



High Ball: Win and Lose

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Chapter One

“God damned mother fucking snow,” Luzien grumbled, kicking at yet another crusted lump of gray ice on the shoulder of the road.

His steps were slower than he would have liked, and more careful, but they had to be, he consoled himself. He couldn’t take a chance on slipping and breaking a leg, or even worse, an arm.

Hell, the record company was going to be pissed enough that he’d left the relative safety of the so-called tour bus, but he’d been damned bored. They should be able to understand that. Luz had never dealt well with boredom; they shouldn’t be surprised to hear that hadn’t changed in the six months he’d been on the road.

It wouldn’t have been so bad if he’d been traveling with the rest of the band, but he wasn’t. Hadn’t since nearly three months earlier, which was when his long-term and supposedly serious relationship with Thom had ended in a sharp, hard burst of fury.

It still made him growl when he thought about that night. He thought it probably always would.

Of course the rest of the band had come down on Thom’s side. Thom was the one who got them all the free drugs... the one who set them up with more groupies than they could handle.

Luz was the one who actually wanted them to practice. To work. To not embarrass themselves and him when they played. And so what if they were only doing the small club circuit right now? A few good tours of the smaller venues would lead to more exposure, then higher sales... and if they were lucky, one day soon they’d maybe be opening for one of the big headliners.

Of course, that wasn’t going to happen now. Hell, Luz would be surprised if they managed to finish this tour as a band, rather than five guys who just happened to play music together, which he kind of thought they might already be, anyway.

He had no idea where the other bus had ended up. It had been in front of his when they’d driven into that fucking storm that had put him off the road with a swiftly dying battery. When the thankfully brief buckets of snow stopped, the other bus hadn’t been in sight. Two hours later, it still hadn’t come back, and Marco hadn’t been able to raise them on the radio. Then the guy had decided to head out on foot, which only led to more boredom for Luz.

He’d stuck it out on the dark, partially remodeled old school bus for another hour before he’d decided that even stomping along the winding road they shouldn’t have been on in the first place was better than just sitting there waiting to die from lack of stimulation.

Okay, it was cold. Bitterly cold, even with the heavy parka he'd thrown on over his leather. The wind slammed into him at random intervals, driving small bits of icy snow against his cheeks.

Long, pale hands slipped from the pockets of the parka to cover his ears, blocking the frigid air from the silver rings in his lobes that felt like tiny icicles piercing his flesh.

"God damned mother fucking snow," he groused again. "And what the fuck kind of place is this that there isn't a damned thing anywhere but rocks, trees, ice and more fucking snow! I swear, I'm never doing a winter tour up here again!"

His hands shoved deep into his pockets again once he started to lose feeling in the tips of his fingers. He almost wanted to just turn around, but when he looked back, he couldn't see the bus anywhere, which was strange because he didn't think he'd walked that far.

Then the wind started up again and this time there were big, puffy flakes mixed in. It was actually pretty. Like some old movie or something, Luz thought. Or one of those paintings he was supposed to be too cutting-edge to like.

It took a few minutes of still more walking for him to realize that it wasn't just the wind blowing old snow around. The drifting, shifting, floating flakes were new... and he really couldn't see more than a foot in front of him now, so going back to the bus? Really not an option.

Fuck, if this shit didn't let up soon, he'd need to find some sort of shelter. It was either that or they'd find him in the spring as a frozen Luz-cicle. That would be one hell of an end to a semi-promising career.

He ducked his head, glad he'd resisted the haircut the label had wanted him to have before the tour. Just because some of the bigger names in music were going short and scruffy, that didn't mean everyone should. It was all about being original, supposedly. So why did they want him to follow the crowd so much?

Of course, right then Luz was wishing there were a crowd to follow. At least then he wouldn't be so worried about getting lost in the damned blizzard he was walking in.

The second storm was pretty much a surprise. To Winston St. James, as well as the Weather Channel people, although he'd suspected the first squall wasn't the end of things. His left elbow had been aching something fierce all day.

Still, the sheer magnitude of the second storm was kind of wild, coming on top of the twelve inches from earlier that day.

“God, I could use twelve inches right about now,” he muttered, exaggerating just a bit; then he laughed at himself. “And that’s what I get for not even trying to keep Rob up here.” Not that the guy would have stayed without a whole hell of a lot of promises Win wasn’t sure he really wanted to make. Not to Rob, anyway.

Rob had been nice enough, and definitely fun in bed, but they hadn’t clicked well enough for anything long-term. Hell, even Win’s best friend Ty had noticed it enough to comment, eventually. As usual.

So, okay. He missed the sex. He even figured he kind of missed Rob, too, a little. But not enough.

That didn’t change the fact that he was stuck in his shop with a good two feet of snow outside. Hell, he was sure his car was nothing but a big, white lump out back by then.

“Great,” he muttered as he finished pulling the sterilized instruments from the autoclave. “Well, could be worse, I guess. At least the upstairs is free now that Rob’s gone.”

He chose to ignore the fact that Rob’s absence meant he was shorthanded. It was his slow season, anyway, so he would wait until spring to worry on it. As usual, there weren’t a whole lot of people who wanted to get half naked in the middle of winter for ink or piercings. Win couldn’t really blame them. Besides, it wasn’t exactly a hardship to spend his days—and sometimes, like now, his nights—in his shop. There wasn’t anything waiting for him at home, anyway; not since poor old Daisy had died back in the fall.

Damn, he still missed that dog. He’d inherited her from his mother a few years back, and while Daisy had liked him well enough, she’d pretty much just pined away for her original human.

Win figured she was probably happier now, off in whatever doggy heaven let her be with her beloved owner.

Still, the fact was, there was no one to miss him if he didn’t try to drive the three miles to the small house he’d inherited along with the dog.

And driving would be stupid. He knew that much. He’d have to be a fool or a tourist to risk it, knowing what he did about storms in this part of New York. By now there was probably a good inch of ice under the snow, and without the plows coming through, clearing the roads and spraying sand behind, there was just no way.

Didn’t much matter, he knew. There was a perfectly good bed upstairs. He’d tested it out many a time, with Rob and without. There was even a halfway decent TV and a DVD player up there, and that would keep him occupied until the power went out. If it did, this time.

The closing routine was simple enough; he'd gotten back into the habit of it in the six weeks Rob had been gone. He didn't forward the phone to his house, but only because the line was dead, which was going to freak the hell out of Ty, but there was no helping it. He'd looked outside between storms and seen the cable from telephone pole to shop disappearing under the snow. It would get fixed eventually, he was sure, and until then... well, Win had never been the sort to panic at keeping his own company. Tyler teased him about that sometimes, but Win kind of figured that was what best friends did. God knew he taunted Ty often enough about how whipped Grace had him, so yeah.

He got the instruments put away, chair backs raised, floors swept, the trash emptied and tied in bags by the back door. He'd take them out to the dumpster in the morning. Assuming he could get out the door, of course, which reminded him. He really needed to check the cupboards upstairs before there was actually zero chance of making it out, rather than the fifteen percent or so that currently existed.

He moved swiftly to the stairs, turning lights out as he went, then trotted up them and took a look inside the cupboards of the small kitchen. He pulled a face at the six cans of soup, one can of baked beans and what looked like at least twenty packages of ramen noodles. Well, he wouldn't starve to death, even if Rob hadn't had the most varied diet in the world.

"Christ," he sighed. "This is gonna suck if they don't get the roads cleared tomorrow." Even then, it would be a fight to get his car out to the road, but he was almost sure he could do it.

He moved into the bedroom that took up nearly half of the second floor, sighing again at the stripped mattress before getting the sheets from the closet in the bathroom.

He'd actually known the bed wasn't made. He'd been the one to pull and wash the linens after Rob had left in that huff. He hadn't been upstairs since, though, so he could forgive himself for not remembering.

A few minutes later, he was flinging himself down on the made bed while the space heater buzzed, working hard to make the room comfortable.

The remotes for the various electronics were right there on the bedside table, which was damned convenient, and he'd just turned the TV on when he heard it.

At first Win thought he was imagining things, but then the sound repeated and he frowned.

His second thought was that it was just a tree branch banging against the building in the wind, but this wasn't his house. There were no trees that close.

The only other option was that there was someone outside in the blowing snow, and it seemed so damned unlikely, except... the road was long and dangerous in this kind of

weather. It was possible that someone had had an accident or broken down and somehow found his shop. If that was the case, then...

Win jumped up with a curse, then dashed into the bathroom and started the shower so the hot water would have time to make it up from the heater in the basement. Then he moved carefully down the dark stairs and into the shop, flipping switches along the way.

He couldn't hear the banging anymore, which was definitely worrisome. It had to be at least fifteen below zero out there, and God only knew how long whoever it was had been exposed to it. It was entirely possible that they could have died by the front door in the few minutes it had taken Win to get there.

