



POKER NIGHT



Pocket Pair

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-sizzling*.

Poker Night

POCKET PAIR

Carol Lynne

Dedication

For all the authors and readers who attended, the first annual, Carol Lynne Authors and Readers Weekend, thank you!

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Chapter One

Trey Huggins gazed out over the water and sighed. He'd been with Bobby and Jules for a month, but he needed to go home. His friends told him he should stay at least until his attacker was arrested, but Trey was beginning to think that would never happen.

How could he have been so stupid as to agree to meet someone in his home he didn't know? Trey knew the answer immediately. He was lonely. Lonely, pathetic people like himself did all kinds of foolish things in the name of companionship.

JB101 seemed so nice when he'd met him online. It wasn't until he'd had a knife held to his throat that Trey had an inkling of JB101's true intentions. And now the man who'd fooled him, raped and stabbed him, was walking around on the streets of San Francisco.

According to the police, JB101 used one of the public libraries to set up his targets. The madman who changed IDs with every victim had already raped and stabbed four men, three of whom had died from their injuries, before setting his sights on Trey.

"Here you are," Bobby said as he walked out onto the deck overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Trey didn't take his eyes off the view. "Yep. Where else would I be."

Bobby sprawled out on the lounge chair next to Trey's. "You're planning to come with me to Zac's later, right?"

Trey shrugged. "I don't really feel like poker."

Bobby reached over and tried to put a hand on Trey's arm, but Trey moved before he could be touched. "It's not about playing poker. It's about spending an evening with friends."

Trey leaned his head back against the lounge and closed his eyes. He didn't want his friends to think he was mad at them, but sitting around a table laughing and joking wasn't something he had in him just then. "It still hurts to sit upright for more than a few minutes at a stretch."

"Would you be mad if I had the game over here? Then you could drop in when you felt like it, and still lie down if you need to."

When Bobby took that tone, Trey knew he wasn't going to be able to get out of it. "It's your house. I just don't want you changing your routine because of me."

Bobby ran his hands through his hair. "You've refused to see any of the guys since the hospital. It's getting harder and harder to put 'em off. They just love you, man, and they want to see for themselves that you're healing."

Trey knew his friends loved him. Heck, what would he do without them? But the shame he felt over what he'd allowed to happen was too much. "I just can't stand the thought of anyone pulling the 'What were you thinking?' thing on me. I've had enough of that from the police."

"And you honestly think any of us would pull that shit on you?"

Trey didn't say anything, because truth was, yeah, he definitely believed a few of them thought it. Whether they actually came out and said it was a fifty-fifty proposition.

With his lower lip stuck out just enough for Trey to know he'd hurt his feelings, Bobby started to get up.

"Wait." Trey reached out, but fell short of actually touching his friend. "Have the guys over. I'll try."

Bobby stared at him for several moments before nodding and retreating to the house.

Trey covered his eyes with his arm. The thing he couldn't seem to explain to Bobby was that it wasn't the rape that held him back. It was the shame that he'd been so desperate for someone to love him that he'd been willing to do almost anything.

The things he'd done via a web cam for JB101 made him blush just thinking about it. What would happen if his friends found out? He felt guilty enough that he hadn't told the police about them. At the time they only asked him if he'd had online correspondence with the rapist.

Trey heard the sliding glass door open. "The guys will be here at seven."

"Will Jules be home?" he asked. He liked Jules a lot. He never asked him questions about how he was feeling emotionally. Jules was concerned with his physical well-being, but he was smart enough to know not to pry into the emotional side of his recovery.

"Yeah. He should be home any minute. Why? Do you need something?" Bobby asked.

"No. Just wondered."

Bobby went back into the house and Trey decided he'd better take a shower. He didn't want one, but he knew it was poor manners to sit at a table with your friends smelling like stinky feet.

After five minutes of internal debate, he eventually stood and went inside. Bobby was already setting up the dining room table. Trey grinned as he walked by. Bobby may say he was having poker night at his house for Trey's sake, but by the way he was whistling, he wanted to host the bi-weekly event.

"I'm gonna take a shower," Trey announced.

Bobby chuckled. "Probably a good thing."

Trey stuck out his tongue and slowly climbed the stairs. His wounds were coming along nicely, but the internal stitches still weren't healed.

After stripping off his shorts and underwear, Trey turned on the shower in his en suite. While he waited for the water to heat, he studied himself in the mirror. His friends gave him a hard time for sunbathing, but although he was African-American, there was obviously a Caucasian somewhere in his ancestry. With greenish-brown eyes and light skin tone, there simply was no doubt. He looked good with a tan, so he suffered the jokes from his buddies.

He had two additions to his leanly muscled torso. He traced the jagged scars left by JB101's knife. The doctors told him he'd been extremely lucky to make it out of the situation only losing his spleen and a lot of blood. Trey could think of one other very important thing he'd lost that night, his virginity.

With a shake of his head, he turned away from the mirror and stepped under the hot spray. He picked up the soap and began scrubbing his body. When he reached his genitals, he washed them without his usual pleasure. Trey had begun to wonder whether he'd ever get another erection.

He quickly finished up and put on a clean pair of underwear, baggy grey shorts and a black T-shirt. The best thing about having hair that was only about half-an-inch long, was that he was out the door as soon as his clothes were on.

Downstairs, he inadvertently walked in on a major make-out session between Bobby and Jules in the kitchen. "Oops. Sorry."

He turned and started to walk out, but was called back by Jules.

"That's okay. Come on back in. We don't have time to do what we want anyway."

Trey spun back around and smiled at the silver fox still wrapped in Bobby's arms. "I could always sit out on the front step and hold the guys back until you take care of it."

Jules gazed into Bobby's pale brown eyes. "Nice thought, but we like to snuggle afterwards. Fuck and run isn't our thing."

Trey knew Jules didn't intend to bring up a sore subject, but he always got a little depressed when he thought about his friends cuddling. *Damn*. That's all he'd wanted, just someone special to hold him.

He was saved from his thoughts by the doorbell. "I'll get it."

Before he was even out of the room, the two men were back to sucking face. Despite everything, Trey loved that the two men couldn't keep their hands off each other. It might be depressing, but it also gave him hope.

He opened the door to Zac and Marco. "Hey, guys."

Zac stepped forward and reached out to hug Trey. As if on automatic pilot, Trey took a step back.

"Oh. Sorry. You must still be sore." Zac's hands dropped to his sides as he came to a stop.

"Jules and Bobby are in the kitchen," Trey relayed, waving them back. "Which means we're better off on the deck."

Instead of taking his usual spot on the lounge, Trey sat at the table. Marco passed him a beer from the case they'd brought as he took a seat beside him.

"So, how're you feeling?" Marco asked.

"Better."

"You gonna be ready for the new school year?" Zac asked.

"I think so. I still have a couple of weeks." Trey took a gulp of his beer. He wished it were colder, but beggars and all that.

"I talked to Cole earlier. He said to tell you he was thinking about you," Zac said.

"You talked to Principal Harding about me?"

"Well, yeah. He doesn't know the story behind what happened, but he knows you were injured. He needed a heads-up in case you wouldn't be able to return for the start of school." Zac took a sip and stared at Trey, daring him to disagree.

"If he doesn't know what happened, how does he think I got stabbed?" Trey asked.

"Knife fight at the local bikers' bar," Zac chuckled.

"You did not tell him that." Trey set his can down more forcefully than he'd intended, sending foam down the aluminium sides.

Zac held up his hands in a sign of surrender. "No. I told him you were attacked in your home, but that's all I said. He did ask if he could come by and see you, though," Zac added with a grin.

"What did you tell him?"

"That I'd talk to you about it." Zac leaned forward on the table. "Would you?"

Trey's insides felt like they were suddenly filled with hundreds of fluttering butterfly wings. "I'll think about it."

Zac grinned knowingly.

Yeah, his friend knew he'd had a crush on the good-looking principal since the day he'd first laid eyes on Cole Harding, but the blond Adonis was way out of Trey's league. Did he really want Cole coming around to check on him out of pity?

"Are we playing out here?" Angelo asked, stepping out onto the deck.

Trey turned and shook his head. "How the heck did you get in?"

Angelo looked decidedly guilty. "Well, I rang the bell and no one answered, so I let myself in."

Trey grinned. "Bobby and Jules must be occupied in the kitchen."

Angelo shook his head. "Nope. I was just in there. I was beginning to think you guys had pulled a fast one on me until I heard you talking out here."

"Maybe we should call Kent and let him know we're back here just in case he goes looking for us upstairs," Zac laughed.

Trey enjoyed seeing his friend happy. Since Eric had come into Zac's life, the man seemed to smile and laugh all the time. Happy looked darned good on Zac.

"Have a seat." Trey gestured to one of the empty chairs.

Angelo hovered for a few seconds, finally lifting his six-pack of imported beer, and a bag of limes. "Maybe I should go put these in the refrigerator. It's best to keep them cold."

"Suit yourself. There's a bottle opener stuck to the side of the fridge," Trey told him.

Trey had considered asking Angelo out on more than one occasion. The guy was definitely hot, and although he had a wide range of quirks, he was fun to be around. But he never felt that spark like he did with Cole. Maybe it was because Angelo reminded him too

much of the family he'd been forced to leave behind when he'd decided to teach instead of practice law like the rest of his family.

He glanced around the table at his friends. Bobby was right. Being around the guys was good for him. Lord knew some of them had as many issues as he did.

Take Marco, for example. He was in love with Kent, and everyone at the table knew it, except Kent. Trey didn't understand the dynamics of the odd relationship the two men had, but Kent had made it clear what he thought of Marco's lifestyle. Funny thing was, Trey didn't believe Marco really had much of a lifestyle. All he ever saw the gorgeous man doing was eating and working. Still, there were gaps of time when Marco refused to comment on where he'd been. Trey had a strong feeling that was one of Kent's problems. Maybe the big construction boss was just jealous at the thought of Marco having a life outside of work.

"Earth to Trey," Angelo said.

Trey hadn't even realised Angelo had rejoined them. "Sorry. Daydreaming."

"Ooh, was it a good one?" Angelo asked.

"Well he probably wasn't dreaming about men's feet stuck into tiny athletic shoes if that's what you're thinking," Marco teased.

Everyone at the table chuckled. It seemed they couldn't get together without someone bringing up one of Angelo's strange quirks. The man hated bare feet and was very vocal about it, but give him a decent-looking guy in a pair of small athletic shoes, and Angelo boned up in a heartbeat.

Angelo had suffered the teasing for so long, he didn't even bother to comment.

The sliding door opened, and Kent, Jules and Bobby joined them.

"With the ocean breeze, it's too windy to play out here," Bobby informed them.

"We know. We were just trying to get away from some of the noises you and Jules were making," Zac chuckled.

Even though Zac was lying, Jules' face paled as he glanced at Bobby. Teasing or not, Trey didn't want Jules to feel uncomfortable around them. "Relax, Jules, he's joking."

Jules' colour returned to normal as Bobby pulled him down on the lounge beside him.

"How's it going?" Kent asked Trey.

"Okay. How's business?"

"Slowing down a little, but at least I've been able to get enough work to keep my help. I know a lot of contractors can't even do that."

They all groaned over the current state of the economy, before settling into a peaceful silence. It didn't appear as though any of them were in a hurry to play poker, and the idea of sitting on the deck, staring out over the ocean with his friends, suited Trey just fine.

Trey took a drink of his beer. Since Zac had mentioned Cole, Trey couldn't seem to get him out of his mind. His chest squeezed at the thought of Cole being the least bit concerned about his health.

He wondered if he had the man's number. *Dang*. He couldn't believe he was entertaining the idea of calling him. *Still...maybe I should just do it.*

Trey stood. "I'm gonna grab another. Anyone ready?"

"I'll take one," Marco chimed in.

Trey took Marco's empty and went into the house. He threw the cans in the recycle bin and dug through the drawer until he found the phone book. When he located Cole's name, he tapped the page with his index finger. *Do I really have the nerve?*

Before he could talk himself out of it, he punched in the numbers. *What if he's busy?* Trey almost hung up, but then he heard the click of someone picking up.

"Hello?"

"Hey. Hi. Ummm, Zac said you spoke earlier. Sorry, this is Trey Huggins." God, could he sound any more like a thirteen year old boy calling a girl for the first time?

Cole's deep chuckle melted Trey's heart. "I knew who it was as soon as you started stammering."

Of course he did. How many geeks did he know?

"How're you feeling?" Cole asked.

"Okay. Better. I don't see any reason I won't be well enough for the beginning of the school year." Trey started pacing back and forth in front of the sink. He figured Marco was probably getting pretty darn thirsty, but he didn't feel like hanging up yet.

"Glad to hear it. Listen, I don't suppose you'd be up for a cup of coffee sometime? I'm not sure if you're up and around much yet."

Trey's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Coffee? Uh, yeah, I like coffee."

Cole chuckled again. "I know. Black with three sugars."

Trey swallowed. Cole actually knew how Trey took his coffee? "What can I say, I have a sweet tooth."

"Nothing wrong with that. So, you feel like meeting sometime?"

"Sure. Anytime's fine." Trey tried to calm his racing heart. *It's just coffee, chill.*

"Are you busy now?"

Trey bit his lip and looked towards the deck. "No."

"Do you know where Homer's is on Magnolia?"

"Sure. I go there a lot." Forgetting himself, Trey bounced on his toes, wincing as pain shot through his stomach.

"Maybe thirty minutes?" Cole asked.

"Thirty's good." Trey looked down at his clothes. He'd barely have time to make his excuses and get changed, but it was worth it.

"Great. It'll be good to see you again."

"Yeah. Me, too." *Me, too?* Trey rolled his eyes at his incredibly stupid self.

He hung up the phone and grabbed Marco a beer out of the fridge. He was so excited, he didn't stop to think what the guys might say.

Handing over the cold can, he addressed his friends. "Who's going to get mad at me if I skip out for awhile?"

"Something wrong?" Bobby asked.

Trey shook his head. "I'm just going to meet someone for coffee."

"Where and who?" Zac asked, in that protective older brother way of his.

Trey's first instinct was to be hurt. "Do you really think I haven't learned my lesson?"

Zac had the decency to look properly sorry for his remark. "I just worry."

"Well, it's with Cole, and we're meeting at Homer's."

Zac's expression brightened. "Yeah?"

Trey nodded. "I need to get changed."

"Wear something sexy," Zac told him.

Trey put his hand on his hip. "I don't know that leather pants and a see-through shirt would be the proper attire for a coffee shop."

"You have leather pants and a see-through shirt? Fuck. Why haven't I ever seen you in that?" Marco asked.

Trey shook his head and threw up his hands before retreating to the guest room. He was sorry he'd mentioned the club outfit he'd purchased in a moment of insanity. He pulled a pair of khaki shorts out of the dresser. His T-shirt matched, and he didn't want to look like he was trying too hard, so he went with it.

Trey felt a little lighter on his feet as he made his way down the stairs. "See you guys in a little while," he called out as he went out the door.

During the drive to Homer's, Trey continually chastised himself. Just because Cole asked him for coffee didn't mean he wanted to date him. Cole was the principal, his boss for crying out loud. The man probably just wanted to make sure the little girly-man that worked for him wasn't emotionally or mentally damaged.

Trey knew he was both those things, but he didn't have to let Cole know. He could suck it up for a few hours and pretend everything was right as rain. Thanks to his grandfather, he may not need his job financially, but he loved every minute of teaching. He couldn't imagine what his life would've been like had he followed in the family's footsteps and used the law degree he worked so hard to acquire.

He pulled his white Volkswagen Eos in front of Homer's and turned off the engine. He sent up a quick prayer that he wouldn't make a complete fool out of himself in the next few hours.

Ready or not, here I come.

Chapter Two

Cole tapped his fingers on the table beside his cup. He still didn't know what he'd been thinking when he'd opened his big mouth and invited Trey for coffee. He'd tried for the last several years to keep their relationship strictly professional. His job depended on it. Then what's he go and do, but ask Trey on a date.

He couldn't beat himself up too bad. After his discussion with Zac earlier in the day, he'd wanted nothing more than to race over and make sure Trey was okay. He'd actually been quite proud of his self-control. It had lasted until he picked up the phone and heard Trey's cute little stammering on the other end.

Cole glanced around the nearly empty diner and reached under the table to adjust his hardening cock. Just the thought of Trey's voice had given him an erection. It was the main reason he'd always tried to communicate with the slight man in emails.

The brass bell over the door jingled, drawing Cole's attention. He licked his lips as Trey stepped inside. Trey glanced around the room and gave a low-key wave when he spotted Cole.

Cole signalled the waitress when Trey neared, instead of doing what he was dying to do, and pulling the man into his arms. "Coffee?"

Trey nodded, and Cole addressed the waitress. "One for my friend, and I could use a refill."

"Comin' up," she said.

Cole studied Trey for a few seconds as the small man turned over his cup. "So, what've you been up to this summer?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he wanted to crawl under the table. "Shit. Sorry."

Trey tried his best to smile, but the gesture fell flat. "It's okay. I helped a friend restore a boat. That was fun."

"Really? I didn't know you knew how to do that sorta thing."

Trey started to lean forward, but jerked back when the waitress appeared and began to pour their coffee. Once she was gone, he leaned forward once again. "I didn't really know

what I was doing. Bobby would give me a chore, and I'd do it. Mostly using the sander and painting the hull."

