invaded his nostrils.

The fragrance was light, faint due to the passage of time, but it remained strong as he inhaled. He put the cloth to his nose, inhaled, and shuddered as the memory of Pepper surfaced so strong he believed she stood there next to him.

It was obvious what the dream meant. Sharing Pepper and Monty in a harmonious electi arrangement was more than a notion. He hadn't admitted it until now, but it was what he wanted more than he'd wanted anything in his life.

Breed stalked into the bathroom, flipped open the lid to the hamper, and shoved the sheet inside. He slammed the top shut. He went into his office, sat at the desk, and turned on the monitor.

He brought up the case to give himself something to think about other than how some bastard had destroyed his dream. He typed rapidly over the keypad, scanned the first pages to appear, he studied the data for a long minute until his vision blurred.

Nothing had changed about the unsolved pieces of the case. Captain Foresight's, Coleson's, the perp's, and Pepper's murderer was still out there.

The agency had taken away his badge and put him on temporary suspension pending the outcome of Wheatland's asinine charges. That didn't mean he would stop working the case. He wouldn't ever quit until the person responsible for the deaths was brought to justice.

The innate agent persona inside Breed made it habitual for him to review the details of the case repeatedly until every nuance sank in and fused in his brain. Sometimes even then he refused to let go. His intuition told him not to. As far as he was concerned, there was no such thing as a cold case. When murder was involved, there was nothing chilly about it except that the culprit was still walking around a free man.

Breed contemplated what he might have missed. He pored over the details of the murders line by line, then again, and again, until the text began to merge and looked like one big fluorescent light on the screen. Only then did he turn away, blinked to clear his eyes, before he started at it again.

He was staring at the grainy image of the person who hit Coleson and the perp when his interlink bleeped. He scanned the loc-tag ID thinking it might be Monty or Aldie, and if that were the case, they'd have to wait. Shutting Monty out meant he had regressed back into his dysfunctional mode. Breed shrugged the thought off. He would make it up to him later. Aldie was a different matter. He seriously wanted to talk to him, but when he did, he wanted it to be up close and personal.

The sudden connection of the communicator didn't startle Breed. Only one person he knew could override his interlink block. "Don't make it a habit of hacking my private line. What's up, XO?"

"Hey, man, you said if I got something on the stream to call you. You said it didn't matter what time or—"

"I know what I said. What do you have?"

"Bad news, man. Real bummer, if you know what I mean. I mean, seeing his face almost made me piss my pants."

"Who is it?" He really didn't need to ask. He already knew the person on the stream. He only asked to validate his suspicions. When he paid the murdering bastard a visit, he wanted all his ducks in a row. Each piece of evidence had to be unquestionable.

"Hey, man, your partner is pretty messed up in the head. Bad deal, huh?"

"Yeah, it's a bitch. Thanks." He disconnected.

#### **Chapter Thirty-Seven**

Breed didn't wait for Aldie to move and let him inside. He shoved right past him and entered the room.

"Hey, nice to see you too. It's kind of early, but after all that bullshit with Wheatland, I was concerned about you. You stopped taking my calls—"

Not one to pussyfoot around, Breed got straight to the reason he was there. "You killed Coleson, Foresight, and the perp. Why?"

For a brief second, Breed thought Aldie would try to deny the charges. He stood stiff, stared at him, gawking with his mouth on the floor. He noticed how odd he appeared, very unlike himself. Aldie prided himself on being calm, cool, and collected in demeanor and dress. His clothes looked like he'd slept in them, and more than one night. His hair stood on edge as if he had been running his fingers through it, and his eyes had the raccoon effect. He twitched, continuously scratched at his bare arms with his nails. *A junkie's nervousness*, Breed thought.

He started pacing and rambling. "Coleson had it in for me. I guess I dissed him one too many times, and he didn't like it. He started threatening me about my job. The old fart was going to blackmail me," he said, and shrugged. "So, I blew him off a couple of times to keep him quiet. That should have been enough, but he wanted more. You know, to do me, but I refused him and threatened to turn him in to Wheatland for sexual harassment. He got very angry about that. Pissed as hell. Those assassins at Jordon's that night were after me. Coleson wanted to silence me permanently."

"What about the perp?"