"Fuck a duck!" he yelped as he opened the door and got a face full of snow and bitter wind. Then "Fuck a duck!" again because there really was someone there and he or she didn't seem to be moving.

Chapter Two

“Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit,” Win chanted, even as he bent down and grabbed the figure by the shoulders of the heavy parka. He’d worry about frostbite later, once he knew if this stupid fucking idiot was alive or dead.

Male, he qualified a moment later, after he’d dragged the snow-crust lump inside and closed the door. Male moron. He could see that now, what with long, black hair falling back from a definitely masculine face. And what a face it was.

Jesus, the guy was paler than pale, but Win had a feeling that was mostly from the cold. Aside from that, though... man, he was almost pretty. Wide, full mouth and cheekbones to die for. Smooth, high forehead that showed just the barest beginning of small creases. They gave that face an almost thoughtful look, even passed out the way the man was.

The long eyelashes lying on that white, white skin and the strong, arched, brown brows said the black of the guy’s hair came from a bottle, and Win spent a moment wondering why his mystery visitor had bothered, but it really wasn’t any of his business.

The one thing that saved the guy from prettiness was the chiseled jaw with that stubborn chin. He was still the best looking thing Win had seen in ages, though, even with the scar that ran down from just above one ear, almost to the jaw line.

Then those lips parted in a moan and Win shook himself. “Okay, stop with the perving,” he ordered himself. “You know he’s not dead, so help him out instead of just staring. Now would be good.”

The first order of business was to get the guy out of his frozen-solid clothes and warmed up. Actually, no. The first thing was to get him upstairs where the heater was on and the shower was running. That would warm him up better than anything else. Or better than anything Win was going to suggest to some guy he didn’t even know, anyway, no matter how pretty he might be. The last thing he needed was some scared straight-boy running back into the snow in an effort to protect his so-called virtue.

“Come on, buddy,” Win murmured, slapping one pale cheek lightly. “Wake up for me, okay? Just enough that we can get you warm...”

Luz felt fuzzy. Fuzzy and cold.

No, make that fuzzy and colder than he’d ever even imagined being in his life, though it was his mind that was fuzzy, not his body. It was his body that was colder than cold.

Something—someone—was hitting his cheek and it felt like he might shatter at even that touch.

He shivered instead, somehow forcing his eyes open to see... no. There was no way he was seeing anything like that. He was still out in the storm and hallucinating. He'd heard that happened when hypothermia set in, so that must be it. Because there was no possible chance that he was looking at Thom.

Then he felt himself being shifted, pulled up a bit until he was sitting and he saw that he was right. He really wasn't looking at Thom, though the coloring was the same, what with the dark auburn hair and hazel eyes. The man's face was shaped differently, though, and a little bit older, which was a good thing because he was still pissed off at Thom, even after eleven weeks and a few days.

"Hello? Anyone home?" the guy said, and Luz nearly cried with relief as he realized that he really was inside... somewhere.

He didn't care where, either. It was enough that he wasn't still out in the God-awful weather. "Y-yeah," he tried saying, though his voice came out as more of a whisper. "God. Did you s-say s-something about w-w-warm?"

"I did," the man answered, "But we need to get you up off the floor, buddy. And there's stairs. But once we manage that, there's a warm shower and a bed with lots of blankets. Think you can make it?"

"H-hell, yeah," Luz stammered, teeth chattering away, suddenly sure he could do anything. Maybe. Later. "Just l-lead the w-way."

Luz hated feeling so weak, but he figured he should be glad just to be alive so he pushed the thought away. His body seemed to be moving just a little bit easier, now that the guy who'd basically saved him had pulled him up from the floor. The stairs were harder, but they managed.

He'd gotten lucky when he'd found this place, whatever it was, Luz knew. Even luckier for him, there had been someone there because the little bit he remembered of the first floor seemed more like a business than a home. What kind of business, he had no idea, but still.

And the guy helping him was being really nice about it. Like he pulled complete strangers in out of the cold every day. And maybe he did, Luz realized. With the fucking ridiculous weather up here, it was entirely possible.

"Oh, God," he groaned, the heat hitting him like a wall when the guy helped him into what was obviously his bedroom. "Oh my fucking God..." If he could have, he would have fallen to his knees and kissed the space heater.

Actually, he really could have fallen to his knees, but there was no guarantee he'd ever manage to get back up again, so he passed on the notion.

Win laughed, amazed by how up front his new guest was. Hell, he could read his unexpected visitor like a book.

“Yeah, it’s warmer up here. We should probably get you out of those clothes and into the shower, though. You could have frostbite. The best way to stop it from getting any worse is to warm you up slowly. Might keep you from getting pneumonia, too.” And it had nothing to do with wanting to see the fucking gorgeous guy naked, he told himself. Nothing at all.

Okay, maybe that was a part of it, Win admitted silently, because those dark gray eyes he’d barely noticed downstairs were peeking at him from behind long, black hair and the next words were... well. Making him think, anyway.

“Usually t-takes a little m-m-more than the offer of a shower and a p-pretty s-smile before I let a strange guy get me n-n-naked,” Win heard the guy saying, and the blush that rose to those pale cheeks must have actually hurt. “Sorry,” the poor frozen kid stammered. “Just c-c-cold...”

Win blinked, his hands stilling on cold, soaked jeans for just a moment before his head dropped back and he laughed. “Winston St. James,” he announced as he went back to work. “And you’re in my shop. Above it, if you want to get technical. So now I’m not a stranger anymore. Let’s get you out of these, uh... ready for the shower.” He offered a teasing wink, hoping he hadn’t gone too far.

A long, hard sigh left chapped, pale pink lips, even as those gray eyes looked grateful that Win wasn’t offended... and wasn’t throwing him back out into the snow. “Luzien Bascombe. C-call me L-l-luz.”

Win couldn’t help the small laugh that left him, though he didn’t let it keep him from steadily pulling still more wet fabric from deeply chilled skin.

“Oh, God,” the guy whispered, skin shuddering slightly, probably from the heat hitting it, Win figured.

“Yeah... warm is good, huh?”

Okay, and the freaky thing for Win was that this man—Mister so damned hot and even better the more naked he got—could have a name like Lose, even if he figured it was spelled differently. Probably with a ‘z’, going by how pretentious the long form sounded.

The truly funny part of it all, though, was... “My friends call me Win,” and didn’t the laugh that got in return just make him want to hear it again. Luz had a great laugh to go

with that great body. The guy was toned, but not bulky. Muscles long, lean... almost wiry, but with a touch more mass than that.

“Win and Luz, huh?” Luz chuckled, still shivering hard enough to have those perfect teeth chattering together. “W-weird. But cool.”

Win shook his head, even as he pushed Luz down on the bed and started on the still-icy laces of sodden combat boots. “What’s weird is you even making it here. It’s fucking evil out tonight, man. Guess it’s lucky for you I got stuck here, though. Not much else that’d be open for a mile or so, either way.”

He finally got the boots off and he tossed them aside, next to the pile of wet parka, leather jacket and t-shirt. The dripping jeans joined the rest a moment later and for some reason, Win wasn’t surprised that Luz apparently didn’t bother with underwear.

He did his best not to check out the guy’s cock. He really did. But it was an appendage, he justified as he took a long, hard look. Any appendage could get frostbite. Really.

Jesus, I’m a sick bastard, he told himself as he stood and pulled Luz to his feet. *Just because he’s fucking hot and said he likes my smile, it doesn’t mean he wants me. And even if he did, this isn’t the time.*

“Come on, Luz,” he finally said, forcing his mind from contemplating what time, exactly, would be right. “Let’s get you wet. Uh, get you into the shower, I mean. A bath would probably be better, but we don’t have one of those here, so the shower will have to do...” And God, could he just shut up? Please?

Even through the overwhelmingly strange sensation of his entire body being numb, Luz noticed Win’s runaway mouth. It sounded like the man was nervous, but he didn’t know why. Unless it was because Luz was naked.

And that must be it, he decided. Win was probably all freaked out that he’d just undressed a guy who’d basically said he had ‘a real purty mouth’. Christ, he probably thought Luz was going to jump him. If he’d been able to jump. Which he couldn’t. Hell, walking was proving to be enough of a challenge right then.

Luckily, he didn’t have to go far, because even with Win’s arm around his waist, more or less holding him up, Luz doubted he could have made it much farther than the ten or so feet to the bathroom.

He winced at the billowing steam, then held on to the sink for dear life while Win released him and adjusted the water until the vapor started to clear. “Th-thanks,” he muttered, thoroughly embarrassed by his own weakness, voice included.

“You’ll have to up the hot water slowly, okay?” Win offered, though Luz noticed the guy wasn’t looking at him, but rather at something beyond Luz’s shoulder.

“Raise your body temperature a little bit at a time. Otherwise, you could do permanent damage to yourself. And keep the pressure low, just like it is. I’ve got one of those big, industrial water heaters in the basement because of the shop, so the hot shouldn’t run out on you. Take your time, and I’ll heat up some soup or something when you get out.” And yeah, Win definitely looked uncomfortable.