Cole automatically leaned forward towards Trey. "Beats the hell out of spending your summer doing research."

"Huh?"

"I've been trying to finish my doctoral thesis for several years now. I'm hoping this summer to get it done."

"At least you're going for it." Trey picked up three sugar packets and poured them into his cup.

That reminded Cole of another thing he couldn't believe he'd done. Why had he confessed to Trey that he knew how he took his coffee? That had been plain stupidity on his part.

He thought he heard a noise coming from Trey. "Was that you?"

Trey's head lowered as he rubbed his flat stomach. "Yeah. Sorry about that."

"Wanna go somewhere and grab some dinner?" Cole asked with no regard to self-preservation.

Trey chuckled. "We're in a diner."

Cole glanced around and leaned in even further, putting his face inches from Trey's. "Yeah, but even though the coffee's good, I'm not much on their food. It's a little too greasy for me."

"What did you have in mind?" Trey asked.

Taking you back to my place and making a meal of you. "Doesn't matter. There's a pretty good Italian place just down the road."

"Mmmm." Trey licked his lips, nearly sending Cole up and over the table. "I love Italian."

Cole pulled out his wallet and threw some money on the table. "You'll like this place. Friends of mine own it. A nice couple."

"Cool."

Trey stood and Cole followed him out, barely suppressing the urge to put his hand on the small of Trey's back.

"I'll follow you," Trey said, walking to his car.

Cole nodded and headed for his pickup. Even Trey's little car was as cute as he was. *God, I'm screwed.*

* * * *

On the way to the restaurant, Trey called Bobby.

"Hello?"

"It's me. Cole asked me to grab dinner with him, so I'll be later getting back than I thought."

"Take your time. You deserve a nice evening out. Besides, Eric showed up and is beatin' the pants off everyone. It's better to spend your money on dinner, than hand it over to our resident card shark."

Trey chuckled. He loved to watch Eric clean-up at the table. The way that vein in Kent's forehead started to pulse when he got upset was priceless. "I'll catch you later."

"Have fun," Bobby said before hanging up.

Trey pulled into the parking lot beside Cole's truck and joined him by the bumper. "I've driven by this place before, but never stopped."

"Well it's your lucky day."

I'll say. Trey walked beside Cole, noticing their size difference.

"How tall are you?" Trey asked.

"Six-three."

"Dang. I guess I never realised how much difference seven inches could make."

As soon as he said it, he was mortified. "Well, you know what I mean."

Cole laughed and actually touched the small of his back when they entered the cosy little restaurant. "This is nice." The hand idly rubbing his back was even nicer. Trey stopped short. It suddenly dawned on him that this was the first time someone had touched him since the attack and he hadn't flinched back out of range.

"Something wrong?" Cole asked, a concerned expression on his gorgeous face.

He started to tell the truth, but stopped himself at the last moment. "No. Everything's fine."

"Cole!" a man called as he ran over to hug Cole.

"Hi, Allan."

Allan stepped back and looked Trey up and down. "And who's this?"

"A friend of mine, Trey Huggins. Go easy," Cole warned with a smile.

Allan started to reach for Trey, but he automatically flinched and stepped back. Allan stopped and glanced from Trey to Cole.

"Sorry," Trey mumbled.

Cole stepped in to save the day. "Trey's just had surgery. He's still tender."

Allan's face brightened. "Oh. Well then, let's get the two of you seated."

Before following Allan to their table, Trey gazed up into Cole's big brown eyes. "Thanks."

Cole grinned and leaned down to whisper in Trey's ear. His lips were so soft, Trey almost moaned as they brushed against his skin. "It's okay. Allan comes on too strong at times."

Trey could tell by the look in Cole's eyes he knew that wasn't Trey's problem, but he nodded his head anyway, and followed Allan.

Allan took them to a quiet booth in the corner. Trey sat down, and Cole slid in beside him, bumping Trey's hip in a sign for him to scoot in further. Trey complied, feeling almost giddy at the thought of sitting so close to his crush.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Allan asked.

Cole turned to Trey. "Would you like a bottle of wine?"

Trey shook his head. "Iced tea would be fine for me."

"Make that two."

Trey waited for Allan to walk away before opening his mouth. "If you'd like some wine, that's fine with me. I just have this weird body thing with red wine. I can drink white fine, but red tends to make me act stupid and get all jittery."

"Probably has something to do with the tannin. Some people are sensitive to it. No big deal. I like tea." Cole smiled.

Trey almost lost himself in the genuine gesture. He felt his body starting to lean towards Cole, when Allan appeared with their drinks. Trey sat up straight and unwrapped his straw.

"Have you decided?" Allan asked.

Trey reached for his menu. He hadn't even taken the time to look at it.

Cole put a hand on Trey's thigh. "Trust me?"

"Uh...yeah. Sure."

"We'll take the special. Will you ask Ramon to add an extra layer of cheese to the top of the lasagne for us?"

Allan nodded. "And the garlic sticks? Do you still want those?"

Cole looked at Trey. "If you'll eat some, I will, too."

Trey nodded. No way could he eat Italian without garlic bread. He handed Allan his menu and waited for Cole to take his hand off his thigh. When it didn't happen, Trey's heart started a rapid beat. *God, I'm pathetic.*

Cole must have noticed the change in Trey's breathing. He moved his hand slightly, rubbing a small circle against Trey's bare thigh. "Does this bother you?"

"Bother? No." Despite the new development happening before his eyes, Trey knew he wasn't ready for a sexual relationship. He still had a lot of crap to work through.

"Will you tell me how it makes you feel?" Cole asked.

"Excited. Scared." He knew Cole didn't know the truth of what had happened to him, but Trey wasn't sure he could bring himself to tell the man he'd had a crush on for years.

Cole averted his eyes for a few moments. Trey got the strong impression he was arguing with himself over something. Trey held his breath. *Did he know? Had Zac told him?*

"I like you," Cole admitted. "I've liked you for a long time, but..."

When Cole didn't continue right away, Trey prompted him. "But?"

"I could very well lose my job. It's all I've known for the past twenty-five years. But...I'm tired of ignoring the way you make me feel."

Trey blinked several times. Was he hearing Cole correctly? "You mean you want to date me?"

"I'd like to. I never thought I'd ask this of a lover, but I'd need our relationship to stay between us."

Trey covered the hand that still rested on his leg. "I'm not sure if I'm ready to get involved with anyone right now, but if I were, I couldn't keep you a secret from my friends. They're my family."

Cole took a sip of his tea as Allan arrived with large plates of lasagne, spaghetti and garlic bread sticks. "Looks good. Tell Ramon he's outdone himself."

Allan winked. "I'll do more than that."

"I know you will," Cole chuckled.

Trey unfolded his napkin and placed it on his lap. Cole removed his hand to do the same, and Trey felt the loss more than he cared to admit. He knew if he ever had a chance at seeing Cole romantically, he'd need to come clean with him.

He surgically sliced into the thick slab of lasagne, trying to work out the best way to start. "Zac said he told you I was attacked," he began.

Cole swallowed his food and nodded as he wiped his mouth. "He said someone came into your house."

"Did he tell you that I let that person in?" Trey gave up pretending he was going to eat and set his fork down.

"No." Cole's eyes never strayed from his plate, but his hand moved back to its comforting position on Trey's thigh.

Trey picked up several sugar packets and began sweetening his tea. "It was a man I met online. We talked and stuff for a couple of weeks before I agreed to meet him. We were supposed to hook up at a club downtown, but he emailed that day and said he was broke. He wanted to know if he could just bring over a bottle of wine and we could stay in."

Cole set his fork down. Trey could tell by the contractions in the man's jaw he was pissed. Was he disgusted with him? Trey opened another packet of sugar. He wasn't sure if he should go on talking, or shut his mouth and wait for the fall-out.

He watched Cole's Adam's apple bob up and down as he swallowed several times before speaking. "You weren't just attacked, were you?"

Dang. Trey wished he could read Cole's facial expressions. He suddenly felt very self-conscious and started to move away, sliding further around the table.

A strong arm reached out and grabbed him by the wrist. "You didn't answer my question."

Trey started to panic, being restrained, even by Cole, freaked him out. He tried desperately to shake off Cole's grip. "Let me go. Please."

Cole released him, sliding over beside him instead. "I'm not the bad guy."

"Really?" Trey asked as he rubbed his slender wrist.

Cole had the decency to look remorseful for his actions. "Sorry. I just didn't want you to run away from me. But your reaction answered my question."

Trey's eyes roamed the restaurant. Had anyone seen his mini-tantrum?

Cole exhaled as he shook his head. "Did you go to the police?"

Trey let out a snort. "The guy stabbed me twice and left me for dead. What do *you* think?"

"Sorry," Cole apologised. "It's just that some men would be too..."

"Embarrassed?" Trey added for him. "Yeah, well, I might've been, but the choice was taken outta my hands when the neighbour called 9-1-1."

"Thank God they did." Cole turned and cupped Trey's cheek, turning his face so they were looking at each other. "I can't imagine what you went through, but anything's better than dying alone in your house."

Trey closed his eyes, unable to maintain eye contact. "They haven't caught the guy. He just keeps doing this over and over to desperate, lonely men like me."

"Look at me," Cole whispered, against Trey's lips.

Trey opened his eyes.

"May I kiss you?" Cole asked.

Trey could see the sincere desire in the man's brown eyes. Instead of answering, he touched his lips to Cole's. The kiss was tender, given their location, but no less erotic. Trey parted his lips to let Cole's questing tongue inside.

For the first time since the attack, Trey felt his cock begin to stir. He broke the kiss, but kept his face close to Cole's. "That was nice."

"That was better than nice," Cole whispered.

"Something wrong with the food?" Allan asked.

Cole grinned and leaned back. "Not a thing. We just had a few things to work out first."

Allan's blond brows rose. "Well, eat, or Ramon will be hurt."

"Yes, sir." Cole saluted and picked up his fork. He gestured to Trey's plate. "You heard the man, eat up."

Trey licked his lips. He was still able to taste Cole. He hated the thought of replacing it for the lasagne, but he really should eat something. Maybe if he was lucky Cole would kiss him again before the night was through.

* * * *

Cole finished his meal and pushed his plate away. How he managed to eat at all after what he'd learned was a miracle. As angry as he'd been with the man who'd attacked Trey,

the emotion was quickly replaced by guilt when Trey basically admitted how lonely and desperate he'd been.

Cole knew if he'd acted on his feelings for the small man sooner, the attack wouldn't have happened at all. After one brief kiss he wanted more, but now he was afraid to push Trey's comfort zone. He couldn't imagine how someone even began to deal with being violated in such a cold-blooded way.

One thing he did know was that he wanted more time with Trey. With a good deal of luck and restraint on his part, maybe they could continue seeing each other after the school year began. He'd just have to continue to treat Trey like he always had. Other members of the faculty and staff didn't need to know, right?

Observing Trey out of the corner of his eye, Cole watched him eventually set his fork down. He started to rub his stomach, but stopped, wincing.

"Still hurt?" he had to ask.

"Sometimes. I'm not used to sitting up for so long. The muscles haven't fully healed I guess."

"You wanna get outta here?" Cole offered.

Trey grinned. "If I say yes, can I have another kiss before I go back to Bobby's?"

He rested one arm on the table and put himself between Trey and the rest of the room. Cole leaned in and pressed his mouth to Trey's. Like before, he didn't force the kiss on the younger man, instead he waited for Trey's invitation to proceed.

Trey's lips parted and Cole delved his tongue inside. Visions of making slow, sweet love to Trey danced through his mind. His body began to respond appropriately with the images the daydream delivered. Cole's mouth opened wider, begging to become part of the man in front of him. How long would it be before Trey was ready? Cole knew things would need to develop slowly between them if there was a chance of real happiness.

He broke the kiss and pulled back. "I've got a blanket behind the seat in my truck. Can I interest you in spending some time with me on the bluff overlooking the water?"

Trey smiled. He started to nod his head, but stopped himself. "You know I can't..."

Cole shut him up with another quick kiss. "No pressure."

Trey did nod then. "Okay."

* * * *

Trey followed Cole to the park. He thought about calling Bobby, but decided against it. It was nearly nine, and surely the guys would figure out he was still with Cole. Speaking of, the gorgeous man got out of his truck with a blanket in hand as Trey turned off his engine. Was he crazy for doing this? Cole had told him no pressure, but Trey didn't even know how much intimacy he could handle yet. What if he freaked out in the middle of something?

"You coming?"

"Yeah." Trey climbed out of his convertible and pocketed his keys.

"Can you make it up there?" Cole asked, pointing towards the gradual rise in front of them.

"I think so." Trey was a bit surprised when Cole took his hand, threading their fingers together.

"I'll help you. Lean on me if you get tired."

Trey wished he'd had a chance to wipe the clammy sweat from his palm first, but it didn't seem to bother Cole. They walked hand in hand to the top of the bluff. By the time they reached the spot with the million dollar view, Trey was winded.

He waited for Cole to spread out the blanket, then collapsed. "I'm out of shape."

Cole lay down beside Trey, turned to his side and leaned up on his elbow. "I'll carry you back down if you want me to."

Trey grinned. "I don't think that'll be necessary, but thanks for the offer."

Trey reached up and ran his index finger over Cole's lips. Although they were different races, Cole's skin was nearly as dark as his. "You sunbathe a lot?"

Cole's tongue snaked out to lick the tip of Trey's finger. "Nope. I've been working on my yard all summer. I'd love to show you what I've done sometime."

"That would be nice." Trey slipped his hand to the back of Cole's neck and pulled him down for a kiss. He licked the lips he'd touched only moments earlier, asking permission to enter. Cole moaned and let him in. Trey probed the inside of Cole's mouth like a man dying of thirst, and perhaps he was.

How long had it been since he'd really kissed someone? In college he'd dated a few times, but he'd never really gotten beyond kissing and mutual jerk offs. He had received a blow job once, and even returned the favour, but it was nothing like a simple kiss from Cole. Trey feared he was in way over his head with the older man.

He'd asked Zac once how old he thought Cole was, and Zac said he had no idea, but he'd guess in his forties. Cole's admission that he'd been in the educational field for twenty-five years had to put him around forty-seven or forty-eight. Compared to his twenty-nine years, Trey felt truly inadequate.

Cole started to roll over on top of him, Trey instinctively putting his hands out to protect his torso. Cole jerked back, breaking their wonderful kiss.

"Did I hurt you?"

"No," Trey replied honestly. "I guess it's become second nature since the attack."

Once again beside him, Cole touched the bottom of Trey's black T-shirt. "May I?"

Trey studied Cole's face. He wasn't sure what he was searching for, but all he saw was concern. He swallowed around the newly formed knot in his throat and nodded.

Cole slowly lifted the soft cotton, until it was under Trey's armpits. Trey didn't need to look down to know what Cole saw, two scars, one fairly clean, one jagged and ugly, that went from one side of his ribs to the other. Although it looked ugly, it was the clean scar that had almost ended his life.

Cole's fingers traced the scars lightly. "Can you talk about it?"

Could he? Trey reached down and touched the long, jagged scar. "This is where he held the knife under me as he fucked me. The tip caught under the skin and ripped it as he continued to...well, you know."

Trey took a deep breath and moved to the other. "This was his going away gift. I guess he meant to kill me. He would've succeeded if the neighbour hadn't heard what she thought was a domestic disturbance and called the cops."

Cole leaned down and began kissing his way across the ugly scars. Trey knew he should protest. The act was so personal, so...intimate. He reached down to get Cole's attention and made the mistake of burying his fingers in the man's thick blond hair.

Within seconds he was lost. Cole's hair felt like spun silk against his fingers. He'd never felt close enough to anyone to do something so ordinary. When Cole's lips finished with the scars, they travelled up to Trey's chest.

Cole turned his head to gaze into Trey's eyes as he swirled a tongue around one of his nipples. Trey didn't even need to look at the dark brown disc to know it was erect. He felt the gooseflesh prickling at his skin as his entire body seemed to come alive.

With a firm grip on the back of Cole's head, Trey arched his back, trying like hell to get closer. He was completely lost to this man and he knew it. Lost in lust, Trey whimpered. "Closer."

Cole released Trey's nipple as he pressed their bodies together. Warm lips landed on Trey's, while Cole's tongue dove into the depths of Trey's mouth. The delicious rub of Cole's erection against his was too much.

With a surprised shout, Trey came. Cole broke the kiss and gazed down at him. Trey swallowed, mortified at his complete lack of control. If Cole didn't think he was sexually immature before, he sure would after coming in his shorts. Trey turned his head to the side, embarrassed.

Cole moved back to lie beside Trey. "Don't," Cole said.

"I can't believe I did that," Trey mumbled.

Cole's hand covered the wet spot on the front of Trey's shorts. "What happened was completely natural. I won't lie, though, I wish I'd had my lips wrapped around your cock when you came, but there's plenty of time for that."

Trey's heart stuttered. The thought of Cole giving him a blow job had been unimaginable only a few hours earlier. It suddenly occurred to him. "That's the first time I've come since...well, you know."

Cole grinned. "See? I'm just what you need."

Trey's cell phone began ringing, interrupting the moment. He reached into his pocket and dug out his phone. He was intent on turning off the offending noise when a glance at the display started his hands to shaking. "It's Detective Torrance, the guy in charge of my case."