"I knew him from my stint at the DEA. When I brought him in, he got all freaked out. To save his ass, he was going to expose what he knew about me. Couldn't afford that to happen." He walked to the bar console and

poured a drink. He gulped it down, made another, and nursed the glass, clutching it between his fingers. "I messed up in DEA. I went under and got too deep. One night I had to take a few hits of Twilight, you know, to prove to the dealer I wasn't DEA. If I didn't, the man would have put a blast in my head."

"You're a junkie."

"I used a little to take the edge off, you know? A social user before things got rough. I got stressed with Coleson on my butt. And then Captain Foresight, he picked up where Coleson left off, but unlike Coleson, Foresight didn't ask, but took what he wanted. He was one sick fuck. When I used to tell you he reamed me good, I meant it. Always after me, nipping at my heels like a voracious dog. But he was ten times worse than Coleson. Like I said, he didn't ask. He wasn't in charge two weeks before he called me into his office, showed me the stream of us in the shower, and then told me to blow him or my ass was grass. Hell, I have bills to pay. I did what I had to do to keep the bastard off me. Foresight liked it rough...whips, chains, leather, a real sadist. God, I enjoyed doing him with that bat. After everything he did to me, it was a fucking rush to get revenge, hear him scream for once. Man, that night I did him, I was so hyped on drugs I didn't realize what I did until it was too late. I haven't used in days. Trying to clean myself up," he said, and Breed wondered if Aldie thought that would vindicate him for murder. Not to mention he had tried to frame him for Foresight's murder.

"Were you in bed with Cortez?"

"You mean literally?" Aldie laughed.

Breed didn't break a smile. He let his half-ass attempt to joke fly over his head.

"Cortez wasn't into men. A real cock hound. He did like his pussy." Aldie looked at Breed. "Believe it or not, Pepper was getting to him. It was the first time I saw him get all crazy about a female when he suspected she was DEA. The man went nuts."

"Really? Then why did he put a hit on her? Why not just try and buy her off like he did you?"

"Cortez didn't buy me off. He owned me. He was feeding my habit, and in return I kept him one step ahead of the DEA investigation."

A cold countenance settled over Breed. So chilly, he felt like his entire body had frostbite. He couldn't move, speak, or breathe.

He lunged at Aldie. He wrapped his hands around his throat and squeezed. "You bastard. You killed Pepper. What, as a favor to Cortez to keep your worthless ass out of confinement and stuff up your nose?" He released him, withdrew his stunner, and shoved it into Aldie's forehead. "I should fucking put a blast through your head."

"Go ahead. Do it, man." Aldie grabbed the handle of the weapon and ground the barrel into his temple. "Do it!" he shouted.

"Fuck!" Breed slammed his knee into his stomach. Aldie groaned, crumbled to the floor, and started wheezing. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? You coward prick. It would be just like you to want the easy way out."

Aldie sat on the floor, legs folded and chin down, sobbing pitifully. Breed looked at the pathetic sight, unremorseful. He connected to his interlink and told the dispatch to send an apprehension team.

Aldie dragged his head up. He wiped his eyes, ran the back of his hand across his nose. "So, that's how we play it? Not even for old times' sake, my partner, *lover*, can't bring me in? You want me to be paraded around like a monkey on a chain so that everybody can see what a disgrace I am?"

"If you think you deserve anything less, you're more delusional than I suspected. Besides, you should count your blessings I don't kill you. You'd like that, though. Like I said, you want the easy way out, but I'm not going to give you the satisfaction. You will get what you deserve. You killed my woman and my child. I want you to suffer, asshole."

His voice was ultra low. Aldie said, "When did you suspect it was me behind the murders? I'm just curious."

"When I didn't tell you what Hollis said about the notes left on Abramson and Hilton. Then, when I was sure, I lied to you about the message just to see what happened. I didn't want to believe my partner was capable of murder. You disappointed me, Aldie. Big time."

Aldie swiped his hand in the air dismissively. "We all have our sins to bear, Breed. Nobody is infallible."

"I don't know what bullshit you are babbling, so save it."