Luz nodded slowly, worn out all the way down to his bones. “Y-yeah. Okay.” He took one step away from the sink and froze, trying his damndest not to move. He figured he’d been less than successful when he heard Win’s muttered “Damn”, though.

“S-sorry,” he mumbled. “Can you j-just put me in there? I’ll be f-f-fine.” He would, too, he figured, if he could just get fucking warm again.

He heard Win snort, even as he felt himself swaying like he was still out in the wind. “The fuck you will,” Win answered, and Luz could hear fabric hitting the bathroom floor.

Unlike Luz, Win wore boxers, which was almost a disappointment.

“You’ll keel over and crack your head open, and then where will we be?” Win added, and damn it, but he had a point.

Win wrapped one arm around Luz’s waist, shivering – apparently at the feel of his skin -- then helped him into the shower and the barely-warm water. “Don’t worry,” Win murmured, pulling him back against that warm, solid chest, “I won’t let you fall, Luz. But let me know if you think you need to sit down, okay?”

Luz nodded, all the while aware that he was going to stay right where he was until he either fell asleep or Win told him they were done. That big, solid body felt far too good pressed against him like that. Not just good, but right. Warm. Strong. Manly, too, which had always been Luz’s weakness. Witness the whole Thom fiasco.

“Feels good,” he said, only knowing he’d spoken out loud when he heard his own words echo from the tile walls. “Crap. Sorry. I... b-brain’s not working r-right, Win. S-sorry.”

Luz was cringing on the inside, just waiting for the moment of what he thought was stunned awareness to turn into a smack down of some kind. He knew it was coming, after all, because regardless of not being outside freezing to death, Luz just didn’t have the kind of luck that would lead to anything other than pain right then.

So he was waiting for it. Waiting for the shocked understanding to become violence or even just shouts and names he didn’t much care for.

Then Win took a breath and Luz could feel it along his spine... and there were hands reaching.

“It’s okay, Luz,” he heard, and Win was leaning against his back harder as one big hand reached around and twitched the hot water knob just a bit higher. Then Win grabbed the bar of soap and Luz could actually hear it as Win lathered up his hands. “I’m gonna give you a wash, okay? It’ll help your circulation.”

Like he was going to say no to that when Win was so tight against his back. Hell, he could almost feel the guy’s chest hairs against his spine, only the lingering numbness blocking the sensation. Luz nodded anyway, just to make it clear that he didn’t mind. At all. And God, those hands felt... well, they’d feel better later, he hoped. When he could really feel.

The lack of true sensation didn’t stop Luz from moaning softly when Win’s strong, warm hands slid slickly over his stomach. It didn’t do a single thing to keep him from breathing faster as he watched that olive skin slip and slide on his own much paler flesh. “Th-that’s good,” he mumbled, pressing back and hoping Win would chalk it up to exhaustion.

“Yeah,” Win whispered against his ear, those hands returning to stroke his deeply chilled skin after bumping the hot water up again. “Just relax. I’ll take care of you, Luz. Relax.”

Luz felt himself frowning, but even as he opened his mouth to ask why Win was using that obviously comforting tone, he found out.

It started in his fingers and toes first, the sensation of pins and needles pricking at his cold-deadened flesh. Then it spread, slowly but surely, until he wanted to scream. And all the while, Win was right there, holding him up, murmuring to him, though Luz couldn’t really hear the words through his own grunts and groans. It wasn’t even that it was painful, exactly, but it was all over his body at once and the annoyance factor alone had him wanting to slap himself everywhere. And still there were those big, warm hands on his skin, somehow soothing him.

“God,” Luz groaned, the prickling feeling going past annoying and directly into the realms of maddening, “You keep that up, Win, and you are so getting laid...” And clearly he was more wrecked than he’d thought because once again, he’d said that out loud. “Uh...” He swallowed hard.

The soft, low chuckle Win released surprised him, though not as much as the thick shaft that was introducing itself to his ass in passing.

“Guess I won’t be stopping any time soon, then,” Win answered him, what sounded like a promise right there in that smooth voice. At least, Luz hoped it was a promise because there was just something about this man, this Winston St. James. And damned if he didn’t want to find out what it was, all of a sudden.

Chapter Three

The first thing Luz noticed when he struggled to wakefulness was that he was blessedly warm. He chalked it up to the trauma of experiencing an Upstate New York winter—up close and personal—that it actually took him a moment of reveling in the sensation to notice why. Even then, he couldn't decide whether it bothered him or not.

It was unusual, yes, because he didn't generally wake up with a big, muscled body wrapped around his own leaner form. Not even when he'd still been seeing Thom. Or fucking Thom, to be more accurate, he thought, bitter for just a moment before pushing it away.

It was nice, he decided, eyes still closed while he pushed back into the man-sized furnace pressed against him.

Win was nice. A good guy. Obviously. He had to be, what with the way Win had taken Luz in and looked after him. And God, had he offered Win sex?

Well, yeah. And apparently Win hadn't minded because there Luz was, warm and comfortable in Win's bed and not beaten to a pulp. He wasn't out in the snow, either, which was pretty much just as good. Maybe even better, what with the cold and wet and just plain... nasty.

So he'd offered and Win had seemed to be okay with it at the time, but that had been hours ago. What if things had changed since? It was possible, Luz figured, because people were fucking changeable as the wind, and the wind changed pretty damned quickly. Especially in Upstate New York. He remembered that much from his so enjoyable little stroll the day before.

Luz sighed softly, wondering if he could somehow shift himself from Win's hold enough to get out of the bed and maybe find his clothes without waking the guy up. At least then he'd be ready to run if he needed to.

"Hey," Luz heard, and if he'd been any more rested he would have jumped out of his skin.

Win was grinning against Luz's hair, just waiting to see what Luz would do now that he was finally out of his very temporary coma. Win had been awake himself for close to an hour, he figured, but he'd been enjoying the sensation of just holding someone for a change. He wasn't sure of whether Luz was going to freak out on him now or not, though. They were pretty much complete strangers, even with showering together, then sleeping naked in the same bed.

“Morning,” he said quietly, chuckling when the younger man jumped just a bit. “How you feeling, Luz? Warm enough, or do we need another blanket?”

Luz shook a little against him, but then seemed to deliberately relax into Win’s hold. “I feel good. You feel good. Warm. You... you’re a good enough blanket for me.”

Well, well. Win could actually feel Luz blushing, and wasn’t that just too cool? “Good,” he answered easily, “Because you feel pretty damned fine to me, too.” Of course, Win figured Luz was already feeling the proof of that, right there against his spine. Win’s arms loosened, hands sliding freely over skin that was darker than it had been before, but still pretty damned pale. “Yeah, Luz,” he added, pressing harder against the guy’s back, “Like the way you feel, all right.”

He liked the way Luz pushed back against him even more, though. Like he craved Win’s heat. Needed it, even. It was... God. Good didn’t even begin to describe it.

Win felt the blush growing on Luz’s skin like a soft burn, that long body becoming warmer still. “You, uh... you want to feel more, Win?” Luz murmured, and God knew how the man could sound so uncertain, but Win wasn’t going to leave Luz in any doubt about what he wanted. Not even a little bit.

The arm under Luz’s body slid up and Win let his palm cover one tight little nipple, even as his other hand roamed willfully down Luz’s side. He hummed softly at Luz’s gasp when he found one slightly knobby knee and lifted it, making room for his thigh right there. Win shifted his leg a little higher, only stopping when he felt tissue-thin skin covering already tight balls against his lightly haired thigh.

“Oh, I sure do want to feel more of you, Luz. But this’ll do for a start.” Win chuckled when Luz moaned again; then he let his hands wander more, one stroking the long, black hair away from Luz’s neck while the other trailed lazy circles around that small, budded nipple. “Mmmm... you like that, huh?” he mumbled, lips and teeth moving lightly at the top of one pale shoulder, nuzzling, nipping. His hips rocked slowly, cock painting small streaks of wetness along Luz’s back.

The long, drawn out groan he received as answer to both words and actions was more than enough of a reply, Win decided. Flattering, too. It was good to know Luz was so into what they were doing that he’d become speechless. That wasn’t stopping that long, pale body from pushing back against him, then forward into his hands, though, and that was even better.

He almost didn’t notice it when Luz’s hand dropped, but he felt the way that skin got hotter, felt the increased rocking. Then he felt that long-fingered hand brush his knee as Luz shifted on his thigh and Win caught on. “Oh, good idea,” he mumbled, his own hand abandoning Luz’s nipple to slip down and wrap around Luz’s cock, fingers tangling as they worked together, Luz just riding his thigh like there was no tomorrow.

Win seriously thought he might purr. Or at least do that thing Rob had always said sounded like one. Because, Jesus. Luz might be wiry, but his cock felt fucking amazing in Win's hand. Long and thin and hard enough to pound nails, and fuck if Win didn't want to be touching it when Luz came. Which would be sooner rather than later, if Win had his way.