Cole sat up and gestured to the phone. "Answer it."

Trey took a deep breath and punched the button. "Hello?"

"Mr. Huggins?"

"Yes, Detective Torrance, it's me."

"I think we may have caught our guy. I need you to come down to the station tomorrow morning to ID the guy so we can charge him."

The phone slipped from Trey's shaking hand. He fumbled with it for a few seconds before placing it back up to his ear. "How'd you catch him?"

"A little sting we set up. Can you come down?" Torrance asked.

"Yes, but if you did a sting, can't you just arrest him for that?"

"We already have, but we have no proof our Loves2Dance239 is the same as your JB101. If you'll finger him for the attack on you, we can begin building a stronger case for the DA."

Trey began chewing on his thumbnail.

"Is there a problem, Mr. Huggins?"

Even though the detective asked the question softly, Trey could hear the barely contained growl in the huge man's voice. He knew he was riding a fine line with the guy. "I just need some time to get myself under control. Please understand."

"If you're not here by ten, I'll come looking for you." That time there was no mistaking the growl.

"I'll be there." Trey hung up the phone. "They think they caught the guy who attacked me."

Cole reached out and wrapped his arms around Trey. "That's good."

Trey gazed up into Cole's brown eyes. "Is it? I mean, I know he needs to be punished for what he's done, but I have a feeling I'm the one who's going to suffer."

Chapter Three

Cole placed a kiss on Trey's upturned mouth. He hated the lost look evident in the smaller man's face. "I can't answer that question for you, but I can offer to be with you. What do you say? Will you let me drive you to the station?"

"I'm not sure that you should get mixed up in this. Heck, I'm not sure I even want to get mixed up in it. I have a feeling this is going to be a long row to hoe."

"I think you're right..." Before Cole could finish his sentence, he watched as Trey's green eyes lost their sparkle. He shook his head. "I think you're right, it will be a long process, but that's the reason I'd like to be there for you. I know you have a great group of friends, but I'm the one who'd like to hold you in my arms and make you feel better at the end of the day."

"You'd do that?"

Cole nodded. "I wouldn't have offered if I didn't mean it."

Trey laid his head against Cole's chest. "I've never had anyone, except my friends, I could lean on."

Cole rubbed Trey's back. "Even though I'd like to consider myself your friend, I'm hoping for more."

Trey nodded. "Me, too."

"So will you let me pick you up and take you to the police station in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me take you back to my house afterwards, so I can show you what I've been working on?"

Trey yawned. "Yeah."

As much as Cole wanted to hold Trey for the rest of the night, he didn't want him to endanger himself getting back to his friend's house. "Why don't you get back to Bobby's and get a good night's sleep."

Trey snuggled even deeper into his arms. "But this feels so nice."

Cole grinned. "I agree one hundred percent, but we've got plenty of time. No sense taking the chance of you falling asleep at the wheel."

Trey turned his head and kissed the skin of Cole's chest where his sport shirt was unbuttoned. He started to pull away, but Cole needed another kiss. He lifted Trey until they were eye level. God, the man was gorgeous.

He ran his tongue across the seam of Trey's mouth until his man opened for him. Cole brushed the interior of Trey's mouth playfully. He knew they couldn't start anything else, and that was a hard task when it came to kissing Trey. Cole would prefer to put Trey in his pickup and take him home forever, but that wasn't a reality he could have at the moment.

He broke the kiss and leaned his forehead against Trey's. "Come on. I'll follow you home to make sure you get there safely."

Trey chuckled. "You don't have to do that. I'm fine. Honest."

Cole stood and helped Trey to his feet. "I'll follow you until my turn-off. How does that sound?"

"Good." Trey waited while Cole picked up the blanket and tossed it over his arm. He melted against Cole's side when the bigger man wrapped his available arm around him. It was hard walking down the incline, but well worth the effort. There was something special about Cole's embrace that had Trey feeling perfectly safe for the first time in weeks.

They reached their vehicles quicker than he would've liked, but at least Trey knew he'd see Cole in a matter of hours. He could feel the wind blowing against the wet fabric of his shorts, sending a series of shivers up his spine.

Cole tossed the blanket onto the hood of Trey's low-slung car and pulled him against his chest. "Maybe you should put the top up for the drive home?"

Trey grinned and glanced down at the front of his shorts. "I'll be fine once I'm sitting."

Cole brushed his hand across Trey's fly. "Maybe you'll get lucky and the friends you're staying with will be asleep by the time you get there."

"No such luck. It's Poker Night. I'm sure everyone will be good and rowdy by the time I get there. I'll try to sneak upstairs and change before they see me."

Before pulling away, Cole gave Trey a deep kiss. "Sleep well. I'll pick you up around nine-thirty."

Cole waited until Trey got behind the wheel and buckled his seat belt before climbing into his big truck. Trey couldn't seem to wipe the goofy smile from his face the entire drive home. He waved to Cole as he turned the corner taking him to Bobby's.

The best thing about Bobby's house, besides the view, was that it was in a gated community. He pulled into his designated spot and pushed the button to put the top back up. After his car was secured, he pocketed the keys, once again reminded of his earlier embarrassment. It would be a job getting changed before he ran into any of the guys.

As quietly as he could, Trey let himself into the house. He was halfway up the stairs when Bobby appeared at the bottom laughing.

"Uh, you don't have a curfew, so no need to sneak in the house."

"Just thought I'd change. I'm feeling a little cold," Trey answered without turning around.

Several agonising seconds went by without a word. Trey squeezed his eyes shut, hoping Bobby wouldn't ask him to come down.

"Well, we're still playing if you're interested," Bobby finally said.

"I'll be right back down." Trey continued up the stairs and to his room.

The first thing he did was to take off the still damp shorts and underwear. He tossed them to the bottom of his closet with the rest of his dirty clothes before getting out a pair of light-weight sweats and a clean pair of boxer-briefs.

Trey started to step into fresh underwear but stopped himself. It would be just his luck for one of the pervs downstairs to smell the dried cum on his skin even through his clothes. He went into the bathroom and ran hot water over a washcloth.

As he began to clean his groin, he noticed his swollen lips in the mirror. *Dang*. No way were the guys going to miss that. His mind was so caught up in figuring out an excuse for his bee-stung lips, he almost forgot about his phone call from Detective Torrance.

He threw the washcloth in the sink and walked back to the bed before collapsing. He didn't even know if he'd be strong enough to ID JB101. What if the guy got off on a technicality and came after him again?

The fresh set of clothing was slipped on without thought. His mind was full of images of the night JB101 had shown up at his door. He could still remember his first impression of the guy and how inadequate he felt standing in front of him. Despite the several webcam shows he'd put on for JB101's benefit, Trey had never seen his face. JB101 kept his webcam aimed at his hard cock which was usually clenched in his fist.

Then suddenly, Trey opened the door to one of the hottest guys he'd ever laid eyes on. His first reaction was 'why me?' The guy could've had his pick of men at any of the gay bars in San Francisco.

Like an idiot, Trey had stumbled backward and motioned for JB101 to come inside. Trey shook his head. He hadn't even asked the guy his name. What kind of desperate pathetic human being does something like that?

A knock on the door pulled Trey from his thoughts. "Come in."

Zac opened the door. "You coming down?"

"Detective Torrance called earlier. They think they caught the guy who..."

"That's fantastic," Zac whooped as he walked over to sit beside Trey.

"Is it?" Trey still wasn't certain. "Will knowing he's behind bars make me feel better about what I allowed him to do to me?"

Zac wrapped an arm around Trey's shoulders. "You didn't allow him to do anything. Those scars on your stomach prove it."

Trey idly rubbed his hand over the scars. "He didn't make me talk to him for two weeks. He didn't make me agree to meet him at my house. He didn't force his way into my home." Trey looked into Zac's eyes. "I did that. I willingly let that psycho into my life."

"I don't know who you are right now, but I won't let you talk about my friend Trey that way."

Trey sighed and glanced away. Why did he expect Zac to understand?

"Hey." Zac bumped against Trey's body. "There's nothing wrong with wanting companionship. I'll admit, you inviting him to your house on the first date wasn't the smartest thing you've ever done, but what he did once there wasn't your fault."

"They're going to drag this thing out. You know they will. I think I have a real chance at something good with Cole, but I can't put him through it. He's worked too hard to get where he is. All it would take is a reporter snapping a picture of the two of us together for him to lose his job."

"I thought the two of you would be right for each other. I'm happy for you."

Trey tilted his head and looked up at Zac. "Don't be too happy for me until I figure out what I'm going to do about it."

"What's that supposed to mean? I thought you just said the two of you had a shot at something. Why would you shut it down before it's barely begun?"

"Because I know Cole well enough to realise that he'll want to be in court with me. He'll want to hold my hand when he sees it shaking. I'm wondering whether it would be better to wait until the trial or whatever is over before seeing if the two of us work."

"Don't you think you should talk to Cole about this? I mean, you're sitting here making decisions for him. Shouldn't he have a say?"

Trey shook his head. "I know him better than you think I do. He'd say being there for me is what was important. He may be willing to throw away a long career, but I'm not ready to let him."

Zac actually chuckled, which surprised Trey. "Getting a little ahead of yourself, aren't you? There are so many variables in this situation, how can you make a statement like that?"

Trey shrugged, embarrassed. "I think he likes me."

Zac laughed louder. "Of course he likes you. What's not to like? I just don't want to see you make the same mistake I did. I knew Eric all of a couple days when suddenly I felt I had the right to tell him what was best for him. Remember how that turned out?"

Trey remembered. Zac was left alone and miserable until he swallowed his pride and went in search of his lover.

"All I'm saying is, don't make decisions for Cole because you think you know what's best for him. It'll come back to bite you in the ass every time."

A round of laughter from downstairs got Trey's attention. "They sound like they're having fun without us."

He stood and held out his hand to Zac. "Let's go win some money."

With a smile, Zac took Trey's hand and followed him downstairs. The group of men were calming down, but Marco was wiping the tears from his eyes which meant it must've been a good one.

"What'd we miss?" Trey asked as he took a seat beside Jules.

Jules glanced at Bobby. It was then that Trey noticed the older man's cheeks were red. "They were making fun of Angelo again. I told them shoe-fetishism was a fairly common occurrence and not the same as a foot fetish."

Jules leaned over to whisper in Trey's ear. "I think I made things worse when that wasn't my intention at all."

Trey turned and kissed Jules' cheek. "Don't be too hard on yourself. These buttheads can twist anything said to fit their sick senses of humour."

He glanced across the table and tried to give Angelo a supportive smile. His friend's cheeks were also red, but Trey had a feeling it was anger more than embarrassment.

It was a wonder why Angelo had anything to do with them. The poor guy always seemed to be the butt of every joke. "Have you ever seen the inside of a police station?"

Angelo narrowed his eyes. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I have to try and pick JB101 out of a line-up in the morning. I've heard you say how sexy you think cops are. I thought you might like to meet me and Cole there at ten."

Angelo appeared dumbfounded for several moments. "Why me?" He gestured around the table. "I mean, anyone here would go with you in a heartbeat."

"Maybe. But you're the one I asked."

"Because you feel sorry for me all of a sudden?" Angelo snidely asked.

Trey had to step back and think about the question. Why had he asked Angelo? They were friends, but Trey wouldn't say they were particularly close. Maybe it was the lost look he often saw in Angelo's deep blue eyes that reminded him so much of himself.

"He's trying to make you feel better, you asshole," Marco said, smacking the back of Angelo's head.

Angelo smoothed his midnight black hair back into place. "I could probably show up. If you're serious, I mean."

"Of course I'm serious. Not really something I'd joke about," Trey answered.

Angelo's expression changed. "Thanks."

* * * *

Sipping his coffee the following morning, Trey regarded Bobby. "Do you think it was wrong to invite Angelo to the station?"

Working his way through a plate of bacon and eggs, Bobby wiped his mouth. "No. Actually I applaud you for what you did."

Trey rolled his eyes. "It wasn't that big a deal."

"You're wrong. You saw Angelo was hurt and despite everything you're going through, you reached out to him. That's what a true friend does."

Bobby's statement warmed him. If Bobby could acknowledge so readily that Angelo was hurt, why hadn't he done anything?

"Why didn't you say something to make him feel better?" Trey asked.

Bobby glanced around the room before answering. "Because Jules felt so bad about the comment. If I'd tried to come to Angelo's aid, I would've made Jules feel that much worse." Bobby grinned. "And I like a happy Jules."

"Did I hear my name?" Jules asked as he walked into the room and stole a piece of bacon from Bobby's plate.

Bobby wrapped an arm around Jules' hips. "I was telling Trey that I enjoy it when you're happy."

Jules' face lit up. "You make me that way."

Bobby pulled Jules onto his lap and the two men began making out right in front of him. Although Trey groaned, he liked the fact the two men couldn't keep their hands off each other.

"I'm going to wait for Cole out front," he told them as he took his cup to the sink for a quick rinse.

He heard Bobby's chair scrape across the floor. "Hang on."

Trey turned around and was enveloped in a bear hug.

"I hope everything goes smoothly. You'll have two people beside you who care about you. Use them if you need to, that's why they're going."

Trey nodded. Bobby stepped back and Jules took his place. He received a quick kiss on the forehead from the older man. "Call if you need us."

"I will. Cole asked me to spend the day with him, so I'm not sure what time I'll get home, but I'll call after we leave the station."

Jules nodded in that fatherly way of his.

The thought stopped Trey cold. "I just realised something. I'm going to have to tell my parents what exactly happened to me before my name shows up in the papers."

Jules appeared taken back. "What? They were at the hospital that night."

"Yeah, but all they know is that someone came into my house and attacked me. They don't ask me personal questions, and I sure as heck don't volunteer them."

Trey once again questioned his ability to go through with identifying JB101. The relationship with his parents was already strained to the point that Trey only called them a few times a year, despite basically living in the same city.

"Who knows, maybe this'll bring you closer," Jules told him.

Trey snorted. "You don't know my mom and dad." He shrugged, resigned to speak with his parents. "If you don't see me again, have the cops check my parent's attic."

"That's not funny," Bobby admonished.

"No. But accurate, I'm afraid."

* * * *

After a sleepless night, Cole pulled up to the guard house at the entrance of the gated community where Bobby lived. He rolled down his window and spoke to the guard. "I'm picking up someone from Bobby Quinn's house."

The man in the dull brown uniform nodded. "I'll have to call Mr. Quinn for permission."

"That's fine." Cole actually liked the fact the area appeared to be so secure. He assumed it was the reason they had Trey staying here and not with Zac.

After several moments, the gate in front of his pickup opened as the guard waved him through. Cole consulted the scrap of paper beside him and made his way to Bobby's. Trey was sitting on the front steps when Cole pulled into the circular drive.

Even in a simple pair of dark green cargo shorts and T-shirt, Trey looked good enough to eat. Trey opened the passenger door and climbed in. Before Trey had time to put his seatbelt on, Cole pulled him over for a kiss.

"Morning," Cole greeted, coming up for air.

"Morning." Trey began rubbing the side of his thigh with his thumbnail, something Cole had long ago realised the man did when he was troubled.

"Something wrong?" Cole asked.

Trey nodded. "I need to talk to my parents about the rape. If you want me to drive separate I'll understand."

"Where do they live?"

"Nob Hill."

"I don't mind driving you, unless you'd rather I didn't."

Trey sighed and rested his head on Cole's shoulder. "My relationship with them is complicated."

"I figured there had to be a reason why you're just now telling them. I can wait outside in the car, or I can even drop you off and go somewhere for coffee while you talk to them." Although Cole had a good relationship with his parents, he knew a lot of people weren't so lucky. The important thing was supporting Trey as much as he'd let him.

"We'll see. I haven't even called yet to see if they'll be home. Guess I need to jump one hurdle before tackling another, huh?"

Cole gave Trey another quick kiss. "That sounds like a good plan."

When Trey started to slide back over to the passenger seat, Cole pulled him back to the centre. "Sit by me?"

"Okay."

Cole was grateful the ride to the station was a relatively short one. Although Trey didn't say it, Cole could feel the younger man's fear.

He pulled into the parking lot and turned off the engine. Before he could get another kiss from Trey, he spotted a familiar-looking man walking towards them. "Is that someone you know?"

Trey smiled. "Yep. That's Angelo. The guys were giving him a hard time last night, so I invited him. I hope you don't mind?"

"Why would I mind? You obviously mean a lot to your friends. I'm sure if you'd have invited them, all your poker buddies would be here."

Trey slowly nodded his head. "You're probably right."

Angelo stood outside the truck looking decidedly uncomfortable. Cole had time for a quick kiss. "You ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

Cole opened his door and joined Angelo, as Trey slid out the driver's door after him.

"Cole, this is my friend Angelo Pilato, Angelo, Cole."

"Nice to meet you," Cole greeted.

"You, too." Angelo shook Cole's hand before turning to Trey. "If you've had second thoughts about me being here..."

"No," Trey was quick to say. "I want you here."

Angelo nodded once and gestured towards the station. "Shall we go in?"

Cole threaded his fingers through Trey's and followed Angelo into the building. Angelo spoke to the desk sergeant, as Cole did his best to reassure Trey. "They'll probably make it so the guy doesn't even see you when you identify him."

Trey wiped his free hand on his shorts. "Doesn't matter if he can see me or not. He'll know."