A sly smile surfaced on Aldie's face. "My God, you are so self-righteous it makes me sick. The perfect, glorious, mighty Breed Uonaidas doesn't have a kink in his impeccable armor. Bullshit! You're no saint. You

screwed around on the woman you supposedly loved. Hell, you even let me bang Pepper. Not to mention while you were fucking us both, you were chasing your friend Monty. Hey, by the way, how did that turn out?"

"You're insane."

"Ah, just what I thought. Monty is a looker, so I can't hardly blame you for wanting to bang him. You *are* fucking him, aren't you?" Aldie chuckled crudely. "You don't have to answer because I know you are. Jesus, you are something else. Tell me, what are you going to do when you get bored with Monty? Toss his ass out and start on your next victim?"

"Stop rambling, Aldie. The more you talk, the sicker I get."

Aldie whispered, "You never knew just how much I loved you. I would have done anything for you, man."

"Yeah, I can tell by the way you tried to frame me for Foresight's murder and killed Pepper. Thanks, but I don't need that type of love."

"You asshole!" Aldie shouted, jumped to his feet. Enraged, he threw his body toward Breed like a missile, tackled him to the floor, and tried to wrestle the gun out of his hand. He failed when Breed sent his knee into his groin and shoved him off.

Aldie went wild, ranting and raving, screaming at Breed. "I loved you! You meant everything to me! You think Coleson, Foresight, nothing anybody did to me meant anything except when you used me like all the others and then tossed me aside like a used tissue wipe. You screwed me, man, in many ways! You were my world." He broke down crying.

Breed just looked at Aldie, expressionless. He turned his back on him when he heard the hovercrafts coming.

A click-click sounded behind him.

Slowly, he turned around to find Aldie standing there, repeatedly pressing the trigger of his stunner that was pointed at his back.

"It's loaded with blanks. I know where you keep your spare. When you fixed a drink, I switched your gun for another. I hope when you go to confinement all the men you put behind force fields give you a warm welcome. In fact, the warden and I go way back. He's already got your cellmate assigned. A six-four, three-hundred-pound ex-wrestler who's in for murder. Broke a man's neck with his bare hands. He's had three cellmates, and every one of them is dead. The warden told me a pretty boy like you might last longer than two weeks if you're real nice."

The shrill laughter sent hackles up Breed's spine and made his hair stand on edge. Aldie was hysterical. He sat there and chuckled so intensely his entire body shook. When he looked up, the glossy sheen in his eyes had turned dull. No light shone behind his eyes. His features twisted oddly, maniacal in appearance. He saw the true person behind the façade Aldie portrayed for the first time. It wasn't fear, desperation, or any other explanation for the crimes he committed. He was a sociopath.

Aldie rotated his neck, rolled the kinks out of his shoulders like a prizefighter warming up to go into the ring. He stared straight through Breed. His voice was clear and precise. The tears had magically disappeared. He took a step toward him. Breed aimed his stunner at his chest.

"Don't even think about whatever you're thinking, Aldie. I will kill you."

Aldie grinned and stepped closer. He kept coming and didn't stop until the end of his stunner was pressed into his chest. "You're not going to kill me because you want me to suffer. Remember?" He leered, snarled, making an intimidating gesture at Breed, who didn't flinch. "Ah, come on, man. Shoot." Breed raised his arm and pointed higher towards his face. Aldie opened his mouth as if to say 'Blast me.'

When he moved back, Aldie started the sinister laughing again. The sound made his skin crawl.

"You told me how you think it's going to play out. Let me tell you what is really going to happen to me. I suffer from mental distress disorder and have been for years. The stress of my job only exacerbated the condition. Now, my head doctor said meds would help, though I disagreed. You know they say a person doesn't know when they are twisted in the head? That's a bald-faced lie." He shrugged nonchalantly.

"Hey, remember those twins I told you about? They screwed me pretty bad. From the first day I arrived, and every time I turned around, they were after me to give it up. Yeah, finally I did, but it wasn't like I told you. They took what they wanted, and after a while, I became the aggressor just to keep them from hurting me. It seemed obedience bored them, and they finally left me alone." Aldie paused as if he lost his train of thought. Then he started talking again. "Oh, and then there was the old dude I called my boyfriend in college. Not true. He was just a professor at the university that

liked young men. Hey, I'm bright, but not that intelligent, so having a professor who fixed your grades in return for sex so you could graduate at the top of your class helped. Then other perverts like Coleson and Foresight, et cetera. I think you get the gist of what I'm saying. I've been under a psychiatrist's care most of my life. I just lost it. That means, worst case scenario, I will spend some time in an institution. No confinement for me, man. Sorry if that disappoints you." Aldie walked to the couch and sat down. He looked at Breed with a triumphant smile plastered all over his face, arrogant and smug.