And he would, he thought with another small laugh, his thigh pressing harder and higher, pushing forward and back, just working Luz's sac the same way his hand was working that still swelling flesh. "Come on, Luz... come on. You know you want to..."

"Yeah," Luz grunted, those hips shifting, obviously working for every possible bit of sensation. "Yeah, Win... you gonna, too? Come on. Come all over me 'til I'm sticky and smell like you. Shoot all over me, Win. Want to f-feel you soaking into my skin."

Lord... just Lord. "Hell, baby," Win groaned back, moving faster now, harder, "You couldn't stop me if you tried. Fuck. Now, Luz. Now." His hand kept working Luz's cock while the other pulled that knee higher, letting his thigh move more freely. His sac drew up, high and tight and harder than he could ever remember, even as his shaft pulsed, sliding in his own pre-come on the pale skin. "Now, baby," he demanded, just pulling and tugging, wrist twisting as he tried to drag the orgasm from Luz by sheer force of will. "Fuck!"

Lord... Lord yeah, that was it. Nothing like feeling that long, thin cock swelling and spurting in his hand, spilling what felt like a flood of viscous seed onto skin and sheets. It was almost enough to have Win ignoring his own orgasm, but not quite. His hips shifted, thigh still high and hard under those emptying balls, a sharp cry pushing from his lips and into Luz's hair as his own eyes slammed shut.

He ground himself roughly against Luz, cock painting thick streaks as he shuddered and shook, exploding wildly, tension releasing in stuttered breaths and nearly convulsive jerks.

Win was still breathing roughly when he managed to loosen his hold on Luz's prick. "God," he whispered, rubbing his come-slicked hand over Luz's stomach, not quite ready to let all that heat and soft skin and surprising strength go.

He'd have to eventually, he knew, because they'd need to shower again and get some food, but... not just yet. "God," he mumbled again.

"Jesus... fucking... Christ!" Luz finally moaned, shaky breaths leaving his lips as Win felt him slowly relax. "That... you... fuck, Win."

"Later," Win groaned, still working on recovering his own breath. His hands slowed on Luz's skin until he finally just pulled the guy back against him even more tightly. "Shit. Just might fucking kill me to be in you, baby. But what the hell. It'll be an awesome way to go." He wasn't even kidding. Much.

Win felt Luz's nod, more than felt it. Mostly because he was still reeling on the inside. So much fucking heat. So much need. And not all of it his own, either. Then there were long, elegant fingers twining with his own against Luz's flat belly and his lover – Jesus, he had a lover, because with the weather, Luz wasn't going anywhere soon – his new lover was speaking.

“Not sure either one of us is likely to survive,” Luz said, sounding serious as all Hell, “but I'm willing to chance it if you are, because that was... Jesus, Win. That was crazy-good, y'know?”

Win found himself grinning then, but he couldn't help it. There was just something so fucking genuine about Luz. No games, no lines. Just ‘yeah, I want to and let's make it good’. It was... fucking charming was what it was, Win thought, rolling his eyes at himself.

“Yeah,” he finally answered, breathing in the scent of sweat and come and man. “But I'm thinking we should maybe eat something first. And shower, just so we don't stick together too bad.”

Win really did love Luz's laugh. Especially when he could feel it, what with that dyed-black head dropping back to rest against his shoulder. “Sounds like a plan,” Luz agreed, “But can we just rest for a few minutes? It's been a really busy couple of days.”

True enough, Win figured... and likely to get even busier soon.

Chapter Four

The snow had finally stopped while they were in the shower, though Luz didn't notice that until much later. He didn't even really notice it when they were back in the small bedroom, a towel around his waist, though there wasn't one around Win's. Mostly because it would have kept Win's thick cock from being nearly down his throat, Luz thought with a purely internal grin.

Still, it had been unavoidable, after the way Win had just had at him earlier with that strong thigh. Luz couldn't blame himself for wanting to see the cock that had nearly bored a hole in his spine, could he? And once he'd seen it – touched it, held it, even fondled it in the shower, for fuck's sake – he also couldn't blame himself for wanting a taste.

Fortunately, Win didn't seem to mind, although the guy seemed to be just a little unsteady on his feet, Luz told himself with a good bit of smugness. Hell, Win looked like he was staying upright through sheer force of will, and Luz would know. He'd been staring up at that pleasure-wracked face for a good five minutes while he teased and tormented Win's prick, his lips wrapped tight around the girth each time he slid down nearly to the base then pulled up to suck hard at the rose-tipped head.

His tongue moved in fast, slick circles, dipping lightly into the tiny slit, and every time Win's hand tightened in his hair, Luz moaned around the flesh between his lips. Sometimes he just moaned anyway, though, because every time he did, Win gasped, groaned, babbled.

"God... fuck, Luz. Yeah... just like that, baby." The words came again, not the same but a variation on a theme, and Luz thought he could get used to that tone of Win's. Really used to it, and far too easily.

"Lord..." Win moaned out, gasping, "Just... Lord."

Yes, Luz thought, head bobbing back and forth, pulling that thick cock deep. Win wasn't overly long—maybe an inch or so more than average—but damn, the man was thick.

Thick and hot. Fragrant, too, because Luz got himself a good nose full of musky-male-bitter-sweet spice every time he took Win in to the root. And damn, he was loving it himself. The sense of power alone was enough to have him humming around the fat head in the back of his throat every time Win gasped and bucked.

Win groaned and Luz pushed another small sound around Win's tip, tongue just laving and pressing every chance he got. He was causing those moans and gasps. And damn, for whatever reason, he loved it with this guy. Maybe because Win was obviously just giving in to the sensations. Not trying to use the situation as leverage.

His lips tightened, pulling back again, sucking roughly at Win's heated flesh, one hand leaving a hip to push up between Win's thighs. Luz moved forward, nearly swallowing that thick cock as he palmed Win's heavy balls, fingers dipping beyond to press teasingly at the tight hole past the thin strip of skin there.

"Fuck!" Win yelped for him. Those strong legs also spread, broadening Win's stance and making room for Luz's long digits to move more freely. "Fuck, Luz, just... yeah..." Thicker fingers tightened in Luz's wet hair, holding his head still.

Win's hips moved quickly, nearly slamming in and out of his mouth, and Luz loved it. Not as much as he loved the way Win was pressing back against his fingertips, clearly wanting him to do something other than tease.

"Come on, Luz... come on, baby. Want it," Luz heard Win groan. "Do it for me..." Then Win's head was falling back and Luz couldn't do anything but press one finger slowly, deeply into Win's tight little shower-damp hole. "Yeah..."

Luz nearly chuckled, but he was far too busy doing everything he could to drive Win crazy to take the time. Instead, he tightened his mouth again, making Win work for it while his finger crooked inside the man's hot-as-sin ass, searching for... yeah, that.

His lips curved just a bit at the edges as Win lost all sense of rhythm, bucking back and forth in spasms while Luz pressed and rubbed at the small nodule inside, Win's sac becoming hard and high and tense, just like that.

"Jesus. Fuck. Fuck, Luz. Gonna... God, gonna... right now. Better... if you don't want..."

He knew what Win was trying to say. Of course he did. Hell, he'd had a good number of blowjobs in his life and there was only one way to take that strained, tight tone. It was a warning, and Luz knew it. He even appreciated it. But he'd be damned if he wasn't going to see this through, though it took him a good few moments to reach that decision.

He took Win in deep again, his throat opening around the bulbous tip and he reveled in the near-wail Win released when Luz pulled his finger completely from the man's tight hole, only to slam it back in, hard and fast and aimed directly at the little nub he'd found earlier.

Then there were two big, strong hands in his hair, holding his head still as Win fucked his lips, his throat, the hot shaft growing harder, thicker for a moment before pulsing, throbbing, firing wild, ball-emptying streams of thick come deep into Luz's waiting mouth.

For the first time in his life, Luz swallowed come, and it wasn't as difficult as he'd expected. He just let his throat stay open, taking each fast, hard shot, then pulled back a little to catch the rest on his tongue.

Win tasted pretty much just like he smelled. Musk and man, sweet and bitter... with just a little hint of something Luz couldn't define. He was pretty sure that was just Win, though.

He let himself slow down, suction growing more gentle as his finger in Win's ass slowed, too, just barely touching the slightly spongy nub inside the man. One more long, slow bob of his head when Win let go of his hair, and Luz pulled back completely, looking up at Win's stunned, lax face.

"You taste good," he whispered, still rubbing lightly at Win's gland, cheek moving slowly against the softening shaft and wondering whether the guy had lube somewhere around. And condoms. Because he'd been willing to take a chance by sucking Win off without one, but fucking was a whole other story.

"Fuck," Win muttered, and Luz was glad to notice that Win's voice was all breathy and still fucking stunned. "You feel good, Luz. Jesus."