Cole wrapped his arm around Trey and pulled him close, much to the apparent disapproval of the desk sergeant. "At least you'll know the guy is behind bars and not roaming the streets."

"Yeah."

"Are you ready for this, Mr. Huggins?" A huge mountain of a man asked, coming into the lobby.

"I think so." Trey gestured to Cole and Angelo. "Is it okay if my friends come in with me?"

Detective Torrance gave Cole a quick once over before moving his gaze to Angelo. Was it his imagination, or did the detective's perusal of Angelo last longer than necessary?

"That's fine. They won't be able to go into the line-up room with you, but they can go back with us." Torrance turned and motioned to the desk sergeant. A buzzer sounded and the detective opened the door, holding it for the rest of them to file through.

"This way." Torrance led them down a hallway to a large room full of desks. The detective walked over to one piled high with papers and disposable coffee cups. He grabbed a file. "We can go in one of the interrogation rooms."

Cole felt Trey tense beside him. He added more pressure to their clasped hands and followed Angelo and Torrance into the small room. Torrance closed the mini-blinds and laid the file on the table.

Everyone took their seats, and the detective regarded Trey. "I'll take you into a room with a one-way mirror. We'll bring in a group of men, and you'll tell us if the man who attacked you is in the line-up."

Trey nodded. "Okay."

"Are you sure they won't be able to see him?" Angelo asked.

The detective narrowed his eyes as he once again seemed to size up Angelo. "I just said he'd be looking through a one-way mirror, didn't I?"

Angelo didn't back down a bit. Cole was actually quite impressed. It wasn't that he considered Angelo a wimp, but he didn't know many men that would dare challenge a huge, six-foot-seven detective. As a matter of fact, Cole doubted anyone spoke to Torrance the way Angelo just had.

"What about Trey coming and going from the room? Can you promise this JB101 guy isn't going to see him? I was just watching an episode of Law and Order and..."

"Enough!" Torrance yelled, slamming his fist on the table. "Either let me do my fucking job or wait outside."

Angelo didn't even blink at the outburst. He waited for the detective to finish his statement and calmly adjusted his glasses. "You do your job, but if this guy gets so much as a peek at Trey, I'll have your balls for dinner."

Cole couldn't help but notice the slight smile play across the detective's lips before he quickly masked his reaction. Torrance stood and motioned for Trey.

"You come with me. You two can cool your jets in here."

Cole gave Trey's hand one last squeeze before he turned to follow Torrance from the room. For several moments after the door shut, Cole had to force himself to stay seated.

"What an ass," Angelo mumbled.

Cole was grateful for the distraction. "Are you crazy challenging a man of that size?"

Angelo shrugged. "I've dealt with my share of bullies. Most are all talk. They're used to intimidating everyone into submission, but most of them can't back it up."

Cole chuckled. "Somehow I get the feeling Torrance isn't putting on an act. I think that big sonofabitch is the real deal."

"Maybe. But now he knows his size and that hideous deep voice of his don't scare me."

"What is it that you do again?" Cole asked.

"I'm the sales manager for a group of radio stations here in the city. Why?"

Cole shook his head. "I was thinking about offering you a job as vice-principal at my school. If you can take on a man the size of Torrance, you'd have those high school kids wetting their pants."

Angelo grinned. "It's a gift."

Chapter Four

"Detective? What'll happen after I identify him?" Trey asked as he was led into a small room.

Torrance waved a uniformed officer into the room before addressing Trey's question. "We inform the prosecutor, and he adds another whole list of charges to what we already have."

Trey's thumb found its way to his thigh and started scratching back and forth across the heavy cotton. "When will you tell me his name?"

"After you ID him." Torrance put his hand on a black box on the wall. "You ready? It's like ripping off a bandage. Better to just get it over with than work yourself up over it."

Trey took a deep breath and nodded.

The detective pushed a button on the intercom. "Bring 'em in."

Torrance turned off the light and Trey was thrown into darkness. The lights in the room on the other side of the glass were turned up as a line of men entered. "Why so many?" he whispered.

"Because the guy's features are pretty common. The prosecutor thinks it'll make a better case if we say you picked him out of a line-up of twelve instead of six." Torrance shrugged. "Just doing everything we can to make sure the bastard pays for what he's done."

Torrance pressed the intercom. "Face front."

The line of men turned and Trey gasped. His gaze went immediately to JB101. Those cold pale blue eyes stared back at him, as if daring Trey to identify him. "Are you sure they can't see me?"

"I'm sure. Do you need any of them to step forward?" Torrance asked.

Trey shook his head. Flashes of the night he'd been attacked assaulted him. When he'd first opened the door to JB101, he'd actually thought the man was attractive. Staring into those soulless eyes, Trey wondered how he'd ever been fooled enough to even let the guy step foot into his house. *Was I that desperate?*

He pointed to the line-up. "Fourth man on the right."

"Chuck, have number nine step forward," Torrance said into the intercom.

"That's really not necessary." *Please*. He didn't want to be any closer to JB101 than he already was.

"I'm sorry, but it's procedure."

Trey took a step back.

"Are you sure that's the man who attacked you?"

"I'm positive that's the man."

Torrance wrote something on a sheet of paper and spoke into the intercom. "That's it. You can take 'em away."

After the line of men had left the room, Torrance turned on the light. "The man you identified is William James Overton. The same man we charged in our sting."

William? Will? Bill? None of the names seemed to fit the man who'd left him for dead. For the first time in his twenty-nine years, Trey actually wished harm on another human being. How would William feel if he was slammed against a hard surface and brutally fucked until he bled? Trey smiled. The image seemed to bring him a perverted sense of comfort.

"If you'd like to wait in the room with your friends, I'll get this all typed up and ready for you to sign. We still have your initial statement on file. Is there anything else you've thought of that we need to add?"

Trey took his gaze away from the now empty room in front of him. "I know I told you I tried to wrench the knife from his hand. The more I think about it, the more I believe I might've broken his pinkie finger."

Torrance made a note on the piece of paper. "That's definitely something we can check for. Anything else?"

Trey shook his head. "I don't think so. You might give me a copy to read over, just in case. I was still pretty shook up when you first came to see me in the hospital."

Torrance nodded, and opened the door. He looked out into the hall before gesturing for Trey to follow him. Before they reached the interrogation room where Cole and Angelo waited, he needed a few moments to himself.

"Can I use the restroom?" he asked.

Torrance stopped and backtracked a few feet. "Down this corridor, third door on the right."

"Thanks." Trey made his way to the restroom and entered one of the stalls. He leaned against the door and closed his eyes. His hand went to his stomach, tracing the raised scars through his T-shirt. He knew in his heart he'd walk away from the whole episode if he thought it was a one-off on William's part.

It wasn't that he didn't want the guy to pay for what he'd done, but he was a realist. In the coming months, he'd have to relive that night over and over to complete strangers, including his parents.

The thought of confessing his sins to Hershel and Claudine Huggins sickened him. Maybe he should take a few days before talking to them?

"You alright?" the detective's deep voice asked.

"Yeah. I'll be out in a second." He heard the outer door shut. Trey took a deep breath and opened the stall. He ran some cold water and splashed his face. His mind made up, he opened the door. Torrance was leaning against the opposite wall, black-booted feet crossed at the ankles.

"Ready?"

Trey nodded but said nothing. He followed the detective back to the interrogation room. Cole sprang out of his chair and rushed towards Trey, enveloping him in his arms. Trey melted against the bigger man, seeking the comfort he hadn't been able to give himself.

"Are you done?" Cole asked after kissing Trey's forehead.

"No. It'll be about another thirty minutes," Torrance answered for him.

"Did he identify the guy?" Angelo asked, getting to his feet.

"Yeah, but I need to type it up and have him sign it." Torrance put his hands on his hips like he was daring Angelo to say anything more.

"Well then, get it done, so we can get him out of here." Angelo stared right back at the detective.

Torrance took a step forward, towering over Angelo and narrowed his eyes. "I don't know who the hell you think you are, little man, but I don't work for you."

"The name's Angelo, and I'm not little. You're just a fucking giant."

"My name's Moody, and I'm just that, so back the fuck off."

"It's okay, Ang," Trey tried to interrupt the duelling men. "I told the detective I'd read over the statement I made from the hospital."

Angelo took his eyes off Torrance and glanced at Trey. "Just trying to help."

Trey reached out and put a hand on Angelo's chest. "I know. You're a good man."

Torrance let out an odd-sounding snort and left the room. Angelo shook his head. "That man should be in a cage instead of roaming around free."

Trey grinned. He'd never seen anyone get under Angelo's skin to the extent the detective had. Even the constant teasing by the rest of their friends didn't affect Angelo like Torrance did.

Cole pulled out a chair for Trey. "You need to sit down?"

"Yeah." Trey knew he'd been at the station for less than an hour, but he felt like he'd run a marathon. Cole took a seat beside him as Angelo settled in a chair across the table.

"I've decided to talk to my parents later in the week. I don't feel like dealing with them after that line-up."

Cole nodded and wrapped his arm around Trey's shoulders. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"At least I have a name to go with the face that's haunted my dreams. William. William James Overton." He still had a hard time connecting JB101 to William.

The door opened behind them, and Moody handed Trey several sheets of paper. "This is a copy, so if you need to change something let me know. I can fix it and have you re-sign."

"Okay." Trey tried to keep his hands from shaking as he attempted to concentrate on the typed words. Reading how he'd first made contact with JB101 brought back the shame he'd felt immediately following the rape.

I invited him in. Trey focused on the sentence. He must've reread the words a dozen times before he was able to move on. When he finished, his eyes automatically went back to the offending statement. *I invited him in.* Trey had always known that was the source of his shame, but seeing it in writing further cemented the feeling.

Before he could hand the papers back to the detective, Cole held out his hand. "Would you mind?"

Would he? On one hand, Cole would know the details of what had happened, but on the other, it would save Trey from having to tell him. Trey knew everything would come out in the trial anyway. Maybe this way Cole could be saved the humiliation of hearing it for the first time in that setting.

Trey handed the sheets to Cole before addressing Torrance. "Other than the bit about his pinkie, I think it's all there."

Torrance nodded. "I'll get that added in and bring it back for you to sign."

"Is there somewhere I can get a drink?" Trey asked. He wasn't really thirsty, but he knew he couldn't be in the room while Cole read the statement.

The detective must've known it as well. "Sure. Come with me."

Trey stood and turned to Angelo. "Would either of you like anything?"

Cole was deep into reading and didn't acknowledge the question, but Angelo shook his head. "I'm good."

Torrance let out another one of those disgusted snorts and led the way out of the room.

"Thanks," Trey said when they were out in the hall.

Moody dug into his back pocket and produced a business card. "I know you were given one of these before, but it might be a good idea to actually use it this time."

Trey took the card for the counselling service. He didn't want to discuss his obvious need for psychological help. He shoved the card into one of his side pockets. "What happens with William now?"

"It's up to the prosecutor. We have another victim who seems willing to testify, as well."

Trey perked up. "So you may not even need my testimony?"

Moody's eyes narrowed. "Are you thinking of bugging out on this thing?"

"I'm a teacher. Do you have any idea what a high profile case like this will do to my career?" Trey tried to explain.

Moody grabbed the sleeve of Trey's shirt and pulled him into another interrogation room. "With William wearing a condom, the only DNA evidence we've been able to gather is skin scrapings from underneath your fingernails and few prints. That alone won't be enough for a guilty verdict. Putting a case like this together is a bit like constructing a puzzle. You gather as many pieces as you can and hope they fit well enough to create a picture for the jury. If you take out a large portion of those pieces, the jury will be left with gaping holes in the big picture. Get it?"

Trey's thumb began sliding against his thigh. "I get it. This asshole gets to fuck me twice."

Torrance sighed. "If you're that worried about your job, maybe you should talk to your boss or something."

"My boss is in the other room. That's part of the problem. This thing could very well end up costing him his job as well."

"Hell. Well, try the school board. See how they feel about it. In the end, you need to decide what the right thing to do is. Losing your job would suck, but watching William walk out of that courtroom a free man could prove deadly."

Trey nodded and opened the door. "I'll think about it."

"I'll go finish making the changes to your statement. Shouldn't be more than another ten minutes."

"Okay."

The detective stomped off. Trey decided to go to the restroom for real this time and headed that way. He knew he had a lot to think about. Moody was right about him talking to the school board, but it wasn't something he was looking forward to.

* * * *

By the time Cole finished reading the statement he felt ill. He stood and left the pages on the table. "I'm going to find the restroom."

Angelo nodded. Cole could tell by the look on his face he had no intention of reading the details of the attack. Cole wished he hadn't. What that man had done to Trey was worse than he'd thought. It went way beyond physical damage. JB101, or William as he'd come to find out, had gained Trey's trust and then betrayed him in horrific fashion.

He walked out of the interrogation room and asked a passing officer for directions to the restroom. When he opened the door, he was surprised to see Trey standing at the sink, washing his hands.

Something inside him shifted at the expression on Trey's face as he made eye contact.

"I'm sorry," Trey whispered. He turned and pulled several paper towels out of the wall dispenser.

He was sorry? "What the hell do you have to be sorry for?" Cole asked, stepping up to stand toe to toe with Trey.

The fact that Trey didn't answer right away and refused to look up from the floor told Cole what he needed to know. He wrapped his arms around Trey and held him against his chest. He remembered enough of psychology class to know you couldn't make someone not

feel guilty. Trey would have to forgive himself, or he'd never be able to move beyond the attack.

"Can I ask you one question?"

Trey nodded.

"Before the attack, did you have an inkling this guy was dangerous?" Cole asked. "Did he at any point in your online correspondence give you a reason to question his intentions?"

"No. I thought he was lonely, like me. I mean, isn't that the reason most guys join online dating sites?"

"So, let me get this straight. You met this guy online, talked to him almost every night for two weeks and then agreed to meet him?"

"Yeah," Trey mumbled.

"Do you know how many guys go to bars and fuck in the back room without even introducing themselves? It sounds to me like you were a lot more responsible than most people, so why're you beating yourself up over it? You didn't know this JB guy, or whatever the hell his name is, was going to attack you."

Cole cupped Trey's cheeks and gave him a brief kiss. "What happened wasn't your fault."

"Let's go see if Detective Torrance has those papers ready for me to sign."

He knew he hadn't convinced the man in his arms of his innocence in the matter, but hopefully, Trey at least knew Cole didn't blame him. "Are you still up for an afternoon at my place?"

Trey nodded. "Sure. I'm dying to see what kind of secret projects you've been working on."

"Not so secret. Just haven't had anyone over," Cole replied, as he led Trey out of the restroom.

* * * *

Trey gave Angelo a hug. "Thanks for coming."

Angelo smiled and stepped back towards his car. "I'm touched that you asked me." Angelo's head tilted to the side. "Are you going to be okay?"

Trey glanced up at Cole and squeezed the bigger man's hand. "I'm gonna try."

"I'm here if you need anything. Hell, we're all here for you. I hope you know that." Angelo dug his keys out of his pocket and hit the key fob to unlock his door.

"Yeah. I know," Trey said as Angelo got behind the steering wheel.

With a half-smile plastered to his face, Angelo shut the door and pulled out of the parking lot. Trey leaned his head against Cole's shoulder. "Can we stop and get something to eat on the way to your house?"

Cole unlocked the truck and waited for Trey to scoot in before climbing in after him. "I've got some great salad fixin's at home if you'd rather do that."

"Sure. My stomach would probably do better with something light anyway."

Once Cole made it out of the parking lot and onto the main road, he rested his hand on Trey's thigh. The simple gesture felt so right, like they'd been together for a heck of a lot longer than twenty-four hours.

Although Trey didn't want to get into a heavy conversation, he needed to set up a few things. "Can you get me a meeting with the school board?"

He couldn't help but notice the tightening of Cole's hand on the steering wheel. "May I ask why?"

"I think they deserve to know what happened, and that there'll be a pretty high profile trial coming up," Trey explained. Once he spoke with the board, he'd make a decision whether or not to move forward.

"Do you care if I call them in the morning? I'd hate to bother them on a Sunday, and I really just wanted the rest of the day to get to know you better."

Trey leaned further against Cole's side. "That's fine. I want to forget about the whole mess for the rest of the day anyway. Learning more about you sounds like a great way to spend the afternoon."

Cole's house was in a residential neighbourhood not too far from the high school. He pulled into the cul-de-sac and into a drive. Although the front yard was tiny, it was filled with landscaped beds overflowing with colourful flowers.

"Gorgeous," Trey remarked.

"Wait until you see the backyard. The lot is shaped like a piece of pie, so all the space is behind the house." Cole led the way up the front walk and unlocked the door.

As soon as they were shut inside the privacy of the house, Cole pulled Trey into his arms and devoured his mouth. Trey opened willingly for Cole's questing tongue. He groaned as Cole's hands made their way down his back to cup and squeeze Trey's ass.

He wanted to feel Cole's skin next to his, wanted to smell the sweat of his lover as they ground against each other. All too soon, the kiss was broken. Trey opened his eyes. "Is something wrong?"

Cole shook his head. "I keep forgetting my manners when I'm around you. I apologise."

"For what? Kissing me? Believe me. I was right there with you."

"No, I mean, yeah. I think the last thing you need right now is someone manhandling you." Cole brushed his thumb over Trey's kiss-swollen lips. "I want you so damn much, but I don't wanna push you into an uncomfortable situation."