Breed returned his gaze. His expression was unreadable. Something that should have frightened Aldie, but he was too busy feeling full of himself. It didn't matter to Breed whether Aldie figured out why his "worst case scenario" didn't upset him. In the end, when he realized how unforgiving he was about Pepper, his blasé attitude would make sense.

It might take one, two, three, or more years to seek his revenge. He wasn't known to be a patient man. In this case, he'd make an exception. No matter how long it took, Aldie would pay for what he did. Big time. Justice would be served—the Uonaidas way.

## **Chapter Thirty-Eight**

One year later

Breed entered the den ten minutes after Monty, who was standing by the bar console with a fresh drink in his hand. He took the glass, swallowed the contents, emptying half the glass, before he handed it back. He finished loosening his tie, unbuttoned his shirt, sat down, and stretched out his legs in front of him before leaning back and closing his eyes.

"I heard Aldie got a slap on the wrist. Damn, I wanted to be there for you, but couldn't get my trial date changed."

"I didn't need you there in court." He peered at Monty. "Now is another matter." He patted his thigh, motioning for him to come and have a seat.

Monty stood in front of him. "How you holding up?" he asked.

"Great. Things turned out how I expected them to." He reached out and wrapped his arms around his waist and pulled him forward, gripped his hips, lifted, and straddled Monty over his waist. Remotely, quietly, he started unfastening his shirt. He removed it, laid it aside, and then started on his pants. He raked his knuckles down his stomach, paused to kiss the center of his chest, nibbling, he continued lower, planting kisses while his adept fingers unhooked and unzipped his pants until his dick sprang free.

He pushed the trousers down as far as the clothing would go. "Raise up so I can get these pants off." He waited for him to follow instructions. Palming his perfect dick, rubbing back and forth over the shaft, he used his other hand to slide the trousers down his legs to the floor.

"You want to talk about it?"

"What I want is to fuck you."

Monty balanced his hands on his shoulders. He laid his chin on top his head. A whispery touch, lips kissed him there.

His lips trailed upward, along his torso, he nuzzled his nose against the peach fuzz of hair that covered the hard muscles and made his stomach soft to the touch. He murmured, "I need my cock out, but don't want to stop touching you. Release me."

Monty reached inside his pants, glided his hand over his dick. "You're already hard and slippery."

Breed looked down at the oily sheen covering his cock and did the eyebrow thing, two quick lifts up. "I've been thinking about you all day. Before I came inside, I got prepared. I'm feeling a little urgent to be buried inside you."

"You were outside my place playing with your cock? Goodness, what will the neighbors think?" he said, amused.

Breed's tone was rough. "I don't care." He cupped his nape, maneuvered him forward until their mouths touched. He teased wickedly, licked his tongue over his full bottom lip before slipping his tongue between the moist plumpness. His invasion swift, he delved greedily, kissing him demandingly.

Monty fell solidly against him. His chest molded to him, making their nipples touch, causing his to ache when their bodies meshed. Sheer pleasure simmered through him like a jolt, electrified, and intensified his desire.

Monty broke contact. He ran his fingers through his hair, framed his face, and tilted upward until their eyes met. His sensual, Breed's dark and hooded. Monty said, "You are a bad boy, Breed Uonaidas."

Breed lifted him up, settling him over his waist. His expression feral, he said, "I know..." His voice faltered as he lowered him onto his turgid length until he penetrated his ass. Buried to the max, he held, luxuriated in the feel of the snug tunnel of pleasure molded around his cock. A beat passed before he rocked his hips forward, driving deep with measured strokes, gliding easily in and out, setting a pace that repeatedly sent the entirety of his shaft thrusting into the depths of the hot, moist man-hole.

Monty encircled his neck, clinging to him, arching to meet each of the commanding propulsions of his pelvis that drove his cock deeper.