Luz nearly laughed when Win swayed, something inside him feeling unaccountably proud of his effect on the man.

"Fuck," Win said again, sounding shaky and lost. "I think I need to lie down."

Luz chuckled, reluctantly pulling his hand away from Win's body. He didn't even bother to try hiding his disappointed sigh as his finger left tight-hot-soft, though he figured the laugh covered it. "I'll take that as a compliment, then."

Win grinned up at him, then fell back onto the bed, those long legs splaying temptingly. "Jesus," he added, and Luz nearly laughed again, just from the sincerity of the words. "If you don't know you suck like a fucking dream, then you've been blowing the wrong guys, baby."

God, he loved it when Win called him baby, which was surprising because Luz had never really been one for pet names. Especially when they were so... he didn't know what. But maybe it was the way Win said it, he realized. Like it was because Win liked him, rather than was trying to make Luz... less. Yeah, that had to be it, Luz decided with a smile.

"So," Win said, breaking into his thoughts in a way that made it more than clear that Win hadn't noticed Luz's moment of thought. "You planning on coming up here and doing something with that pretty cock of yours? Because I'm thinking there's no point in wasting a hard-on like that one. It would be a fucking shame if we did." Then Win's eyebrows were wagging and Luz couldn't manage to keep from throwing himself onto the bed.

“Um, you, uh... I mean, we need... stuff.” God, could he sound any more like a huge, geeky virgin, Luz wondered. No, he doubted it. But he wasn’t a virgin, damn it. It was just... Hell, he didn’t know what, but it was Win.

And Win was grinning at Luz, just so sure in his skin. Like he didn’t have a single doubt, though about what, Luz had no clue.

“In there,” he heard, Win’s nod at the bedside table making the words clearer. “Lube. Condoms, too. At least, I doubt anyone broke in and stole them while I wasn’t looking.”

Luz laughed, shaking his head and feeling suddenly easier himself.

Regardless of his earlier thoughts, Luz had been pretty sure Win would be the one doing the fucking while he was the undoubtedly happy recipient of said activity. But the guy’s words seemed to imply the opposite, and while Luz was a little bit surprised, he for damned sure wasn’t going to say anything to make Win change his mind. That being so, he simply swallowed down the small frisson of nervousness and leaned over, opening the drawer.

He laughed again, loudly, when he looked inside, anxiety lost to amusement. “Jesus, Win. Were you planning on shooting a porno in here? Because this is like... a truly obscene collection.” And it was, too. There had to be at least six different kinds of lube—both flavored and not—plus what looked like a few dozen condoms in there.

That didn’t stop him from choosing a tube at random and grabbing a handful of the foil-wrapped packets. “Boy scout?”

Win was blushing. He knew he was blushing. And he hated blushing. Especially right then. Of course, there really wasn’t anything he could do about it, so he just shrugged and bent one knee, rumbling softly at Luz’s indrawn hiss of a breath. “Only in the sense of always being prepared,” he answered, then shook his head. “My last assistant lived up here. Rob and I, we sort of got... involved, a little. That stuff is left from before he took off, okay? He liked trying out new things.”

And that was all Win wanted to say on the subject, so he let his knee fall to the side, offering a better view of cock, sac, and the shadowed cleft hiding the hole he was almost completely sure Luz wanted to know better. “So what do you say, baby? Want to fuck me?”

He smirked just a bit at Luz’s nearly silent moan. “I should probably warn you,” Win went on. “It’s been a long time since I’ve had anything but your finger in there. I’m probably gonna be real tight, so if you don’t...”

And just like that, Luz had the lube open, which had pretty much been the point of his words, Win admitted to himself, though they'd been true.

Two slick fingers roamed around Win's hole, even as Luz leaned in, pressing his lips slowly and deeply to Win's own, that hot tongue sliding almost delicately against the seam of his closed mouth.

Win opened his lips, pulling Luz's tongue deep into his mouth just as one long digit breached his hole. The kiss, simple as it was, got deeper, more complex, and Win didn't mind in the slightest. Hell, it was...

Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck. Good. Luz's finger felt fucking amazing with the slickness. Even better than it had felt mostly dry when Win's cock had been deep in the mouth against his own. He could taste himself there, and that was only making him hotter, more desperate.

He truly didn't know when he'd decided that having Luz fuck him was something he wanted. Hell, he'd had every intention of riding that tightly muscled little ass until he exploded inside it... right up until he'd come down Luz's throat and realized Luz was still hard.

Still, it didn't much matter, Win decided. He would bury himself in that lean body soon enough. But first... well, first Win was going to find out whether Luz was as good with his cock as he was with his mouth. Win might not catch very often, but it wasn't as though he minded it every now and again. "Another," he grunted, pressing down onto the finger inside him and deliberately squeezing around it. "Let me have two, baby."

God. It was like Luz had been waiting for just those words because a second finger joined the first, bringing its own supply of slick-wet-cool, though the cool swiftly faded. "Oh, yeah. Just... just like that, Luz... God, want more, baby."

"Y-you got it, Win," Luz stammered, letting the two fingers push deep, stretching, sliding, twisting inside until Win thought he might scream.

Win gasped; he couldn't help it. Luz's fingers felt so fucking good and they seemed to have some sort of talent for finding Win's prostate because there it was, and this was the second time Luz had zeroed in on it in less than three seconds.

"Yeah," Win groaned, his other leg bending and opening wide, his hands grasping behind his own knees to demand more contact, more depth. "Yeah, Luz... Fuck, baby, just like that, okay...?" Dear God, just like that. Please. Because while Win had never been a monk, he'd never felt anything like this, either. Nothing like Luz touching him.

"Y-yeah..." he heard Luz stammer, but those fingers were still working at him, so a shaky voice? Just fine, as far as Win was concerned. Then "God, you're tight, Win. Can't believe my c-cock is gonna fit."

Oh... oh, yeah. That was a good tone. Like Luz was wanting even more than Win had thought. Like Luz was maybe surprised by how much, too.

“It will. Now, come on, Luz. Come on, baby,” because damn, the fingers were good, but that long, thin cock would feel even better, and while Win didn’t mind taking his time, most days, this wasn’t one of those days. They could take it slowly and explore later. “Come on, Luz. Now.”

He actually felt those long fingers shudder, Luz was suddenly shaking so hard.

“Gonna try another, okay?” Luz said, voice rough to Win’s ears as that soft, pink mouth found the side of Win’s neck and latched on gently. “I... God, I’ll last like a minute if I try to... one more, okay?”

Win groaned in answer, rocking with the effort to pull Luz’s fantastic fingers deeper. He could feel sweat beading on his brow, could feel his cock rising slowly from the way Luz was nibbling at his neck, as well as the fingers still working his gland. “F-fuck... yes, baby. Give me one more... Stretch me good, Luz. Fuck, with as long as you are, you’re gonna be so deep...” He almost couldn’t wait.

The third finger took a bit more effort, but Luz didn’t stop, not even when Win gasped and arched, a sound very much like a whimper leaving those lips. He just bit a little harder at Win’s neck and twisted his wrist, working the first two digits apart, opening the tight hole just enough that when he pushed again with three, they slid right in.

Win tensed a little and that hand stilled almost completely, then Luz was moving his lips up over Win’s jaw and dipping his tongue into Win’s open mouth and even the small discomfort fell away as sheer sensual pleasure swarmed through Win’s body.

Fuck, Luz could for damned sure kiss. Win had already known that, but the reminder didn’t hurt. Neither did his ass, Win thought with a purely internal grin. In fact, Luz seemed to know exactly what he was doing, which was a little bit confusing considering how tentative the he’d seemed once they’d gotten past the first finger.

Of course, maybe Luz didn’t top much. Win could understand that because he didn’t bottom often, himself. Hell, it had been... fuck. A year and a half since the last time he’d been fucked, as opposed to being the one doing the fucking. And with as fucking hot as Luz’s ass looked, Win could understand other guys wanting to be on him and in him more often than not. Win was planning on getting in there himself, soon enough, and making Luz forget everyone else who’d ever so much as touched him. Soon... but not right then.

“Fuck!” he gasped, wrenching his mouth away from Luz’s demanding kiss, “Fuck! Come on, baby... that’s... Jesus, that’s enough. Get the fucking condom on and get in me, already!” And God help him, he was begging. Begging to be fucked. Christ.

Then he saw the look on Luz's face and he nearly came right then because Luz looked... Fuck, he looked like he'd just won the fucking lottery, even though he was... shaking his head? What the fuck?

Luz was breathing too hard and fast. He could tell by the way small sparks were dancing in front of his eyes. He was too damned excited and he knew it. If he did what Win was asking—or demanding, more like—forget about the minute he'd mentioned before. He'd come in half a second. God, he'd almost come just from kissing Win while his fingers were up that tighter than tight ass.