Cole's words made a lot of sense. Although he had honestly enjoyed the passion between them of a few moments earlier, he knew he could just as easily have freaked out. Better to save them both the embarrassment of something like that happening.

Trey's stomach growled, reminding him of his hunger. "Did you say something about making salad?" he asked as he tried to lighten the mood.

It worked if Cole's grin was an indication. "Come on, the kitchen's at the back of the house."

As he walked through the living room, Trey made a cursory glance around. After growing up in his parents' house surrounded by antiques and knick knacks from their world travels, Trey had developed a minimalist-style of decorating. Cole's taste was somewhere in between. With gleaming hardwood floors and comfortable furniture, Cole had mixed several very nice antique pieces.

"Nice place," he commented.

"Thanks. I like it." Cole gestured to one of the bar stools at the kitchen island. "Have a seat while I whip us up something fresh and quick."

Trey took a seat and watched as Cole began pulling vegetables out of the refrigerator. "Dang. I don't think I've ever seen that many vegetables outside a grocery store."

Cole set his haul on the island. "These're from my garden. I'll show it to you when we're finished eating."

"Garden? I thought that was something for old people and folks who live in the country," Trey teased.

Cole retrieved a large knife and cutting board and began slicing tomatoes. As he concentrated on the task at hand, his demeanour turned serious. "Look around you, Trey. I live by myself. In my position, there's no way I can take a steady lover and my folks live in Phoenix. What else do I have to do with my off time?"

Of all the things Trey knew he could've learned from the statement, one item stuck in his mind. Regardless of what Trey hoped might develop between them, Cole couldn't have a partner. Part of him already knew that, but to hear it hurt.

He rested his chin on his palm and leaned on the counter as Cole continued to prepare lunch. Could he have an affair knowing it couldn't go anywhere? Even though it was more than he'd ever had, Trey didn't think casual dating was for him. He didn't expect to meet someone and move right in, but without hope of a future with Cole, Trey wasn't sure he wanted to get his heart further involved.

Cole began mixing an olive oil based salad dressing as Trey continued to watch him. He knew he could call Bobby to pick him up, but at the end of the day, Cole was still his boss. The upcoming school year would be hard enough without pissing off the principal.

In the end, Trey decided to stay for lunch and a quick tour of the backyard. He could always claim a headache if he needed to.

"Would you like to eat on the patio?"

Trey glanced up at Cole. "Sure."

"Good. Will you grab a couple bottles of water out of the fridge?" Cole asked, carrying two plates towards the French doors.

Trey slid off the stool and retrieved the water, before joining Cole on a large patio. Cole had been right, the backyard was amazing. Everywhere he looked there was something new to see. Cole had created an old-fashioned English garden with small sitting areas tucked in between the profusion of flowers.

"It's gorgeous."

Cole set the plates down and wrapped his arms around Trey from behind. "It makes me smile when I come out here."

"Where's the vegetable garden? All I see are flowers."

Cole took a step back and led Trey by the hand. Tucked between the privacy wall and the side of the house, were enough vegetables to put the average hobby gardener to shame.

Trey's gaze zeroed in on the tomato plants. "Do you ever make fried green tomatoes?"

Cole shook his head. "I've heard of them, but I've never eaten them."

"My grandma Elliott, my mom's mom, used to make them when I went to Georgia to visit." Trey smiled. It had been a while since he'd thought of his grammy. He'd loved spending summers in the small town with her. Although his mother rarely visited her childhood home, at least she'd sent Trey.

"Do you still visit?" Cole asked.

"No. Grammy died when I was in high school. She was the first person to admit she knew I was different." Trey sighed. "According to Grammy, sex didn't make the man, but because I was different, I'd have to prove myself even more to be seen as equal in the eyes of others."

"Smart lady."

Trey shrugged. "It was good advice, it just wasn't true."

"Why do you say that?" Cole asked as he walked beside Trey back to the table.

"Because it's the truth. It doesn't matter how hard I work, what career goals I attain, I'll always have the word 'gay' attached to me. I could win the Nobel Prize and people would still attach that word to my name when they talk about me."

"And you see that as a bad thing," Cole seemed to surmise.

"I'm not ashamed of being gay if that's what you think. I just wish people didn't use it to define me."

Cole tapped his fork on the tabletop. "I'm going to take a wild guess and say that's how your parents define you. Am I right?"

"No, not really. They'd be more likely to define me as a teacher, something they approve of even less than my sexuality."

"Why? You're a great teacher."

"Because I'm not a lawyer. In my parents' eyes, I sold myself, and them, short when I quit law school after the second year to get my teaching degree."

Cole shook his head. "So, because you decided to become a teacher they don't want to see you?"

Trey took a bite of salad as he thought about the question. "It's not that they don't want to see me. I mean, I think they still love me..." Trey wasn't sure how to explain the strange family dynamic in the Huggins' household. "Maybe they just don't like me. On the rare occasions I visit, we tend to sit around and stare at each other. Then my mom will get into a discussion with my dad about a case, and I'm left alone to listen."

Cole reached over and put a hand on Trey's thigh. "Why haven't you told them about what happened to you?"

"I don't know. Embarrassment maybe. Once I went against their wishes and got the teaching degree, things changed. It's screwed up, I know. Welcome to my life." He tried to grin but knew it fell short.

Cole didn't ask any more questions, and they settled in to eat their lunch. Trey admitted it was nice making idle conversation after the morning he'd had. He felt comfortable with Cole and had to continually remind himself a serious relationship between them wouldn't be possible.

By the time they'd both finished, Trey knew the names of most of the flowers in the garden. He could easily see himself working to control the weeds and deadheading the colourful plants alongside of Cole.

He shook his head to dispel the dream.

"You okay?" Cole asked.

Trey glanced up and made eye contact before quickly looking away. He refused to allow himself to get lost in those big brown depths. "It's been a nice lunch, but would you mind taking me back to Bobby's?"

Cole reached out and turned Trey's chair around so they were facing each other. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," Trey lied. "I guess I need some time."

"Have I done something to offend you?" Cole asked.

Trey sighed. He knew they'd have to have the discussion sooner or later, Trey figured it would be better to get it out of the way before he got hurt worse. "I don't think I can do the casual thing with you, or with anyone for that matter."

"Casual? What're you talking about? Do you know what a risk I'm taking here? Do you think I'd do that for a casual affair?"

Trey pushed his chair back and stood. "Look, I thought I could do this, but I can't. I have no doubt we'd be good together, but you've made it pretty darn clear dating is as far as it would go and...forget it."

Trey picked up his plate and carried it into the kitchen. He turned on the hot water and ran a cursory rinse over his plate when he felt Cole press up against his back. Strong arms went around him to brace themselves against the granite counter top. He closed his eyes as Cole's cheek brushed against his. Trey held his breath.

How could he possibly resist the gorgeous man?

Chapter Five

Cole struggled with what he wanted to say. False hopes wouldn't do either of them any good, but he couldn't let Trey walk out of his life.

"Please don't go," he whispered. "I've waited too long for this chance to have you walk away."

"I just don't know if I can do it. It's like contemplating an affair with a married man, only instead of a wife, I have to contend with a career. No matter how much I want things to be different, I know our relationship can only go so far."

Cole removed his hands from the counter and spun Trey around to face him. "I've never found anyone I cared about more than my job. Give me a reason to change my mind."

Trey's arms wrapped around Cole's waist as his forehead landed softly on Cole's shoulder. "The thought of loving you more than you love me scares me. It's a lot of pressure, ya know?"

"It doesn't have to be. Why can't we take things a day at a time? Be together as long as it's enjoyable for both of us?"

Trey sighed. "If I told you, you'd laugh."

Cole reached between them and tilted Trey's chin up. "Talk to me. I promise no laughing."

"It goes back to something else my grammy said to me when she admitted she knew I was gay. She said being a man didn't give me the right to screw around. That I should hold myself to the same virtues God intended. Sounds stupid when you say it out loud like that. But I guess Grammy's words had an impact. I was a virgin before JB/William. I thought it would be something I could share with the man who knew he wanted me forever."

The idea of dating Trey without making love to him shocked Cole. He knew some gay men never had anal intercourse and carried on perfectly romantic lives with their partners, Cole just never thought he'd be one of them. He knew he couldn't tell Trey it wouldn't bother him, because he loved fucking. What he needed to do was figure out if he could give Trey what he needed while keeping himself sexually satisfied enough to stay interested. It sounded completely shitty even to him. How was he going to explain it to Trey?

Cole cleared his throat. "How do you feel about doing other stuff?"

Trey chuckled and buried his face in the crook of Cole's neck. "I'm not an angel. Heck, I came in my shorts less than twenty hours ago."

Cole silently breathed a sigh of relief. "If I promise to be a gentleman when it counts, will you agree to see me?"

Cole wasn't sure how long the two of them stood there before he finally felt Trey nod. "I'd like that."

"So you'll stay awhile?"

"Only if you'll let me help you outside in the yard."

* * * *

Trey groaned as he sat in one of the shaded chairs. "Tell me again why I volunteered for this?"

Cole laughed and began rubbing Trey's shoulders. He had to give the guy credit. Trey had exceeded Cole's expectations and then some. "Because you wanted to spend time with me?"

"Remind me to ask you to watch a movie next time. I don't think my muscles have ever been this sore."

"Just wait. They'll get worse." Cole bent over and pulled off Trey's sweat-soaked shirt. "If you want to take a shower, I can throw your clothes into the wash."

He tossed the shirt to the patio and began kneading Trey's neck and shoulders once more. Trey's head fell forward, so Cole concentrated on the back of his neck. "Feel good?"

"Mmm hmm," Trey moaned.

Cole couldn't resist and let his hands travel around and further down Trey's chest until they reached his pecs. The small dark brown nipples pebbled immediately, making Cole smile. He began to lightly pinch the evidently sensitive nubs. "Does that feel good?"

Trey arched his back and leaned the top of his head against Cole's groin. "You know it does."

With Trey's head rubbing against his filling cock, Cole wanted nothing more than to feel those tawny lips wrapped around his dick. He almost moaned when Trey opened his eyes to stare up at him.

"Feel like taking a shower with me?" Trey asked.

Shit. Cole knew it would be his first real test. Would he be able to stand next to a wet and slippery Trey and not want to fuck him? Probably not. Cole knew he'd always feel the need to bury himself deep in Trey's ass, but he also knew going in that it wasn't an option. He'd either have to learn to get around the technicality or give up any hope of seeing Trey.

"Sure, as long as you're comfortable with me playing. I may not try to fuck you, but you can't expect me to be naked with you and not want to touch and taste."

Trey leaned back enough to stare into Cole's eyes, like a lost puppy. "I...um...I'm not very skilled in those areas."

Cole smiled. Trey's honesty was refreshing, and it made him want the smaller man even more. "I'll teach you."

Trey grinned. "I'd like that."

* * * *

With his face shielded from the warm spray by Cole's broad shoulders, Trey took his first look at the bigger man's body. He swallowed the saliva pooling in his mouth as he studied the long, thick cock surrounded by neatly trimmed blond pubic hair.

Cole's soapy hands began sliding across Trey's chest, stopping to tease his nipples. "Damn, you're sexy," Cole said as he bent to bite Trey's neck.

Trey wasn't sure what to do, but he knew he wanted to touch the cock that had him so enthralled. He reached around Cole and picked up the bar of soap. After getting his hands nice and slick, he pointed towards Cole's erection. "May I?"

Cole laughed and pinched Trey's pebbled nub with more force. "You can do anything you feel like doing, darlin'."

Trey started at Cole's balls, cupping and rolling the giant orbs in his hands. "It's not like I've never touched a man, but it's been a long time and nothing as impressive..." Trey trailed off suddenly embarrassed.

Cole released his hold on Trey's nipples and soaped his own hands again. Trey almost choked when Cole went right for his rod, squeezing the length in a firm grip. Trey couldn't help but to wonder whether Cole was trying to silently teach him what he liked.

Trey decided to follow Cole's lead and released the sac and his hands. He slid his still soapy hand up to Cole's thick erection and tried to grip the girth in the same hold his own cock was being held in.

Cole smiled. "That's it. A little harder."

Trey licked his lips and squeezed.

"Oh, yeah, like that." Cole began moving his fisted hand up and down Trey's length.

Trey followed suit. He stood on his toes and ran his tongue across Cole's lips. A noise erupted from Cole's throat as he used one of his hands to grab the back of Trey's head, pulling him in for a deep kiss.

The two of them had shared quite a few kisses so far, but nothing had prepared him for the tongue fucking Cole was giving him. Trey twined his tongue around Cole's as the two mutually picked up speed on the other's cock.

Trey gasped into Cole's mouth as the first shot erupted from his cock. The hand on the back of his head moved down to wrap around his waist. Trey was thankful for the support as he struggled to stay on his feet.

After his breathing had returned to semi-normal, he realised his hand was covered in Cole's cum.

Cole eventually broke the kiss and stared down at Trey, swiping an errant strand of cum with his tongue. "Wow."

Trey grinned. "Yep. That pretty much sums it up."

* * * *

Cole traced a line from under Trey's chin down across the raised pink scar tissue to his belly button. "This is nice."

Trey grinned. "If you think that's nice, wait 'til you see this," Trey said as he flipped the sheet off his naked body.

Cole chuckled. After an evening of getting each other off in various ways, it seemed Trey was still ready for more. "I wasn't talking about your body, although it is a fine specimen. I was talking about laying here with you."

"Oh. Yeah, that's nice, too," Trey laughed as he flipped the sheet back over himself.

Cole shook his head and uncovered Trey's flaccid cock once again. "Doesn't mean I don't still enjoy looking at you."

Trey spread his legs, flinging one of them over Cole's. Despite the way he acted, Cole was sure neither of them would be able to get it up for several hours, and by that time they'd be sound asleep. "You staying?"

Trey glanced at the clock. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Like I said, it's nice laying here with you. It might be a good idea if you called your friend though."

"Bobby," Trey reminded him.

Cole reached over and grabbed the phone from the bedside table. "Here, call Bobby, and let him know you're in good hands."

Trey took the phone and chuckled. "Don't sell yourself short. I've been in great hands."

Cole leaned in and gave Trey a kiss. "I haven't seen you this playful before. It looks good on you."

A shadow passed over Trey's expression, but was quickly covered. "You seem to bring it out of me." Trey ran a hand over his limp cock. "In more ways than one."

Cole slapped Trey's inner thigh. "Just make your phone call so we can get back to snuggling."

Trey dialled Bobby's number and waited. "Hey, Jules."

While Trey talked to his friend, Cole got up and went into the bathroom to get another wet washcloth. After a quick wipe of his genitals and abs, he rinsed the cloth and carried it back into the bedroom.

"Yeah. No, I'll be fine," Trey continued to talk.

Cole knelt between his lover's legs and began cleaning away the dried cum from Trey's chocolate brown skin.

"Okay. Well, you'll probably already be at the hospital by the time I make it."

Cole tossed the washcloth to the floor and stretched out beside Trey. He licked the soft area behind Trey's ear as his hand once again found their way to his lover's nipple.

"Gotta go," Trey moaned and ended the call. He tossed the phone onto the floor and rolled to face Cole. "Kiss me again."

Cole chuckled and grabbed a handful of Trey's ass cheek. "I think I've created a monster."

"Grrrrrowl," Trey teased before Cole's tongue invaded his mouth.

* * * *

The following morning over a breakfast of scrambled eggs and fresh tomatoes, Trey couldn't seem to wipe the smile from his face. He'd never known sex could be so stimulating and so much fun at the same time.

As Cole continued to play footsie with him under the table, Trey tried to concentrate on the day ahead. "Can you call the school board for me?"

"Sure, I told you I would." Cole's instep moved further up Trey's calf.

"I told Jules I was gonna move back to my house, so I need to get my clothes and stuff."

Cole's foot paused. "You sure?"

Trey nodded. "It's time. With William behind bars, there's no reason for me not to. Besides, Jules and Bobby are still in the honeymoon stage. I'm sure they're looking forward to having their house to themselves again."

Cole rested his foot on the chair between Trey's legs. "Have you been back since that night?"

Trey shook his head. "Zac and Eric went by to pick up my clothes, but the police wouldn't let them in. Detective Torrance is the one who packed my stuff."

Cole took another bite of his eggs.

Trey could tell his new lover wanted to say something, but was holding back. "What?" he finally asked.

Cole swallowed and wiped his mouth. "I'd like you to let me go over there first to make sure the place is cleaned up. I'll take one of your buddies if you'd like, but I don't think it's a good idea for you to just walk into the place after what happened."

Trey tried to remember back to the night of the attack. Other than a few small pieces of furniture getting knocked over, he couldn't think of anything else that...

"What?"

"My couch."

"What about it?" Cole asked.

"I want it out of the house." He knew even if he was able to get the blood off the black leather, he'd never be able to sit on it again.

"Okay," Cole agreed.

"I'll call Zac. I'm sure he'll help you carry it. While you're doing that, I'll go pick out something else." Memories of the night assaulted him. Images of his face hitting the black leather as William fucked him, seeing his own bloody handprints as he continually tried to get away from the searing pain of the knife ripping through his skin.

He hadn't even realised he'd started shaking until Cole's strong arms wrapped around him, pulling him from his chair.

"It's okay, darlin', I've got you," Cole soothed.