His voice sounded drowsy and thick. "Kiss me," he said, slipping his tongue between Monty's lips when he lowered his head. The kiss was tentative at first and then became primitive—a clashing of teeth, swirling tongues that mated in a feverish pitch. Greedily both devoured each other's

mouths with an untamed thirst. Intent on consuming him whole, he didn't hold anything back. Determined never to restrain himself with Monty again, physically or emotionally, he affirmed his need to take but give equally with each desperate, almost savage, surge into the sheer pleasure of his man.

Choppy pants, weak groans escaped when he lifted Monty and laid him flat on his back against the couch. When he moved them, it caused his cock to slip out of his ass. Monty moaned, protested, wiggling about. Raising his butt up and squirming the wet hole over his cock, he tried to force deeper penetration. Feeling rapacious, Breed obliged him. With one hand he gripped his hip to hold him still, the other guided his penis forward until he screwed the thick crown until he entered him again. Hovering over him, he started pushing deeper into the snug heat. "There. Is that what you want?"

"More."

"Okay, baby."

Their eyes met, his half-open Monty's narrowed, and then widened when he flexed his cock and swiftly penetrated, thrusting hard and deep.

Monty gasped. "Breed!"

He felt his body tense beneath him. His anus tightened, locked around his cock, sucking sensations rippled through every nerve ending in his cock. He slowly withdrew, slammed his hips forward, cursed under his breath, and shuddered as he struggled not to lose control and climax.

Monty hooked his legs over his back, lifted his waist up to take him deeper, began the rhythmic, frenzied tempo that drove his cock to and fro inside the hot, moist portal that melted around his cock like warm butter until he was fucking, unrestrained, inside his ass.

He was able to go so deep, so far, he feared it was almost too much. "Fuck, I'm going to hurt you," he groaned, fighting the untamed urge he had to fuck himself to death.

Monty popped his ass with his flat palm. "Do it! Fuck me!"

Breed caught his wrists in his hands and jerked them above his head, holding them in place. He backdrew, slammed his hips forward, and moaned. "Damn, Monty." In that moment, their gazes locked, he erupted, knowing Monty could see, understand, the fierce depth of his emotions in his eyes when he climaxed. Breed shattered, he shook violently, and ejaculated.

He was still gulping, trying to suck in air when Monty pushed him away. "What? Did I hurt you? I apologize if—"

His kiss was savage, possessive, that of a man parched. He framed his face between his fingers, sliced his tongue between his lips, and started rotating. Then he tore his mouth away. He encircled his cock, squeezed. "Your dick is still hard."

"That happens when I'm horny as hell."

"And you haven't been taken care of properly."

Monty looked temporarily confused when he caught his hand and removed it. Breed rolled onto his stomach, came up on his knees, and pushed back until he felt his cock at the entrance of his ass. "Fuck me, baby," he said, going down and surrendering to his man. He felt the explosive cum simmer through his ass as soon as Monty entered, stroked a few times, grunted in satisfaction, and then collapsed over his back.

By the third, fourth, fifth—hell, he'd lost count—orgasms, both men fell onto the bed exhausted but pleasantly sedated. Monty snuggled up against him, causing their sweated bodies to slip and slide against one another when they made contact. He welcomed his embrace, a lazy thigh rubbed over his, an arm wrapped around his waist. He cupped his butt, caressing the firmness soothingly between his hands.

Breed's voice sounded drowsy. "I hate to admit it, but there's not an ounce of strength left in my body. I couldn't raise my pinkie if I wanted to right now," he said.

Monty yawned, slipped his hand around his cock, cradling him. He kissed his chin. "That's makes two of us."

A comfortable quietness settled between them. Neither spoke for a long time until Monty broke the silence. He said, "Are you upset that Aldie practically got off scot-free? I mean, he will do time in an institution...at least three or four years, but that doesn't seem like justice."

"It's what the court ordered. You're a lawyer, Monty. It is what it is."

"If I was a prosecutor, I would have made sure he got time in confinement. It's cases like these that make me consider switching sides."

"Even if you were the prosecutor, not discounting your skills, but Aldie's lawyer did a good song and dance for the jury. She had them eating out of her hand. Not to mention Aldie cried on cue, sobbed pitifully, and played to the jurors' sympathy. The entire theatrics should win an Oscar nomination."