“O-one more,” he insisted, biting his lip again to stave off some of the excitement racing through him. “I... God, I don't want to hurt you, okay? And you're... fuck, Win, you're really tight.” He didn't even wait for Win to reply; he just pushed his pinky finger in with the others, moaning softly when Win's body arched into and then away from the pressure, opening so... well, not easily, exactly, but without more than a reasonable amount of effort. Fuck, Luz almost thought he could shove his whole hand up there. Almost wanted to, in fact.

Well, not really, he admitted silently, because the last thing he wanted to do was hurt Win, and the one time Thom had tried to do that to him, it had hurt like nothing he'd ever known before. He'd bled for three days afterward, and that hand had never even made it all the way inside him. Which was not what he wanted to be thinking about, though it had solved his little hair-trigger problem pretty handily.

“O-okay,” he breathed, eyes meeting Win's wide, hot stare. “Okay, Win. I... yeah.” And God, the way Win bit his lip had Luz hotter. Again.

He sat up then, balancing somehow as he remained hunched over Win's shifting form, and when his free hand sought and found foil, he lifted one small packet to his mouth. His teeth tore into the edge of the wrapper, freeing the latex, and he carefully rolled it over his already throbbing prick with a small groan. “God, Win,” he whispered, “I can't believe... I mean, I... fuck. I'll try to make it good, okay?”

Win blinked, then Luz felt that strong body rocking up, the skin of Win's ass just brushing his cock. “It's already good, Luz. Let's make it even better, huh?” Then there was a long, drawn out moan and Win spoke again, the words destroying whatever bizarre reluctance had possessed Luz. “Fuck. Do it, baby. No more stretching. Just get that pretty fucking cock inside me, okay? Now!”

Luz moaned again and pulled his hand slowly away from Win's loosened hole, then moved, hands coming to rest on the mattress at either side of Win's body, those held knees hovering over his elbows. “Okay... okay, Win,” he mumbled, shifting and flexing until he felt his rubber-clad tip perched right there at Win's hole.

“God... okay. Gonna try to...” His hips pressed forward and Luz took one shaky breath, holding it as he pushed, relaxed; pushed, relaxed... and when his head finally slipped inside, he released it as a sharp, short cry that Win echoed.

Oh. Oh, it was. Fuck, it was too much. Too fucking good. So damned good, Luz seriously wondered whether he was even going to last long enough for one stroke, he was already so close.

Win was so fucking tight and hot around him, that strong body all curled and open and wanting him. It was like a dream, but also like a fucking nightmare because Luz just knew he was going to embarrass himself and leave Win wanting and disappointed and... and then Win was somehow rocking up onto his cock, and Luz stopped worrying.

“Okay?” he mumbled, relief singing through his veins when those needing, wanton eyes closed, the loss of that gaze letting him settle, deep in his bones. Letting him settle deep in Win, too, because as Win’s body relaxed, Luz felt himself slipping deeper, deeper.

He felt Win shuddering beneath him and closed his own eyes as he shored up against that tight ass, his balls resting on hot, slightly damp skin.

“I’m good,” he heard Win grunt, and thank God the meaning of the words was echoed in Win’s tone. Then “Move, Luz,” and there were legs over his shoulders. And “faster,” a few moments later, when he’d given in to the earlier demand.

God... if Win wanted faster, he was for damned sure going to get it, Luz thought with a shaky grin. He was going to get harder, too. Just as a bonus.

His body moved, snapping back and forth, cock driving deep and pulling back once it was buried to the hilt. His own knees bent, drawing up beneath him to grant more leverage, more force to his steady, needy thrusts. His eyes opened, then burned with the sight before him and he blinked repeatedly, doing everything he could to keep them wide, to etch the look on Win’s face into his memory.

“Soon, Win,” Luz grunted, every part of him pushing, driving towards the inevitable moment of explosive completion he felt looming. “So tight. Too fucking good. Soon.”

And Win was already arching and bowing, rocking roughly beneath him, and Luz thought it was possibly the best thing ever. Then Win groaned, words flying from those red lips.

“Fuck, yes... soon, baby. Now. Fuck...” And there was Win’s hand, wrapping tight around the thick, meaty prick Luz wanted to suck again, and Luz couldn’t help shuddering, nearly vibrating from the sheer beauty of the sight, and the knowledge that he was the one who was doing that. Making Win need so badly.

He watched with one corner of his mind as Win stroked himself, squeezed himself, one finger digging into the tiny slit Luz had tasted so recently. He felt every tug, every jerk as though it was happening to him, and in a sense, it was. And then Win shook, body jerking wildly as long, loud cries sprung from those mobile lips. Short, strong spurts of white spilled wildly, dotting Luz's skin as he pumped, thrust, pistoned desperately in and out of Win's tight heat.

Luz was gasping, moaning, nearly crying at how right it all was, how good. Then there was a big hand on his ass, fingers digging in, squeezing, pulling him harder into the unbearably perfect sheath of Win's body and he couldn't hold back. No chance.

His body arched, shook, hips driving deep again, then once more, and when he heard his own shout echoing from the walls, Luz came.

The orgasm raged through Luz's body, taking him nearly by surprise. His eyes closed so fast and hard, he almost thought he'd gone blind from the sheer suddenness of it. But that incredibly tight ass was squeezing him and there were fingers bruising his ass in a way Luz had never imagined could feel good, but it did... and God help him, his teeth were hard on Win's shoulder, biting down and nearly breaking skin. He could feel Win spilling still more hot seed between their bodies, even as Luz shot hard and rough into the condom covering his spurting shaft. God.

Chapter Five

His eyes were locked on Luz as he watched the man wander through the main room of the shop. Of course, Win kind of thought that might be because of the way Luz looked in nothing but a towel and Win's own flannel shirt. He hoped so, anyway, because he figured it would suck beyond the telling of it if he was getting all obsessive just from the fact that it was his shirt keeping the guy warm.

Warm-ish, in any case, because while he'd turned the heat back on once they'd come downstairs to get Luz's things in the washer, it was still a good bit on the cold side. It was warming up pretty quickly, though. Or maybe that was just him.

"So what do you think?" he finally asked, trying not to groan when Luz bent over the counter to open the thick binder there. Damn, that was definitely a fine ass.

Luz tossed him a grin over one shoulder, flipping slowly through the first few plastic sheathed pages of what Win knew was his portfolio. "If this is really your work, I'm kind of surprised. Um, not that it's yours, but that you're way the hell up here in the middle of..."

The look on Luz's face, all of a sudden, was nearly enough to have Win laughing. It was like Luz had just realized how the words might sound. "Um, I mean you're kind of... secluded?" Luz added, biting at that full bottom lip and looking apologetic.

Then Luz bit his lip harder and flipped another page or two, and damned if his obviously sincere interest didn't have Win feeling all... warm and fuzzy inside, for fuck's sake.

"Damn, Win," Luz went on, almost making him blush. "You're really good. God, you'd be booked solid for months at a time if you were in L.A. or New York, man. Hell, even Nashville."

Lord. He was in so much trouble with Luz. Hell, Win could feel himself falling fast and hard. Too fast and too hard, honestly, if Luz's approval of his work could have him so fucking happy. And it did.

Yeah, Win knew he'd be kicking himself once the roads were cleared and Luz went on his merry way. He doubted the guy would ever even give him a thought, unless it was to tell his band mates, whoever they were, about getting lost in a storm and finding shelter. Win, on the other hand, just knew he'd remember every detail of their time together as though it was etched across his mind. Which he supposed it sort of was.

Still, there was no point in telling Luz as much. They had one more day. Maybe two, tops. Then they'd both go back to their real lives.

He might as well enjoy it while he could, Win told himself harshly. He'd handle the regrets and heartache later. After it was over.

“Thanks,” he answered, moving closer and looking over Luz’s shoulder. “And you’re right. I’m kind of in the ass end of nowhere, but...” He shrugged. “I grew up here, pretty much. After school and everything, I came back. Mom wasn’t doing so well, you know? It just seemed like the right thing to be here for her. After she was gone...” He sighed and shrugged.

Then he saw Luz frown and sighed again, internally this time. When was he going to learn to think before he spoke? Well, maybe never. Fortunately, Luz didn’t seem too put off because those pale pink lips opened and Luz’s words weren’t what Win expected. “School? Wow. Like... art school, maybe? Because I have to tell you, Win, you do damned fine work. I can tell it’s mostly original, too. Not, you know... stencils and shit.”

Jesus. Luz could pull him out of the beginnings of a funk like no one else Win had ever known before. And he was smart, too, damn it, because there was no way he’d missed that unintentional sigh on Win’s part. Luz had that body, those lips, those stunning fucking eyes, and he had a brain, on top of it all? Yeah, that pretty much just made it even worse.

Or better, maybe, Win told himself harshly. After all, with everything Luz had going for him, there was no way the man would ever waste himself on some washed-up never-was who was content to just live life with no real ambition for the bigger and better things that could have been so easily acquired. Some regular guy who was content with his life, the way Win was. It was good to know that for sure.