Trey allowed himself to be rocked back and forth in Cole's lap as if he were a child. He thought about the business card Moody had given him the previous day. Maybe he wasn't dealing with the attack as well as he'd thought. What would it be like when he was forced to relive every agonising detail on the witness stand?

The thought of going through the trial without Cole's comforting embrace scared him. How was he supposed to see Cole every day at school and not seek him out for comfort? *Dang*. Lifting his head he gazed into Cole's beautiful brown eyes. "I think I need to ask the school board for some time off until the trial's over."

Chapter Six

Tapping a pencil on his desk blotter, Cole once again glanced at the newspaper beside him. The announcement by the prosecutors' office of William James Overton's arrest had created a media frenzy.

It turned out that Overton was the son of wealthy business owner, Paul Overton, a man with money and political connections in the Bay Area. It was because of Paul Overton's clout that the prosecutor had been able to get the trial moved up to the second week in October.

Overton stunned the media when he sided with the victims instead of his own son, saying in a press release that William had always been a confused and rebellious young man.

The trial wasn't expected to last more than two weeks, but it was two weeks Trey had made Cole promise not to try and see him. Cole couldn't believe he'd agreed to such a thing, but Trey had been so damn adamant about protecting Cole and his position that he'd eventually agreed.

Now, well into the third day of the trial, Cole had already chewed his fingernails to the quick. Trey's friends had taken turns sitting in on the hearings as their schedules allowed. Cole felt like the lowest fucker in the world for not being there for the man he was growing to deeply love.

Trey's friends seemed to understand and tried to keep Cole updated by telephone call and text message every time the court went into recess. He glanced at the clock, knowing the judge should be calling for lunch soon. Trey had told him over the phone the previous night that he could be on the witness stand any time the following day.

Cole closed his eyes and rested his back on the chair. Sleep had been almost nonexistent lately. He'd become accustomed to Trey's sweet little body curled against his as they slept.

In the days and nights leading up to the trial, Cole spent long hours on the phone with Trey. His lover had decided to move back in with Bobby and Jules within the safety of the gated community.

Although a video of Trey had been taken by a television news helicopter hovering over the house, at least the multitude of photographers had been kept outside the gate.

Cole's phone rang and he immediately seized the receiver. "Yes?"

"It's Bobby. They just broke for lunch."

"Has he been called yet?" Cole asked.

Bobby sighed into the phone. "Yeah, but he's not done. He started to lose it a little, and the prosecutor asked for a recess."

Cole could barely swallow around the lump in his throat. "Do you think I could talk to him?"

"Sorry. The prosecutor has him holed up in a room here. I have an idea though."

"Yeah?"

"If you can get to my boat before court is adjourned for the day, I'll bring Trey by this evening and take the two of you as far out on the water as I can."

Cole wanted nothing more, but he knew Trey would protest. "Trey won't do it. He still feels the need to protect me."

"Believe me, after the morning he's had, he won't be in the right frame of mind to protest anything. Why don't you grab some food on the way over. Slip 36B, *My Second Chance*."

"I'll be there. Will you be able to speak to Trey before he goes back on the stand?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if you do, can you tell him my flowers are starting to die without his singing?"

"I take it that's code for you miss the shit out of him?" Bobby chuckled.

"Yeah. Something like that."

"You know, if the two of you were as caught up in each other as you are in your careers, none of this back and forth would be necessary. You'd have your ass parked in the seat beside me so he could look into your eyes as he poured his shame out for the world to hear."

"It's what Trey wanted," Cole reminded Bobby.

"Yeah, maybe so, but that doesn't make it right. The two of you have practically lived in each other's pockets at night and on weekends for the past three and a half months. When're you gonna admit you love him?"

"Three and a half months compared to twenty-five years building a career..."

"Fuck that. Do me a favour, will ya? Ask yourself something. Which have you enjoyed more, your career or spending time with Trey? That's all I'm gonna say on the matter. I should have Trey at *My Second Chance* by six."

Bobby hung up without another word. Cole slammed the phone back into its cradle, not happy about having been scolded by the younger man.

"He doesn't know what he's talking about," Cole said to the phone.

Cole had been in the room when Trey had spoken with the ten men and women who made up the school board. On Cole's whispered advice, Trey had invited a representative from the teachers' union to accompany him. Although very careful of what he said to Trey, the board president, James Porter, was very firm on the position that Trey's personal matters would not be allowed to affect the students or his fellow faculty members in any way. When Trey tried to question James further, the president called an end to the impromptu meeting.

Cole had returned home while Trey had coffee with the union representative, Monica Burns. Ms. Burns told Cole the board would not be able to fire him for his sexual preference as long as he didn't make it an issue within the school. She told him to think of it as the school boards' version of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'.

As the weeks went on, Trey decided to submit a letter of resignation to the school board. Although Trey didn't plan to make his sexual preference an issue, he knew the trial would do it for him. Rather than allow his teaching record to endure the backlash, he resigned in good standing.

Cole knew Trey wouldn't have trouble finding another position the following school year, but he worried what his lover would do in the meantime. Trey tried to assure Cole he'd be fine financially until he found another job, but Cole was more worried about Trey's emotional state.

Trey started attending a support group two nights a week, but with the trial looming closer, he'd begun to see a psychiatrist as well two days a week.

Cole could see the changes in Trey's behaviour as his counselling progressed. His usually shy lover was quickly coming out of his shell. Although they hadn't spoken again about making love, Cole knew the time was quickly approaching when he'd have to make a decision.

Bobby had been right about one thing, he had fallen in love with Trey. But after Trey's meeting with the school board, Cole was more concerned than ever about losing his job. Would he be able to eventually live with Trey without anyone at the school finding out? Hell, Zac lived with Eric. Cole knew for a fact that not only did several of the teachers know, but some of the football players as well.

For Christ's sake, there was a reason he'd moved to the San Francisco area in the first place. When had he decided to let the bigots around him dictate what kind of life he was supposed to live?

He was reaching for the phone to call the union representative, when it started ringing. "Hello?"

"Someone shot Trey in the back of the head with a red paintball on his way up to resume the witness stand," Angelo informed him.

"What!" Cole yelled, standing so fast his chair was knocked against the wall.

"Yeah. The cops took the guy into custody, but he was shoutin' all kinds of fucking die fag-type shit. The guy used a sling-shot, can you imagine? I already called Moody and told him to get his ass down here."

"He's a detective, what the hell is he supposed to do?"

"Whatever he has to. He promised me Trey would be safe. It's time for him to put up or shut up."

Despite his concern for Trey, Cole had to give Angelo credit once again. The man definitely didn't seem to be afraid of Torrance one bit. In fact, Angelo seemed to try and rile the heavily muscled cop at every turn.

"So what's happening now?" Cole asked.

"The judge threatened to clear the courtroom for the rest of the trial, and issued a recess for the rest of the day."

"Can he do that?" Cole asked, astonished.

"Of course he can do that, he's the judge. Anyway, Bobby wanted me to call and tell you to get your ass over to the marina."

"Yeah. Okay. I'll leave now. Thanks."

"Man, that was some scary shit. Everyone, including Trey, thought the guy'd shot him for real," Angelo said.

By the time Cole hung up the phone, his hands were shaking. What if some crazy bastard had managed to get a gun into the courtroom? Hell, for that matter, someone could get Trey before he entered the courthouse.

Cole closed down his computer and grabbed his suit jacket off the coat rack. He stepped into the outer office and addressed his secretary, Jill. "Something's come up, and I need to leave for the day. Tell Marion she's in charge."

"I'm on it." Jill reached for the phone. "Is everything okay?"

No. "Yeah, just some personal business I need to see to. I'll be back in the morning."

Cole climbed into his pickup and laid rubber getting out of the parking lot. He knew he couldn't continue riding the fence where his relationship with Trey was concerned.

* * * *

Trey was bent over in the backseat as Jules inspected the back of his head where the paintball had hit him. Jules had washed away some of the red paint with a wad of wet paper towels, but Trey couldn't wait to take a shower.

"I think you'll be okay. You have the beginnings of a bruise, but it could've been much worse had the asshole used a gun instead of a slingshot."

Trey sat up and looked around. "Where're we going?" he asked Bobby.

"Thought I'd take us out on the boat for the evening. Get away from the photographers for a change."

Trey liked that idea. He was sick to death of having cameras shoved in his face. Maybe once he was on the boat, he could deal with what had happened earlier. His psychiatrist had told him to deal with things as they came along and not hold them in. Trey was trying, but breaking down into a sobbing mess wasn't something he'd felt like doing at the courthouse.

"Have you ever seen Angelo so fired up?" Bobby chuckled.

"Yeah. That day he met Detective Torrance for the first time. It was a side of him that I'd never seen." Trey realised he didn't know that much about Angelo. He'd been playing poker with the guy for several years, but other than his job, and penchant for small athletic shoes on guys, Trey didn't know much else.

That realisation shamed him. How could he call himself a friend to Angelo when he'd never really taken the time to get to know him? Trey promised himself to rectify that as soon as the trial was over. He mentally added it to the growing list of things to do once he got his life back.

Bobby drove by a familiar truck before parking at the opposite end of the lot. Trey's heart began to beat faster. "Is Cole here?"

Jules grinned. "Bobby thought it would do both of you some good to see each other."

Trey barely heard Jules as he jumped out of the car and raced down towards the water. He was sure he resembled a running back as he wove between the obstacles in his path. He reached Bobby's boat and scrambled down the steps to the salon.

"Cole!" he shouted as he launched himself into his lover's arms.

Cole greeted him with a troubled smile and a deep tonsil tickling kiss. Trey closed his eyes and let Cole take the lead. He'd had enough of being strong. All he wanted was to spend a night with Cole taking care of him. Trey didn't care if that made him sound weak. He knew it was what he needed.

Cole broke the kiss and stared at Trey. "I've missed you so goddamn much."

Trey's eyes began to burn as the long-held tears threatened to fall. "I don't know why you're here, but I'm so glad you are."

"Angelo called."

Trey reached behind his head. "So you know what happened."

Cole nodded. "I know I promised you I'd stay away, but I just couldn't after what happened."

Trey shut Cole up with another kiss. He could hear Bobby and Jules above them walking around on deck.

"Come with me," he said as he led Cole towards one of the two cabins.

Cole gasped, and Trey knew his lover was looking at the red paint still in his hair. "Yeah. I need a shower."

"Is there one on this boat?" Cole asked.

Trey nodded and led the way into the captain's cabin. Without a word, Cole began removing Trey's clothes. Although the two of them had seen each other naked many times, Trey suddenly felt self-conscious. He knew it was that morning's testimony that had him feeling vulnerable.

Cole must have read his mind, because his lover shook his head. "There's no need to hide what you're feeling with me."

Trey swallowed. "I don't know if I can shower with you."

"I wasn't planning on it. I'm here for you, not for sex," Cole explained.

Trey broke eye contact. "Why do you continue to put up with me? I have to frustrate the dickens out of you."

Cole chuckled, surprising Trey. He looked up at the bigger man. "What?"

"I just think it's cute as hell that you refuse to cuss."

Trey shrugged. "Don't see the need."

Cole pulled Trey into his arms. "I know you don't, which is one of the many reasons why I've fallen in love with you."

Trey's knees threatened to buckle. Though he'd secretly hoped Cole would someday come to love him, Trey never really held out much hope. "You love me?"

Cole nodded, an odd expression crossing his face. "More than anything."

Cole seemed to study Trey for several moments. "Why don't you take your shower, while I go set the table? I bought some fried chicken for us to have for dinner."

Trey stretched and gave Cole a tender kiss. "Thank you."

Cole watched Trey disappear into the head and shut the door. He sunk down onto the bed and buried his face in his hands. He hadn't lied when he'd admitted to Trey that he loved him more than anything, but what did that mean to his future?

The length of time they'd been together kept playing through Cole's mind, three and a half months. How had he managed to fall so deeply in love with a man he'd only been dating such a short time?

He heard the water turn on and the shower door close. Cole stood and wiped the moisture from his eyes. He hadn't been crying, but it was the closest he'd come since he was a boy. *Damn.*

It was then he noticed the boat was moving. He'd been so engrossed in his conversation with Trey, he hadn't even realised they'd left the marina. He opened the door and strode towards the small galley.

He started to get plates out of the locker but wasn't sure how many to get. He closed the door and went up on deck to find Bobby and Jules.

"Hey," he called out.

"Up here," Bobby yelled.

Cole looked up and shielded his eyes from the sun. "I thought I'd go ahead and feed Trey. It doesn't look like he's eaten much in a couple of days."

Jules nodded. "You'd be right. It doesn't seem to matter what I fix, he keeps saying he's not hungry."

"Well, I've got plenty of fried chicken and side dishes to feed all of us if you're interested."

"Let me get a little further down the coast, and I'll drop anchor and come down."

Cole nodded and went back below deck. He quickly set the table and went to check on Trey.

"How's it coming?" he asked, opening the door.

Trey stood wrapped in a towel with his black suit jacket in his hands. He was picking at the dried red paint splatters on the collar and shaking his head. "It's probably ruined."

Cole walked into the cabin and took the jacket from Trey. "We'll just have to ask a dry cleaner. No sense worrying about it."

He tilted Trey's chin up and could see obvious signs his man had been crying. Cole wished he knew what to do. "Dinner's in a few minutes. Would you like to sit with me for a while?"

Trey nodded and waited for Cole to sit on the bed. Cole wanted to pull Trey into his lap and wrap him up in his arms, but he didn't know if it would be welcome. It was so damn hard to understand what Trey must be feeling.

He smiled when Trey made the first move and put one knee beside Cole's hip on the mattress. "May I?" Trey asked.

Cole held out his arms, open for anything Trey needed. It didn't take long before Trey's towel-covered ass was sitting in his lap. Cole closed his arms around Trey's lean body and buried his face against his lover's neck, inhaling the clean smell of soap.

"I love you so much it scares me," Trey whispered.

Cole pulled back and stared into Trey's beautiful eyes. He knew in that moment he'd do anything to have Trey in his life. "Don't be scared. Bobby said something to me earlier that's really had me thinking."

"What did he say? Do I need to apologise for him?" Trey said with a slight grin.

"He asked me which had brought more meaning to my life, my career or you." Cole stopped and swallowed around the newly formed lump in his throat. "I realised something. I can always find another job, but I'll never find another you."

Trey's head tilted to the side. "What're you saying?"

"That I'll do whatever it takes to spend the rest of my life with you. So when you go back into that courtroom, I'm going to be sitting beside the rest of your friends."

Trey shook his head. "That's not necessary. The trial won't go on forever. Maybe if we play it cool until it's over, the school board will leave you alone. I'll probably only be on the stand for another day."

"What kind of partner would I be to let you go through that alone?"

"I won't be alone. I'll have my friends with me and you in my heart."

Cole couldn't shake the feeling that Trey really didn't want him in the courtroom. "Is there something you're not telling me? What's the real reason you don't want me there?"

Trey tried to look away, but Cole cupped his lover's cheeks and held his head in place. "Talk to me, darlin'."

"There's some stuff that I haven't told anyone except my therapist. It's not even in the police report I filed, but William's defence attorney is darn good. I'm afraid he'll make me tell the jury things that no one should have to hear."

Cole traced Trey's black eyebrows with his thumbs, trying to soothe the troubled younger man. He couldn't imagine what had Trey so scared, and his lover was scared. It was easy to see in his eyes and feel in the tense muscles of his back.

Cole leaned forward and swept his lips across Trey's. "You don't have to tell me, but it might be easier if I hear about it now, rather than read about it later."

Trey's hand moved down to rub across his towel-covered thigh. "I'm afraid I led William to believe something about me that wasn't true. Maybe I did silently ask for what happened to me."

"You wanted him to rape you? You invited him into your home so he could stab you and leave you for dead? I highly doubt that. William had an agenda from the beginning. The fact that he'd already done it to others is proof of that."

Trey started to squirm on Cole's lap. He knew it wasn't the time to get an erection, but the movement against his cock was taking the situation out of his control. He placed his hands on Trey's hips to still the movement and received a wide-eyed expression in reply.

"Sorry."

"Don't be. It's not that I didn't enjoy it, but we've got other things to talk about first." Cole watched as Trey appeared to be warring with himself. "Nothing you can say will make me love you any less."

"You sure about that?" Trey sighed. "Well, you know I told you I met William online."

"Yeah."

"After the second time we chatted, he asked if I had a webcam on my laptop. I said yes, and he asked if I'd turn it on and strip for him." Trey paused, obviously trying to gauge Cole's reaction before he continued.

"From there things began to progress very quickly. He'd ask me to do things to myself. I don't know why I did some of them, but he told me I was sexy. I'd never been told that before and it seemed to fuel my creativity."

Cole saw the embarrassment and shame in Trey's eyes, and he didn't like it. "Do you think you're the only one to perform for a lover? I've done plenty of things in my day I wish I could take back, but I can't. I've learned to accept the fact that I get carried away at times. Sounds to me like you experimented with your own body and there's nothing wrong with that."

"But I did it for someone I'd never even met," Trey cut in.

"Do you think I knew anything about the guys I let suck me off in dark back rooms?" Cole put his forehead against Trey's. "I guess what I'm trying to say is that there's nothing wrong with getting your freak on when it's mutual. When you did those things for William, it was your choice, that's what makes the difference. What you did by choice has nothing to do with what was taken from you by force, and don't let anyone try to make you believe differently."