"You seem calm about that. I admit it's kind of eerie."

"Why?"

"Because I know you, Breed. That and your aura and calm demeanor don't mesh. If you were any bluer, I'd confuse you for a juicy blueberry."

Breed chuckled. "Interesting analogy." He rolled to the side, converged on Monty, edging him backwards until he was flat on the bed. His look was wolfish. "Suddenly I feel rejuvenated. Let's see if we can make me glow pink. What do you think about that?"

"I know I can make you burn red hot."

"Oh, baby, you know I love a challenge."

Monty wrapped his arms around his neck and drew him down until their bodies were horizontally aligned. He kissed his mouth. He saw the words forming on his lips. This time he waited. Waited for him to say he loved him. He ached to hear those three simple words that he never realized meant so much to him until now. The anticipation of knowing that someone loved him so deeply, and he felt twice the same, made him giddy. He, emotionally dysfunctional, felt "giddy," he thought, and almost laughed.

"I love you, Breed."

"I know, baby." He smothered a grin when Monty looked disappointed.

He eased inside the welcoming warmth. Monty's eyelids fluttered and closed. Breed caught his chin, rubbed his thumb over the pouty bottom lip. He framed his face, kissed his mouth with slow, intense, deliberation. Further melding their bodies, thrusting to the depths, raining kisses over the sweetness, he murmured, saying, "Open your eyes, Monty. See who's making love to you. Who loves you."

His lovemaking was unhurried, passionate, a tender assault that sent them quickly to the edge of the precipice of pleasure, over the crest, swirling into the eddy of bliss. He waited until Monty clung to him, climaxed, before Breed sought his own fulfillment.

As Monty snored beside him, Breed stared into the darkness thinking how good it felt to get lost in the moment and forget all the injustices in the world. The ugliness faded into nothing, if only for the minute, just a minute, but was never forgotten. He would never forget as long as things remained unsettled.

Monty stirred, snuggled closer, tightening his hold on him. Yes, Breed thought, it felt damn good to forget. He'd allow himself that, but never to forgive.

Ever.

## **Epilogue**

Three years later

Aldie wanted to scream, a gritty hand that tasted sour when he bit into it closed over his mouth, suffocated the noise. The sound was muffled, lodged in his throat. He wanted to gag, spit the sweaty taste out, and wipe the bitterness from his lips.

He prayed to wake up from the nightmare.

He didn't move. He curled into a fetal position and sank back against the wall feeling the chipped cement bite into his back. He tried to disappear into the darkness in hopes the men left him alone. That was always his fantasy, one that reoccurred nightly for the three years in the institution. His dreams never came to fruition. The two orderlies always came in the night like thieves, appeared like dark apparitions, and dragged him away to the basement.

The floor was cold, damp, and covered with mildew where water leaked from the pipes overhead in the room. His knees scraped across the mushy surface as they pulled him along to the far corner of the room where they liked to work. Just below the single windowpane, where a sliver of moonlight shone through.

He knew why they chose this spot. The men enjoyed hearing his screams as much as they liked seeing his face when the torture began.

No matter what, he was determined not to scream, to refuse them the satisfaction of hearing him sob and grovel like a bitch one last time. He swore to himself, gritted his teeth, when one of the men grabbed him by the neck and flung him into the wall.

Orderly Brunt was a burly man, thick-necked, pudgy around the middle. He had large hands that he used to inflict pain in the worst way Aldie thought possible. He never used the iron fist to beat him black and blue

anymore because the first time he did it he had to explain the bruises to the nightshift lead nurse. He'd conveniently slipped and fallen down the stairs. That didn't stop him from using his fist in unorthodox ways that made him queasy to his stomach and puke when he thought about it.

The other attendant was young, buffed, not as brutal as Brunt. His games weren't sick. Hodges had his hang-ups, though. He refused to admit he was gay, took his frustrations out on Aldie, blamed him for getting his cock hard as if he had ever come on to him.

Aldie cringed hearing the whisper of zippers slide down. The sound, once exciting, made his heart palpitate wildly inside his chest as a sense of dread washed fresh and raw over him. He hated the noise. Just hearing it made tears spring to his eyes.

Brunt's tone was gruff. "A little going away present, pretty boy."