And Win really was content. Or he had been until he’d opened the shop door to find Luz there.

The whole thing was stupid, and he knew it. Two and a half days earlier, he hadn’t even known Luz existed. And okay, he liked the guy’s cock. And mouth. He was sure to like the hell out of that tight little ass that he’d be getting well acquainted with real soon. That didn’t mean he wouldn’t get over it, though. Because he would. He’d have to.

Win nodded, hip canting to lean against the counter while Luz skimmed through the rest of the book. “Yeah, art school. I went to Pratt, if you can believe it. Drawing.” Win chuckled. “My first boyfriend had a thing for ink, though, and he dragged me all over the city for a year or so. He ended up just about covered in it.” Win laughed softly, remembering.

“But you didn’t,” Luz said, stopping on a page that showed a deceptively simple piece. “God, this is...” Luz shook his head, staring at the small tattoo pictured there for long enough that Win actually started to feel nervous. “This is a fine fucking piece of work, Win. Must have taken hours to get it right. The cross-hatching alone, in place of shading...” That head shook again, dark gray eyes meeting his own.

“Why didn’t you?” Luz added quickly. “Get covered, I mean. Most ink-jockeys barely have a spare inch of unmarked skin. Um, not that you don’t look great the way you are, but...”

Win cocked his head, looking at the picture in his book. Luz was right. That one small piece had taken close to twelve hours, over all. He’d had to do it in four sessions.

“I could ask how you know so much about tattoos when you don’t have any of your own,” he responded slowly. “But to answer your question, it was the fact that Jeremy ended up with so much random shit on him. I always kind of felt like ink should mean something. Something real. Not just ‘I want Taz on my calf because he’s cool’, you know? Which—no shit—was the reason Jer got that.” He chuckled. “But seeing all the guys doing the ink? Knowing they were making permanent records of whatever their clients wanted? That just... did it for me. I found a guy who was willing to take on an unpaid apprentice and a couple years later I dropped out of school to ink full time... sort of segued into piercing, too. Then Mom got sick. Sicker. After she passed, there was the house and the dog. I found out she’d owned this place, too. It was standing empty, so here I am.” He gave Luz a wry smile. “Not a glamorous story, but that’s me in a nutshell. No glamour.” Which might not be strictly true, but that had been his mother’s life, not his.

Luz nodded at him again and then that long, lean body was pressed right up against Win’s. There were teeth nipping, sharp and strong at his ear and God, Win really liked that. More than he’d liked it earlier, when he and Luz had still been in bed.

“Glamour is over-rated,” Luz murmured, still holding Win’s earlobe between his teeth, that wet tongue just flicking until Win almost wanted to scream. Would have if it hadn’t felt so damned perfect. “If you have a life you like, one that makes you happy, that’s what matters.”

Yeah, yeah okay, Win told himself. Whatever Luz said, as long as he didn’t stop what he was doing. “Uh-huh...”

He could feel Luz grinning against his skin, and damned if that fine voice didn’t sound even hotter, better, all of a sudden. “So how long do we have before my clothes...” The sound of the washer buzzing interrupted Luz’s words and Win groaned softly at the little laugh he heard. “Never mind. Not enough time for you to fuck me over the counter. Or I hope it’d take longer than two seconds, anyway.” Luz pulled back and Win couldn’t decide whether to moan at the loss or chuckle.

“Dryer takes forty-five minutes, baby. That might be long enough. So don’t move. I’ll, uh... fuck, Luz, I’ll be right back, okay?” Lord, he might just pull something important if he moved as fast as he wanted to, and that would be bad.

Then Luz was giving him another heated grin and a muttered “Yeah. I’ll be right here, Win,” and fuck it. He would run.

He could hear Luz laughing at the speed Win used to race to the small room in back, transferring clothes and starting the clunky old dryer. “Supplies, baby,” he announced as he dashed toward the stairs. “Don’t. Move.”

God, it suddenly felt like he’d been waiting forever to be inside Luz. But he wasn’t going to wait any more.

Chapter Six

Lord. What had he been thinking? He'd told Luz the story of his life, right there in the shop. And okay, it wasn't the fully detailed and angst-laden version, but as Win had noticed before, the guy wasn't stupid. Then Luz had burst out with that whole thing about being happy, and... well.

Win figured he was happy, all right. Most of the time. That wasn't what had him so baffled.

It was more that... Luz didn't look like he could possibly be a day over twenty-three, at most, but the guy hadn't offered the words like a platitude or even something he'd read in a fucking greeting card.

No, he'd said it like he meant it. Like he knew -- really knew -- what he was talking about. So either the guy was way older than he looked, or... "Or maybe I'm not the only one with some hard times behind him," Win muttered to the empty room.

He wasn't the sort to dwell on his own past mistakes and heartbreaks. He sort of figured the past was done. As long as he'd learned from the things that had gone wrong, he could chalk it all up to learning and experience. But he hadn't been able to make that distinction five years ago, and the fact that Luz could at that age just floored him.

Luz was clearly even smarter than Win had thought, which made his leaving that much more of a certainty.

That wasn't going to be for a little while yet, though, and it was equally certain that Luz was waiting downstairs for Win to come back and fuck him until he screamed. "Brood later," Win told himself sternly, "Fuck now. Plenty of time to cry after he's gone." Not that he would actually cry, but still. "Focus."

He focused all the way through grabbing the condoms and lube from the table beside the bed. He even managed to keep it going while he took the stairs down, two at a time. Then Win froze, staring at the picture before him, his mind nearly blank aside from "in" and "now" and "mine".

The last didn't even worry him, he was so far gone already. Just from the sight of Luz bent over the counter again, towel and shirt on the floor while those long, slender fingers stroked slowly back and forth over the hole Win wanted inside of. Now.

"Jesus," he heard himself whimper, even as his feet dragged him unresistingly across the floor.

Luz hadn't been bored, exactly. Just... ready. Wanting. He had been since before the dryer had even started. Hell, he'd been aching from the moment he'd felt Win's cock, hard and hot even through his towel and Win's jeans.

So, yeah. He'd taken the few minutes available to pose himself, leaving no question about what he wanted.

He'd grinned just a bit when he'd heard Win's feet clattering down the stairs, then reached down between his legs, displaying himself in a way he hoped would be irresistible. He hadn't worried until those feet had slowed, then stopped, at which point he'd actually wondered if he'd gone too far.

Now, though...

Now there was the sharp, loud grating of a zipper being nearly torn with haste and Luz relaxed. As much as he could while bent over and naked, with a raging hard-on of his own pressing against the glass front of the counter "Oh, good," he murmured, voice going all thick and hot. "You're back. I was about to start without you."

He could hear Win breathing, the sound harsh, labored, and it only made Luz feel even more wanton. He was, and he knew it. Hell, he thought maybe he'd always wanted this. Wanted to want somebody and have them want him just this badly.

He'd always assumed that he'd known how it felt to be the entire focus of someone's attention, but now? Luz was realizing that the sensation was entirely new. And surprisingly comfortable.

"Jesus. Come on, Win. Please..." And then there were slick, strong fingers rubbing circles around his hole and Luz's eyes closed in a helpless prayer for faster, now, just more.

"Jesus, Luz," Win groaned, that shaking voice close, but not close enough. "Fucking beautiful." And thank God Win thought so.

He repeated the silent sentiment again when he pushed back, taking two questing fingers in with a tiny hiss that was hidden under Win's moaned "Fuck".

"Ah!" Yeah, that was it. That was what he needed, or at least a damned good start, Luz thought with a moan. The stretch, the welcome burn. It was fucking perfect. He could feel the words building in his chest. Feel them bubbling up as Win moved his hand, those thick digits sliding deeper, then back, crooking and spreading.

Fuck, it had been close enough to three months as to make no difference, and in all that time Luz hadn't had more than his own finger up his ass, but he wanted more. Needed more, if he was going to be honest. And he was there with Win.

It felt like he'd been waiting a whole hell of a lot longer than two days or so to feel Win push inside him. Felt like weeks, months, years... maybe forever. He didn't care, though. Didn't care that he was probably tighter than he'd been in years. Didn't care that Win's thick prick was going to feel like a bludgeon, battering away at him. Or rather, he did care about that. He was fucking looking forward to it.

"Fuck," he moaned, and he wasn't surprised to note that he was keening. "Come on, Win. Come on. Now. Let me... Fuck!" as those fingers found and rubbed the spot that suddenly had lights dancing in front of Luz's eyes. "God, just fuck me already!"

Win was pretty sure he'd never opened and slid a condom on himself quite so quickly before, but what else could he do? Especially with Luz right there, just rocking back and forth on his fingers. Hell, the guy's ass was tight. Tighter than Win had imagined, and he'd done a lot of fucking imagining since Luz had appeared. And now... well, now he was going to be inside that hot, tight body. Feel those long, lean muscles under his own bulkier form while he buried himself hard and deep.