A knock on the door made Trey jump in his arms. "We'll be out in a minute," Cole called.

"Okay. No hurry," Bobby said.

Cole shifted his attention back to Trey. "If you really don't want me in the courtroom that's fine, but I don't want to stay away because you're embarrassed some of this might come out."

"How about if you come over to Bobby's place after I'm done for the day?"

Cole knew Trey was still worried about the school board finding out about their relationship. He was going to protest further, but he decided Trey had enough on his plate to deal with. "Okay, but are you sure you wouldn't rather come to my house?"

Trey shook his head. "I can't be sure a photographer won't follow me. We'd be much safer at Bobby's."

Cole wanted to argue that he didn't care anymore, but a small part of him wasn't so sure he was thinking with the right head. "You feel like eating some fried chicken, slaw and potato salad?"

Trey nodded. "Yeah. Just let me get dressed first."

Cole started to leave, but Trey called him back.

"You can stay."

Cole turned around just as Trey dropped his towel to the floor. Cole leaned against the door and bit the inside of his cheek as he stared at the gorgeous man in front of him. If nothing else, their talk seemed to put Trey more at ease. Had his lover been carrying the guilt around with him to the point that he hadn't allowed himself the pleasures of his own body?

Trey stood with his shoulders back, perfectly aware of Cole's studying gaze. Cole felt his body respond to Trey's hardening cock and shook his head. "You're about to get me into trouble."

Trey grinned, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "I'd like to go home with you later, if that's okay?"

Cole knew immediately what Trey was asking for. The problem was, he didn't know how to respond. Was Trey offering what he'd held so dear out of guilt, or did he truly want to make love?

Cole stepped forward until he was toe to toe with Trey. He reached down and caressed his lover's cock. "You can stay with me anytime you want, but I can't take your gift until I figure out a way for us to be together for real."

Trey stepped closer and ground his erection against Cole's hand. "I think the longer I let it go, the more importance I'm putting on the physical aspect instead of the feelings behind it."

Cole swept his tongue across Trey's lips before pushing his way inside for a taste of his man. Trey responded immediately and welcomed Cole's kiss with exuberance. *Damn*. Cole wanted nothing more than to throw Trey onto the bed and bury himself deep into his lover's ass.

He broke the kiss and whispered against Trey's mouth. "Not here. When we get to my place, we'll take things one step at a time."

Trey nodded. "Then I guess you'd better feed me."

Cole reluctantly released the cock in his hand and bent to pick Trey's clothes from the floor. "Then I guess you'd better get some clothes on so I can think of something other than your sexy ass."

"You love my sexy ass," Trey teased.

"Yep. Your sexy ass, stomach, legs, arms, brain...I could continue to name body parts, but it's easier to just say I love you."

Chapter Seven

Cole unlocked his front door and ushered Trey inside. Trey released more of the day's tension as he glanced around the living room. It was amazing how at peace he felt in Cole's house.

Since having the talk with Cole earlier in the evening, he'd slowly allowed himself to unwind. He'd realised how much pressure he'd been putting on himself in regards to the physical aspects of a relationship.

Cole was nothing like William, and it had been wrong of him to hold himself back the way he had. Trey wondered when he'd become such a prude. How could it be wrong to give yourself, body and soul, to the man you loved?

He turned towards Cole and held out his hand. When Cole took it, Trey led him into the master bedroom. "I've missed this bed."

"It's missed you. I've spent more than my share of sleepless nights in it since you've been gone."

Trey unbuttoned his white dress shirt and let it fall from his shoulders. He unzipped his slacks and stepped out of his shoes, kicking the pants to the side. "Would you mind taking me to Bobby's in the morning so I can get a clean suit?"

Cole began stripping the clothes from his muscular frame. "I thought I was gonna go with you to the courthouse?"

Trey shook his head and pulled back the covers. "I've got you in my heart. I don't need you to be in the courtroom. If we're patient until this is over, maybe we can make it work, and you can still hold onto your job."

He slid between the sheets and waited for Cole. To say he was nervous would be the understatement of the decade. He was petrified that he'd freak out in the middle and scare Cole off for good. *I'll be fine. It's Cole, not William.*

Cole switched on the bedside lamp and turned off the overhead light before crawling into bed and right up against Trey. "Before we do anything, I want you to know something."

"Okay."

"Loving you isn't conditional upon having sex. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Trey nodded and rolled on top of Cole. He gazed into his lover's eyes and felt his chest expand further. "Yes."

Wrapped in Cole's arms, Trey felt safer and more loved than he ever had. He moved down enough to rest his head on Cole's chest. Large hands began rubbing circles on his back and Trey practically purred. Every touch from his lover felt like a gift.

Trey circled the nipple in front of his face with his index finger. He was delighted when the pink flesh began to harden. "I love you," he whispered.

Cole pulled Trey back up and kissed him. The gentle kiss was a mere sweep of slowly exploring tongues. Cole broke the kiss and whispered against Trey's lips as his hands landed on Trey's ass. "I love you, too, darlin'."

The finger running lightly up and down his crack wasn't enough for Trey. He repositioned his legs on either side of Cole's body and drew them up. With his ass opened wide to his lover's touch, Trey stared down into Cole's brown eyes. "Touch me."

After several moments, Cole reached over to the bedside table and retrieved a small bottle of lube from the drawer. "I'll go as fast or slow as you want, but you'll have to be honest with me if you become uncomfortable."

Trey nodded as Cole began to rub circles around his hole. Cole seemed to be in no hurry to progress as he began kissing Trey. Slowly, the pad of Cole's finger began to press against the puckered skin until the tip slipped inside. After several moments, Cole pressed in further.

"That okay?" Cole asked.

Trey was no stranger to playing with himself. A man didn't reach his age and not feel the need to explore his own body thoroughly. Unlike the attack, Cole's probing finger didn't elicit an ounce of fear or pain, and Trey found himself wanting more.

"Feels good," he moaned.

Cole's hips thrust up as he continued to saw in and out of Trey's ass, eventually adding another finger.

Trey licked at Cole's bristled chin as he began rubbing his erection against his lover's torso. "In me," he moaned, needing more.

Cole's fingers stilled inside of Trey. "I don't wanna push you too far this first time."

"You're not. I want it," Trey confessed.

Cole used his free hand to search out the bottle of lube once more. He dripped the cool liquid down the crack of Trey's ass and added a third finger.

"Condom?" Trey asked as he reached for the drawer beside the bed.

"I don't know," Cole moaned. "Look in the back."

Trey was searching the drawer when he came across a photograph. He blinked his eyes several times as he stared at his own image. "You have a picture of me?"

Cole removed his fingers and wiped them on the sheet before removing the photograph from Trey's grasp. He set the snapshot of Trey, sitting in the bleachers at one of the football games, on the table. "Sorry."

Cole didn't say anything else as he began searching the drawer. He finally came out with a foil package. "I knew I had one somewhere."

Trey pulled Cole down on top of him. His curiosity wouldn't let the subject of the picture go. "Did you take that picture?"

Cole stared down at him for several moments before shaking his head. "It's embarrassing."

Trey let out a snort. "Yeah, like I haven't told you embarrassing stuff about me. Spill," he said in a playful tone.

Cole sighed. "I stole it from the darkroom at school last year."

The idea of Cole doing something so out of character warmed Trey. He reached up and pulled Cole down for a kiss. He didn't need to ask why it was in the bedside drawer with the lube. As he swirled his tongue inside Cole's mouth, he pictured his lover jacking off to his image.

He blindly reached down and grasped Cole's hand with the condom in it. "Make love to me."

Still looking a little shame-faced, Cole sat back on his heels. "You're not mad?"

Trey shook his head and spread his legs further apart. "The only thing I'm mad about is that you had a picture, and I didn't."

Cole tore the foil packet with his teeth and started to roll the condom down his shaft. Trey stopped him. "Let me."

With a surprised expression, Cole removed his hands and reached for the bottle of lube. "It's all yours."

"Hopefully," Trey teased.

He took the opportunity to stroke the fat cock several times before rolling the thin latex to the base of Cole's erection. He couldn't stop a moan from erupting as Cole once again began to finger his hole.

With the condom in place, Trey reached lower and began to fondle Cole's low-hanging balls.

Cole chuckled and swatted Trey's hands away. "If you don't stop that, it'll be over before it begins."

Trey dutifully tucked his clasped hands under his head as Cole leaned forward, bracing himself over Trey on one arm. He knew this would be a big test for him. The thought of being held down by a much bigger body would've sent him into a panic only a few months previously, but surprisingly, he felt safe, not scared.

Without being asked, Trey shifted one of his legs to drape over Cole's shoulder. The heat in Cole's eyes intensified as he leaned further down for a kiss.

"You sure about this?" Cole asked as he touched the head of his cock to Trey's stretched hole.

Trey nodded and positioned his other leg on Cole's opposite shoulder. He closed his eyes as Cole's cockhead pushed past the outer ring of muscle. Trey held his breath, expecting Cole to ram inside. When he didn't, Trey opened his eyes and gazed up at his lover.

"You still with me?" Cole asked.

"Yes."

Cole eased his way in slowly, stopping frequently to allow Trey's body time to acclimate itself to the girth of its invader. At each interval, he'd wait for Trey's nod before proceeding.

By the time Cole was fully seated, the burn in Trey's ass had turned to pleasure. Trey swallowed a gasp as Cole seemed to drop his defences. The love Cole felt for Trey was so evident on his face, it took all Trey's control not to profess his love over and over and beg Cole to stay right where he was for the next sixty years.

"You okay?" Cole asked.

"Better than," Trey answered.

Cole pulled out slowly before gliding back in.

Trey released his hands from under his head and pulled Cole down on top of him. His legs started to slip from Cole's shoulders, but his lover caught them in the crooks of his arms and held Trey open.

The position was slightly awkward, but Trey needed to feel Cole as close as possible. His hamstrings may be screaming in the morning, but his heart was singing at the moment and that's what mattered to him.

He continued to accept Cole's deep kisses with fervour. The longer their tongues played with each other, the faster Cole's hips seemed to thrust in and out of him. Trey broke the kiss as he moaned in pleasure. "Faster."

He didn't quite know what he needed, but his balls were begging for release.

Still buried to the hilt, Cole leaned back and tucked a pillow under Trey's hips. Trey's legs were once again positioned over Cole's shoulders which allowed Trey plenty of room to touch his cock. *Oh, sweet heaven that feels good.*

"Get ready," Cole panted as he moved into yet another position. On his next thrust, Trey screamed as Cole's cock pressed against his prostate.

"Again, please," Trey begged as he took a firmer grip on his cock.

He didn't know how many times he felt the zing of electricity race through his body before his cock erupted, but it was unlike anything he'd ever experienced. At one point Trey was certain he was going to die from the sheer pleasure of Cole's cock in his ass.

As he struggled to breathe, he heard Cole's grunts in rapid succession. Trey managed to open his eyes in time to see his lover's climax envelop him. "Oh, that's beautiful," he whispered in a reverent tone.

Cole's body stiffened, as the veins in his neck stood out in stark relief.

He wasn't sure, but Trey thought Cole might be experiencing the same feeling he'd just recovered from. He pulled his lover down into his arms and slipped his legs from Cole's shoulders to wrap around his waist.

Cole gasped several times before he spoke. "Never been like that."

Trey smiled as he kissed Cole's sweaty temple. He was disappointed when Cole reached between them and pulled out.

"Hey, I liked you in there," he whined.

"I liked me in there too, but losing the condom in your ass would kinda defeat its purpose," Cole rasped.

Trey waited for Cole to dispose of the rubber before snuggling back up against him. "Do you think someday we can do it without a condom?"

"I'm counting on it. We need to wait a few more months for you to take another test though."

"Yeah. At least I can start dreaming about falling asleep with you still buried inside me."

Cole yawned. "Someday."

Trey heard Cole's light snores as his lover dropped off to sleep. He eased himself out of bed. Before he retreated to the restroom, he stared down at the man he loved. He knew in that moment that he'd absolutely made the right decision to make love. Trey couldn't imagine a more perfect man for him.

* * * *

"You need to eat something," Cole prodded.

Trey dutifully took another bite of his ham and cheese omelette. "It's good. I'm just nervous."

He couldn't stop thinking about getting back up on the witness stand. Would the judge clear the courtroom again? Trey had worried all night. On one hand, it would be nice not to tell his deepest secrets to a room full of strangers, but on the other, he also wouldn't have his friends to concentrate on. The previous day had been hard, but he knew it would soon get unbearable.

Cole's chair scraping across the floor got his attention. He took another bite of eggs as his lover's arm wrapped around him. "It's not too late to change your mind. All it'll take is one phone call, and I can take the day off."

Trey shook his head. They'd been over the same subject several times during the night. "Hopefully it'll be my last day. I can make it."

The omelette seemed to swell in his stomach. "I don't think I can eat any more."

"Will you at least take a banana or something with you?" Cole asked as he kissed Trey's jaw.

"Sure," Trey agreed. The fact that Cole seemed so worried about him made Trey feel special. He didn't regret the previous night in the least. He was glad he believed in his feelings enough to make love.

Trey took a drink of his orange juice before turning his head and closing his lips over Cole's. There was something special about the way Cole kissed him. It was like a boost of strength for him. Cole had always seemed so sure of himself, and when they were together, he passed some of that to Trey.

Breaking the kiss, Trey glanced at his watch. "You'd better get me over to Bobby's or we're both gonna be late."

Cole nodded but didn't immediately pull away. "I love you," Cole whispered.

Trey smiled. "I love you, too."

Cole kissed him once more before standing. He picked up Trey's plate and rinsed it in the sink, while Trey took a banana and an apple from the bowl on the island.

When Cole turned around, Trey held up the fruit with a big, cheesy grin. Cole chuckled and shook his head. "You ready then?"

"As much as I'll ever be," Trey replied and strode towards the door.

Once they were on route to Bobby's, Cole reached over and held Trey's hand. "You'll call me if you need me, right?"

Trey squeezed the hand in his. "I don't want to get you into trouble."

Cole pulled into the nearest parking lot and turned off the engine. He twisted in the seat to face Trey and gathered him in his arms for a kiss. "I don't think I care anymore. I mean, I love my job, but I love you more. If I can't have both, I'd rather have you."

"I want you to be able to have both, and I'll do everything I can to not jeopardise your career. If that means waiting a few hours before I talk to you, I can deal."

"You shouldn't have to wait a few hours. If you need me, call me on my cell. You got that?" he asked with a slight grin and shake of his finger.

"Yes, sir." Trey smiled and kissed him, slow and deep. "Now, get me to Bobby's."

Cole started the pickup and pulled back onto the main road. When they were a block away, Trey unfastened his seat belt and squatted down on the floorboards.

"What the hell are you doing?" Cole asked.

"You and I know there'll be photographers outside the gate. Just taking precautions."

Cole grunted and Trey watched as his lover's hands tightened on the steering wheel. Trey knew Cole understood the need, but didn't like it any more than he did. He reached out and touched Cole's leg. "Hopefully after I finish giving testimony, they'll forget about me, and we can start dating like regular folks."

Cole chuckled. "I'm not sure we'll ever be considered 'regular folks'."

The truck slowed and Cole hissed through his teeth. "You were right. The news crews seem to be camped out."

Cole pulled up to the guard station and rolled down his window. "I'm going to Bobby Quinn's. I've got a very special delivery."

Trey saw Cole gesture to the floorboard. The guard's face appeared in the open window, and Trey gave him a smile. "Hi, Jack."

Jack grinned. "Keep your head down. The natives are getting restless."

"Will do. Thanks."

* * * *

After a quick shower and change of clothes, Trey walked down the stairs to find Angelo, Bobby, Jules and Detective Torrance standing in the foyer. He stopped and shook his head. "Is there something going on that you're not telling me?"

All four men suddenly looked uncomfortable. Jules produced a newspaper and handed it to Trey. He was shocked by the picture of him being ushered from the courtroom, the red paint clearly visible on the back of his head. He didn't need to read the attached story. The headline said it all, *Local Gay Man Injured in Courtroom*.

"Wow. Guess this means I'm fully out of the closet," he tried to joke. He tossed the paper onto a table and squared his shoulders. "Let's go."

Moody opened the front door and gave the surroundings a quick study before motioning the others to follow. They climbed into Moody's four-door non-descript sedan with Trey sandwiched between Jules and Bobby.

"Why do I feel like I'm surrounded by bodyguards?" Trey asked.

Angelo glanced over his shoulder, his bright blue eyes revealing his worry. "Because you are. Word has it Carl Blakely and his flock are in town to protest the trial. Moody's taking you in the back way."

"Carl Blakely the self-proclaimed fag-hating Evangelist?"

"The very one. He's called his followers to protest outside the courthouse," Angelo continued.

"Protest? What the heck for?" Trey asked.

"According to an interview he did earlier this morning, he thinks Overton's actions were God's way of thinning the abominations he calls queers. Blakely thinks the city should give Overton a medal, not a trial." By the time he was finished, the vein in Angelo's neck had started to throb with anger.

"So it doesn't matter to Carl Blakely that Overton himself is a queer?"

"Blakely doesn't think William is gay. He thinks God worked through him to kill the men," Moody added.

Trey was stunned. He didn't even blink when Jack let them through the gate into the sea of cameramen. Something dawned on him. "Was the guy in the courtroom one of Blakely's?"