Hodges snickered. "He isn't as handsome as he used to be when he first came here." He chuckled. "But his looks aren't what turned me on anyway."

"On your knees, pretty boy," Brunt ordered.

Aldie stopped trying to fight a long time ago. The last time he did, they broke his leg in three places. Again, he had a problem managing the stairs. Because of this, he hobbled, dragged his lame leg behind him. He would have been fine if the hospital brought in a specialist, set his leg right, and offered physical therapy. Murders didn't get that type of consideration. He was a cripple.

This was his last night in the institution. Tomorrow he'd be a free man. With that thought in mind, he tried to lose himself in a black void. Force his thoughts elsewhere and ignore what happened to him.

They didn't deviate from their routine. If nothing else, he had to be thankful they acted quick in order to complete their rounds without being questioned about tardiness. One time he struggled in hopes if he fought them long and hard enough someone would notice their absence and come looking for them. It happened one night. That's when he found out another orderly was just as sick. That night he'd been gangbanged. Now, he just gritted his teeth and bore the men's abuse.

He shivered, cold from the chilly air, when they stripped him bare. He refused to complain, knowing it was a useless waste of breath. Instead he hugged his knees, prayed he'd be knocked senseless with the first thrust that rammed his head into the concrete block wall.

He continued to pray for death. Murmuring feverishly as Brunt dug his fingernails into his flesh, held his hips, and slammed his hips forward.

Aldie tasted blood when he sank his teeth into his bottom lip. It was salty, but a welcome taste compared to Hodges, who loomed in front of him with his cock pressing into his face.

The bile burned up his throat. He gagged, choking on his sobs that tore from his mouth as the brutality continued. He received a slap upside his head from Hodges when he stopped sucking, fingers twisted in his hair, his scalp stung when strands were yanked at roughly.

"Aw, let the pretty boy scream, Hodges. One last time."

Hodges must have been feeling benevolent tonight. He released Aldie and stepped back. He leaned against the wall, folded his arms over his chest, and watched Brunt do his handiwork.

After it became too much, Aldie screamed. He continued to scream, shrill, high-pitched wails that echoed in the narrow chamber. He sniveled, squealed, blubbered like a bitch the more Brunt worked him over.

"Just kill me!" he shrieked. Trembling, he flung his arms wildly, flailing in the air when Brunt grunted in satisfaction and Hodges moved into position.

Brunt pinched his jaws between his pudgy fingers. "We aren't murderers, pretty boy. Not like you."

The last thing Aldie remembered before he blacked out was the crude laughter of both men as they prodded, pushed, maneuvered his body into another position so they could enjoy him together, one final time.

\* \* \* \*

His fingers trembled, making his signature on the release screen he had to sign with the stylus come out squiggly and undecipherable. Not that anyone would care. Once he walked through the doors, he'd be forgotten, as if he'd never existed. Nobody was waiting for him on the outside. No cheering family members, friends, not even the state-assigned parole officer would be there to make sure he got out today.

He was on his own, alone in the world, just his maimed body, an old gym bag were he kept his clothes, and memories of his horrid three years he lived in the hellhole.

The sun was brighter than he recalled. He blinked against the stinging that burned his eyes when he looked up in the sky. It wasn't even full sun. Already he could see storm clouds rolling in. A downpour was coming. He couldn't even have a non-fucked-up release day, he thought, walking down the street to the passenger transport station where he'd wait for his transportation home.

Home, he thought with malice. A one-bedroom room with a sink, toilet, window, stovetop, and a cot. That's where he'd live the rest of his days. Not that he was complaining. It would be his. He could eat, crap, and sleep when he wanted to. Though sleep wouldn't come easy, he'd give it his best shot tonight. Maybe knowing the dual bastards couldn't get to him tonight, he might sleep like a baby. He doubted it. In three years, he hadn't slept a full wink through the night. He always listened, waited, wondering when they would come for him and the torture would begin.

Walking slowly, dragging his leg behind him, he shuffled down the street. The going was laborious, painful, but he managed to reach the covering of the transport booth just before the drops of rain splattered the top of his head.