Moody met Trey's eyes in the rear view mirror. "Yeah. He was scoping out the trial to report back to Blakely. The whole paintball thing was his own idea, according to him."

For some reason, Blakely's presence seemed to galvanise Trey's determination to see Overton behind bars. Heck, he'd already been outted in the press so why not make a statement while doing it?

"I want you to take me in through the front, not the back," Trey informed Moody.

"No way," Angelo piped up.

Trey took a deep breath. "If I slink in through the back, Blakely and his followers will use it against me."

"And if you walk in through the front, you could very well be shot and not with a ball of paint," Moody grouched.

"I'm not trying to be some kind of martyr. But I've felt ashamed and guilty long enough. I want to walk into the courthouse with my head held high, because I've done nothing wrong."

Jules reached for Trey's hand and squeezed. "I'll walk in with you."

"So will I," Bobby chimed in as he held Trey's other hand.

"You're all three crazy," Angelo huffed. "But I'll be there to watch your backs."

Trey watched as Moody's gaze zeroed in on Angelo. He could've sworn he heard the man growl. "Let me make a call."

The detective picked up his cell phone and informed the policemen on duty that they'd be entering through the front. When he finished with the call, he shoved the phone back into his pocket. "I hope you know what the hell you're in for. According to the sergeant in charge, they've already called in reserves. I guess the place is a madhouse."

"That must mean there are people there who don't agree with what Blakely and his flock are doing. Good." Trey's thoughts wandered to Cole. How would Cole feel about the situation Trey was about to get himself into?

* * * *

Cole was almost to the high school when his phone rang. He picked it up from the seat beside him hoping to see Trey's name on the display. Zac's name surprised him. "Hey."

"Have you seen the paper?" Zac asked.

Cole's chest tightened. "No. It's probably still on the front walk. Why?"

"Trey made the front page."

"Shit!"

"You'd better stop and get one before you get here," Zac informed him.

"Why? Is there a problem at the school?"

"Just get one. I'll meet you out front."

Zac hung up and tapped the phone against his forehead. Well, if students or faculty wanted to make an issue out of Trey's ordeal, he'd make an issue with their intolerance. He pressed the button to call his secretary.

"I thought you might be calling," Jill answered.

"Schedule an emergency all-school assembly for nine. I want everyone there including the janitorial staff."

"Are you sure that's necessary?" Jill asked.

"I'm sure. Just do it, please."

"Consider it done."

Cole hung up as he pulled to the side of the road. He jumped out of his truck and dug change out of his pocket for the newspaper machine. Paper in hand, he got back into his truck.

He read the article with a lump firmly planted in his throat. It detailed some of Trey's testimony from the previous day as well as the attack on his lover in the courtroom. The article ended with questions as to whether the trial would be closed following the incident.

His gaze went back to the picture. Trey's bowed head as he fled the courthouse surrounded by his friends said it all. He knew he should also be in the picture. He should be the one with a protective arm around the man he loved.

Cole tossed the paper to the seat beside him and drove to the school. Just like he'd said he'd be, Zac was standing on the front steps.

Cole parked the pickup in his designated spot and jumped out, leaving the paper behind. "What's going on?" he asked as he joined Zac.

"The students have been talking about Trey all morning."

"Christ. I've already told Jill to set up an assembly for nine."

"Yeah, she just announced it over the intercom, but I wanted to talk to you first." Zac took a seat on the top step and motioned to the cement beside him.

Cole glanced around before joining Zac. "Give it to me."

"Let's just say you should be incredibly proud of your student body."

"What?" Cole was shocked.

"Yep. For the most part, everything I've overheard has been in Trey's defence. Of course there are a few grumbles, but that's to be expected in a school this size. Someone even made a big poster and mounted it outside your office with supporting messages. Most of the kids have been signing it. They even had to get a second piece of poster board from the art department for the overflow. They thought you might be willing to take it to Trey."

"Why me? Everyone knows how close the two of you are." Cole started to wonder if his secret was out.

"Because you're the principal. They look to you to make sure things get done on their behalf." Zac slapped Cole on the back and stood. "Course I don't know what you're gonna say in that assembly now, but I thought you might want to know before going in."

Zac disappeared inside before Cole could even thank him. He tried to gather himself before entering the school. He'd never in a million years expected to hear what Zac had told

him. He'd been so ready to scold them for making an issue of Trey's attack, that he hadn't even considered they might support their ex-teacher.

Cole knew it said a lot about the calibre of teacher Trey was. To earn the loyalty of your students was the best praise a teacher could get. As he entered the school, he wondered what the old-fashioned school board members would have to say.

When he came face to face with the poster outside his office, Cole realised he no longer cared what the school board had to say. He started reading some of the messages and couldn't keep himself from chuckling. There were a few brave souls who dared to not only cuss, but add their signature. *Give 'em hell, Mr. Huggins, Best Wishes, Joe Plank.*

After reading each and every message, Cole decided to leave the posters where they were in case others hadn't had the chance to sign. He walked into his office and was greeted by a smiling Jill.

She pushed a cardboard box towards him. "These are for Mr. Huggins. Parents and students have been dropping them off all morning."

Cole peered into the box. There had to have been at least a hundred envelopes. "All good wishes I hope. I'm not about to take a hate letter to him."

Jill shook her head. "Nope, no hate letters. I handled each and every letter myself. I'm sure I'd have been able to spot someone who was upset."

"Go ahead and cancel the assembly. I'll make a simple announcement of thanks. No sense in giving the school board any more fuel for the fire that'll probably ignite because of all this."

* * * *

Detective Torrance wove the car through the barricades that had been set up to keep the crowd under control. Trey's jaw dropped at the number of people screaming and holding signs. "Looks like there's a pretty healthy mix of haters and supporters," he commented as he read a sign that said, *The only justice for fags is death.*

Moody pulled to a stop and pocketed his keys. "You sure about this?"

Trey's eyes roamed the crowd. "I'm sure this is the way I want to go in, but I'm having doubts about you guys putting yourselves in danger for me."

Angelo was the first person to get out of the car, quickly followed by Moody. "Wait here," the detective said.

He watched as Moody put his phone to his ear and spoke briefly. In no time uniformed officers seemed to surround the detective's car. "Holy shit," Trey mumbled. He'd had no idea he'd be causing such a ruckus.

Beside him, Bobby started to chuckle. Jules leaned around Trey and gave his partner a narrow-eyed look. "What exactly do you find funny about this situation?"

Bobby shook his head and stopped laughing. "Nothing. Sorry. It's just the first time I've ever heard Trey cuss. Guess it struck me funny."

Trey hadn't even realised he'd done it. "I guess the old saying there's a time and a place for everything holds true."

He grinned and elbowed Bobby in the ribs. "Don't tell Cole, okay?"

"Promise."

Moody opened Bobby's door and gestured for them to get out. "Look straight ahead and don't get engaged in any of the bullshit that's going on."

Trey nodded and followed Bobby out of the car. As several more policemen surrounded them, they began making their way to the courthouse steps. Trey heard the word faggot enough to last a life time. He wondered if those people knew where they were. It was like screaming you hate cops in the middle of a police station.

As they neared the steps, the crowd parted, and Trey almost came face to face with Carl Blakely. He recognised the bigoted sonofabitch almost immediately from the news stories he'd seen on television in the past.

Blakely held a Bible in his hand and thrust it out in front of him as Trey neared. "Death shall be your reward for the perverted life you lead," Blakely shouted.

The religious zealot started to step towards Trey. Before the detective had a chance to move, Angelo stepped in front of Blakely and pushed him to the ground, the impact knocking the Bible from his hand.

Angelo spat on the ground beside a stunned Carl Blakely. "If anyone's going to hell it's you, motherfucker."

Blakely's entire body began to shake as his face turned a dark crimson. Evidently, Blakely wasn't used to being put in his place by a fag. "You'll pay for that," Blakely shouted.

Angelo snorted and glanced over his shoulder at Moody. "Can you have one of your friends get this garbage out of our way?"

Trey spotted the momentary flash of respect in Moody's eyes before he gestured for some of the officers to get Blakely to his feet and restrain him while Trey and the others passed.

By the time Trey made it into the courthouse and through security, he was shaking like a leaf. Never had he heard so much hate in his life. It was enough to make a person wonder about the society they all lived in. To preach hate of any kind under the guise of religion sickened him.

One of the guards inside spoke quietly to Moody for several moments while they waited for Angelo, Jules, and Bobby to get through security. Trey could tell by the expression on the detective's face that it wasn't good news. He stepped to an alcove and pulled out his phone.

"What's going on?" Angelo asked.

Trey shook his head. "I don't know, but whatever it is, it must be big."

"Maybe the judge has decided to close the court for the rest of the trial," Jules said as he came up to stand next to Trey.

He could see Moody slap his hand against the wall as he spoke harshly to whoever was on the other end of the phone. Trey sure hoped it wasn't his boss he was talking to like that, or the detective would most likely be busted down to traffic cop by the end of the day.

Moody ended the call and stuck the phone in his back pocket. It was a few moments before he turned around and gestured Trey over. *Uh oh.*

Trey stepped towards the detective in a cautious manner. "Something wrong?"

Moody braced his hand on the wall and wiped his face on his shirt sleeve. "William Overton's dead. They found him earlier in his cell."

Trey felt like he'd been punched in the stomach. "What? How?"

Moody shook his head. "Don't know. He was found with a knife sticking out of his throat."

Trey tried to let the implications of that statement sink in. If William was found alone in his cell it meant someone was able to get to him. "They think it was a guard, don't they?"

Moody nodded. "It gets worse. His stomach was slit open, similar to what he did to his victims."

Although Trey didn't have it in him to feel remorse over William Overton's death, he worried about the fallout from such a high profile death inside the jail. "So, what now?"

"We get you back to Bobby's. As you can imagine, the case is over, so hopefully the media will start leaving you alone."

"I hope so."

Trey couldn't help but to feel there was something Moody wasn't sharing with him. The man seemed too out of sorts about Overton's murder. He reached out and placed a hand on the detective's arm. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Moody answered as he moved his arm. Clearing his throat, Moody turned to the rest of the group. "Let's get you home. I've got some things I need to take care of."

Epilogue

Trey glanced around the poker table at his friends. It was a rare occasion when both Jules and Eric had the evening off, so another leaf had been added to accommodate their growing group.

He reached under the table and put his hand on Cole's thigh. It was amazing how well his partner got along with the rest of the group. They'd all decided to move their game permanently to Bobby's house, at least until Zac and Eric bought a bigger place.

Angelo threw his cards down and stood. "I'm out. Anyone want a beer?"

Several heads nodded in response. Trey's cards weren't really playable, so he folded as well. He'd been watching Angelo all evening and knew there was something bugging his friend. "I'll help you," he volunteered.

He gave Cole a quick kiss before following Angelo into the kitchen. "Something wrong?" Trey asked his friend.

Angelo lifted his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I don't know. I've had some weird shit going on lately. Guess it's just getting to me."

Trey leaned against the counter and crossed his arms. "Why, what's been happening?"

Angelo shrugged. "I don't know. It may sound crazy, but I'd almost swear someone's been watching me."

"You mean like a peeping Tom?"

"I don't think so. That brings to mind some lecherous creep who's trying to see me naked or something. No, this is more like during the day when I'm out and about. Although I'd swear I've heard someone outside my house, too." Angelo sighed and threw up his hands. "I'm probably just being paranoid."

"Doesn't sound like it to me. Why don't you call Moody?"

Angelo snorted. "Sure. I'll get right on that. I'm sure he has nothing better to do than put my paranoia at ease."

"Hey, I thought you were bringing back beer," Kent shouted.

"Be right there," Angelo called back. He opened the fridge and removed four bottles of beer and the bowl of limes he'd cut up earlier. "Did you want one?"

Trey nodded. "I'll get it."

Angelo moved out of the way and squeezed two of the limes into his Mexican beer. "So how're things going with Cole?" Angelo asked before licking the juice from his fingers.

Trey almost giggled. That's what life with Cole had reduced him to. Most days he felt more like a lovesick teenager than an unemployed teacher. "They're good. We've been talking about moving in together."

"No shit? That's fantastic."

"Yeah," Trey agreed.

"So what're you waiting on?" Angelo put the bowl of limes back into the fridge and turned to pick up the bottles. He handed one to Trey and carried the other three.

"Things to die down a little more. With the investigation into Overton's death still in the papers, I thought it would be best to wait awhile longer."

Angelo shook his head. "You've already given Overton more of your life than he ever deserved. Time for you to move on and do what makes you happy."

Funny how Angelo's words seemed to so closely match Cole's. "Yeah, that's what I hear."

Angelo grinned. "At least I'm in good company."

"The best."

Before they left the kitchen, Trey tapped Angelo's arm with one of the bottles he carried. "Do me a favour?"

"Sure."

"If you really feel someone's following you, call Moody," Trey advised.

"I'll think about it."

Trey gave his friend a supportive smile. "I'm here if you need to talk."

"I know. Thanks."

* * * *

Cole unlocked the driver's door, and Trey climbed in, scooting to the centre of the bench seat. Cole got in after him, and fastened his seat belt.

"It was nice seeing Eric lose a few hands," Trey chuckled.

"Luck of the cards," Cole answered. He didn't want to brag, but he knew he'd played his winning hands to perfection. Eric had been a good sport about it, even with the rest of the guys teasing him.

"Do you mind if I stay over again?" Trey asked as Cole pulled out of the gated community.

"You don't even need to ask. You know I'd prefer to have you with me every night." He'd talked until he was blue in the face, trying to convince Trey to move in with him. After talking to the union representative and seeing how the students and parents had reacted to Trey's attack, Cole wasn't worried about the school board any longer.

It bothered him that he'd probably never be able to take Trey to award banquets and stuff, but his private life was his own, and he'd be damned if he let anyone try and tell him otherwise.

"Angelo told me I was crazy to put off living my life because of anything remotely to do with Overton."

"I knew I liked that guy," Cole chuckled.

"If we did move in together, could it be at your place? I've been thinking about selling my house anyway, too many memories."

Cole wrapped his arms around Trey, pulling him even closer. "Are you telling me you'd like to move in?"

"Yeah, I think that's exactly what I'm telling you."

At a stop sign, Cole checked his rear view mirror before bending to steal a kiss from the man he loved. "I do believe you've just made me the happiest man in the world."

Trey laughed. "Yeah, I'm quite the catch. Who wouldn't want a scrawny, out-of-work teacher who's a disaster at growing things?"

"You're not a disaster. You just need to learn how to talk to them, and you'll find work in no time." Cole's hand moved to the bulge between Trey's legs. "And all your parts are the perfect size."

Trey moaned as Cole gave his lover's hardening cock a playful squeeze. "You've got that high privacy wall, right?" Trey asked as he unzipped his pants.

Cole grinned and wrapped his hand around the cock on display. Since making love the first time, Trey had almost completely come out of his shell as far as sex between them was concerned. His lover continually seemed to think up new positions and places he wanted to

try. Cole figured Trey was making up for lost time and was more than happy to accommodate his lover.

"Yeah, why, you got something special in mind? Wanna run around the backyard like a couple of flower nymphs?"

"Something like that." Trey gasped as Cole pressed his thumb against the sensitive underside of the exposed cock head.

He pulled into the drive and threw the truck into park before unfastening his seat belt and jumping out. He reached back in and managed to free Trey and scoot him to the edge of the seat with his legs dangling outside.

Cole swallowed Trey's cock down to the root. He paid special attention to rub his heavy five o'clock shadow against Trey's sensitive balls. He knew from experience the raw scrape and burn set his lover off.

"Gonna shoot," Trey warned.

Cole pulled his mouth from the head and continued milking Trey's cock with his hand as he travelled down to lick and suck on his lover's sac. He couldn't wait for the day he could safely swallow his seed.

He heard Trey's hands scramble for purchase on something a second before they fisted in Cole's hair. With the way Trey was pulling, it was a wonder his lover didn't leave him bald.

A warm splash of cum covered Cole's hand as it shot into the air and straight back down. Trey howled loud enough that Cole was sure the neighbours were going to call animal control.

Trey eventually released his hold on Cole's hair and slumped back in the seat. "You've killed me."

Cole chuckled. With his erection pushing painfully against the fly of his jeans, there was no way he was going to let his lover fall asleep on him. He tucked Trey back into his jeans and underwear and threw him over his shoulder.

"What the heck?" Trey questioned as Cole stalked around the side of the house to the gate.

"You promised me naked flower nymphs, and dammit, I'm gonna hold you to it."

Trey reached down and gave Cole's ass a hard slap, followed by a nice grope. "All you had to do was ask."

Cole shut the gate and grabbed the cloth from off the patio table. He carried Trey to one of his hidden garden spots and set his lover on his feet. He spread out the tablecloth and started stripping.

He noticed Trey standing with his arms crossed and a grin on his face. "What're you waiting for, get naked."

Trey shook his head. "You have to ask nicely."

Naked as the day he was born, Cole suddenly felt ashamed of himself. He'd never been so forceful with Trey. Even though his lover had continued with his counselling sessions, Cole should've known Trey wasn't ready for that kind of talk. He stepped forward and removed Trey's shirt. "Please come play with me?"

Trey reached out and cupped Cole's balls. "See, was that so hard?"

"No, but it's getting there," Cole laughed.

About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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