Nobody was around except but him. He had the rest stop to himself, and that was fine by him. Three years without a moment of peace, he enjoyed the solitude. He huddled in the shelter, wrapped the flimsy windbreaker he wore closer to fight off the wind that came now that the sun disappeared behind the clouds. He waited on the transport to arrive and take him away from the institution.

When enough time had passed and the transport didn't arrive, Aldie stepped out to see if he could see if it was coming. He moved to duck back inside the booth to keep from getting soaked now that the rain was falling heavier when a man suddenly appeared.

"Aldie McMahon."

Aldie held his head at an odd angle to get a closer look at the man. He seemed familiar. The structure of the face, eyes, dark features reminded him of someone. The medication sometimes screwed with his head. Having his brain bashed in repeatedly didn't help him keep a clear thought, either. Sometimes the past and present blurred.

The man moved closer, invading Aldie's personal space. He felt cornered backed into the small area like prey with a predator blocking the entrance. He tried to size the man up with his one good eye. "What do you want?"

"Three years is a long time to wait for revenge."

Aldie shuffled back as much as the tight area allowed. "Who are you? Do I know you?"

"No, but you knew my father, Cesar Cortez. I'm Manuel. Remember me?"

"The name sounds familiar, but that was a long time ago." He lied.

"One-thousand ninety-five days to be exact. Do you know what it feels like to turn eighteen, and for your birthday you receive an elaborately decorated gift box with your father's body parts inside? It's something you never forget."

Aldie didn't respond. He looked above the man to the sky rails above to see if the transport was in sight. He muttered, "My memory is fuzzy. It sounds horrible what happened. I feel for you, man." He lied. He hadn't given a damn about Cesar Cortez when he died three years ago. Nor did he give a damn now.

Annoyed, he glanced at Manuel, thinking he'd grown into a handsome man. Another day, time, he would make a move on him. The mirrored glass that surrounded the booth showed his reflection. It wasn't clear glass, but the thin plastic type that distorted features into wavy blobs. He didn't need to see to know what he looked like. He stared at his mouth that drooped slightly downward on the left side, one sleepy eye, and his scarred complexion. Gone were the glamour days forever.

"The night my father was left by the Elite Forces, after they brutalized him, they added insult to injury by leaving a message. That information never reached the media. I was told it was a rival drug czar who did my father in. I never believed that. People in the business cut up someone they think turned rat. They don't leave notes. Do you know what the note said?"

Aldie shrugged nonchalantly.

Manuel said, "Eat this and die, you sick bastard." The movement was quick, a sudden strike, one minute the glint of the steel flickered, and then he shoved the knife into Aldie's stomach. He jerked upwards, hard enough to shove him back.

Aldie groaned, doubled over, stumbled forward when Manuel ripped the knife free. He clutched his stomach, blood poured between his fingers, an

incredible burning ate at the lining of his stomach. He looked up, mouth hung open, he gasped.

"An agent said your fingerprints were on the note. Justice served, you bastard." Manual turned and walked away.

He tried to speak, air escaped, his head lolled to the side. He coughed, blood trickled down the side of his mouth. A gurgled sound happened when he inhaled and exhaled. He tried to speak, but could only mouth the words that came out low and raspy. "Not...right," he muttered.

Aldie's eyes closed, darkness descended. His last thought, *No...no, it was "Suck this and die, you sick bastard."* 

His last words whispered. He said, "Breed."

## THE END

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carolina Barbour is the author of three erotic novels published by Siren. She brought her readers the first story, *Pure Distraction*, the Sci-Fi suspense romance about Vale's parents Xander and Lana and how they found love while trying to thwart a psychotic killer.

Twice the Pleasure, released early January 2009, is a western novel with a sassy gun handling heroine named Jayce and two gorgeous men that seduce her into the world of a ménage of trios and all its pleasures.

*Pure Rapture* is part of the Pure Series. Though Vale and Allie's story is uniquely different, Carolina has brought her readers another erotic thriller with enough twist and turns to keep you turning the pages. In addition, she introduced more of the delightful Rynoir family and even gave a tease about Lyric Rynoir and her husband Solomon. A story she intends to expand on in future Pure Series novels.

Currently, Carolina is working on the third installment in the Pure Series. She introduced Noor Rynoir in Pure Rapture, but his true story doesn't begin until he travels back in time to Texas to save his planet and ends up finding *Pure Desire*.



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