"Y-yeah," he groaned, pulling slick fingers from that clenching haven before spreading the remaining gel over his desperate shaft.

"Yeah," he said again, his thick tip finding Luz's small opening like it belonged there. "Just hold on, baby. Gonna make this good." Then Luz pushed back again and his soft cry—filled with both pain and some sort of accomplishment as Win's size opened him around that bulbous head—nearly did Win in. "Shit. Shit, Luz. Don't m-move."

His hands were tight on Luz's hips and Win barely kept himself from whimpering at the way Luz's body held his, pulsed around his cock. Fuck, the heat alone was nearly enough to have him spilling. Add in the tight perfection and he was just barely holding on.

He held himself entirely still for a handful of moments, his eyes closed as he breathed, letting shuddering but deep breaths calm him just a bit. And then Win moved.

He pressed himself deeper, biting his lip when he shored up against Luz's toned ass, eyes opening as that long spine arched to push Luz's body as far onto him as possible, as if there was some way to take Win in in his entirety.

"Oh, God," Win muttered, unable to resist any longer.

"Y-yeah." Luz was whimpering, that long-muscled body shifting, rocking, and it was the best thing Win had ever felt. "God, yes... fuck, Win. Fuck. Harder. Harder, love. Jesus, gonna feel you forever..."

Lord. He had no idea of whether Luz was even aware of the words pouring from between those wide lips. He didn't care, either, except for the fact that he couldn't answer them at

the moment. All he could do, in fact, was just what his lover was asking. Demanding. Whatever. And Luz was definitely his lover. Not just some random guy who'd come along and turned out to be gay and interested. He should have realized as much when he'd asked—begged—Luz to fuck him.

Win wasn't sure of how he was going to make things work, but he for damned sure would. Even if it meant closing up shop and moving to the city. Any city. There was no way he could give this up. Not now that he knew how good it was. How good it would go on being, he promised himself.

His hands gripped pale, slender hips tighter as he pressed himself in to the root. He paused there, body hunched over Luz's nearly vibrating form. Heavy breaths left him, gusting hard against long, tangled hair and Win pushed through the strands, mouth closing over the top of one lean shoulder. "Fuck," he whispered, the words almost lost against Luz's skin. "Fuck, baby. Never felt anyone like I feel you. Could do this forever, Luz. Never want to stop..."

"Don't, then." Luz groaned, trying to move, though Win wasn't going to let him. Not yet. "Fuck, Win, don't stop, okay? Just move, for fuck's sake!"

Win couldn't help the smile that curved his lips. "Patience," he murmured, taking his time until Luz's demanding growl had that body vibrating around him. It was too much and not enough, all at once.

Luz wanted him to move, and Win wasn't the sort of man to deny his lover. He wasn't going to start now, either.

He pulled back, hands still tight and holding Luz in place while he made the motion as slow as he could manage. Then, when just his tip remained inside Luz, Win reversed, snapping his hips forward and driving deep.

"God, no! No, I'll come, Win, I'll c-come if you d-do that..."

Jesus, Luz was good for his ego. Just the way Luz was moaning and uttering those sharp, wild cries was nearly enough to have him flying. Add in the fact that Luz clearly meant it when he said he was so damned close, and Win was maybe a thrust or two away, himself, just like that.

His balls were hard, tight against his body as he repeated the action Luz had objected to. "Want you to come, baby," he grunted, forcing himself to hold still with just the head of his cock inside his lover's body. "Need you to come, Luz. With me, okay? N-now."

His hips snapped forward, giving a little twist that had Luz howling, and when the man arched hard, that tight, perfect little ass slamming back to meet his skin, Win was lost.

His teeth dug hard into the tense muscle at the top of Luz's shoulder, fingers deep and feeling those sharp hip bones. His own hips pistoned wildly, his thrusts short, hard, needy. And when he came, it was with a sort of full body convulsion Win had never experienced in his life before Luz. He'd felt something similar when he'd had that long, thin cock deep in his body, but only then.

"Yes. Fuck, yes. Yes. God. Win. Win. Fuck. Win." Luz was panting, rambling, and Win realized, even in the throes of his own pleasure, that he couldn't even imagine ever becoming tired of hearing that.

He wasn't going to say so, of course. Not right then. Even if he could have spoken in actual words, Win figured that would be too much, too soon.

He held himself still, cock throbbing inside Luz, a few last spurts emptying into the condom in time with the pulsing of his balls. God.

All that mattered right then was the thick shaft he felt pulsing its last deep inside him, and hadn't that been one hell of a fucking ride?

Sure, he'd wanted it to last longer, but Luz really couldn't complain. Even if he'd had the energy, he wouldn't have.

His entire body felt limp, wrung out. He almost thought he might have passed out from the sheer force of the pleasure that was still swarming through his blood. And Win was still inside him, though he could feel that cock softening in small increments.

It was fucking unreal, the way he was feeling. Good, but unreal.

"Fuck," he whispered, suddenly wishing it would snow again, regardless of how much he hated the cold, white, wet shit. Anything to make this whole experience last longer. "That was... God, Win. How the hell are you single?"

Damn, he wished they were in bed. It would have been easier to hide his disappointed sigh when Win pulled that amazing cock from him if there'd been a pillow to swallow the sound.

They wouldn't have had to worry about making it up the stairs, either, he thought with a small frown when he straightened and had to brace himself against the counter, his knees were so weak.

"I guess I was waiting for you, baby," Win answered, his voice still thick, like he hadn't come down yet, and the words had Luz frozen for just a moment or three. Jesus, had Win really said what Luz thought he'd said?

Well, apparently so, because when Luz turned, Win actually looked a little bit sheepish... and a whole lot nervous. Like he'd just realized what he'd said, himself.

Whatever Win saw in Luz's face, Luz figured it was a good thing because the worry was gone just as quickly as it had appeared.

"Cool," Luz managed to say, eyes locked on bright hazel.

Christ, his Dad had been right, Luz admitted silently. He really was a whore for any sort of affection. Would probably sell his soul for someone to say "I love you" and mean it. Which was probably why the whole Thom thing had lasted as long as it did, even with all their problems.

But Win wasn't Thom, as Luz remembered noting more than once before. And Win wasn't making any improbable claims about love after just a bit more than forty-eight hours.

No, Win was just making an offer, Luz figured. Sort of. He thought Win was just putting it out there that if Luz was interested, he would be willing to see what might happen. That was still more than he'd gotten from Thom. And why was he even thinking about that fucking bastard when he was here, body still vibrating from the thorough and perfect fucking he'd just enjoyed?

"Shit," Luz said, closing the foot or so between him and Win. "I waited two days to feel that, man. And just so we're clear... Patience? Not a virtue I actually have."

He leaned in, pressing his lips slowly, softly to Win's, and when the man just hummed and pulled him tight against that mostly-clothed body, Luz blushed.

"Maybe we should try that with both of us naked next time," he muttered ruefully when the kiss ended for the moment. "You know, just so I don't feel like a total fucking whore."

God, Win's laugh was a beautiful thing. Luz leaned into that strong, solid body, moaning softly as Win's big hands stroked up and down his spine.

"Sorry," Win said, though there wasn't a single tone of regret in the word. "You just make me that hot, Luz. Couldn't wait. And Lord, was it ever worth it."

Luz considered replying, but Win's lips were on his and the man could kiss like nobody's business. Besides, whatever he'd been thinking about saying? It was gone now, lost in the slow slip and slide of tongues, in the languid touches and soft, swallowed mumbles between them.

They could talk later, Luz decided. After the basking.

Yeah.

Chapter Seven

Bed had been a damned fine idea, Win admitted, even while Luz's fingers roamed slowly through his hair, clearly trying to learn the bumps of Win's skull. He shivered slightly when those digits paused at the seam on his skull. "Scar?" Luz asked softly, clearly not wanting to disturb Win's semi-nap, but still sounding curious.

Win couldn't help smiling, even with his lips pretty much hidden against Luz's fine, soft skin. "Mmmm," he answered. "Call it a reminder of New York and school. No big thing, baby." And it wasn't. Not now, anyway.

At the time, it had seemed like a huge fucking deal. Hell, at the time, Win had pretty much sworn off men while the EMTs had rushed him to the hospital. He was pretty sure Jeremy hadn't had the chance to swear off, though. Not while serving three to five for aggravated assault, anyway.

"What about this," he countered, hand covering a jagged-edged spot that was even paler than the rest of Luz's skin. "Seems like it must've hurt."

Luz's chest rose and fell under his cheek in a sigh and Win could almost feel the guy trying to decide how much to tell him. Yeah, there had to be a story there, and damned if Win didn't want to know all of it.

He wouldn't force it, of course, but he definitely wanted to know. Hell, he wanted to know everything Luz was willing to tell him, and then some.

"Elgin Bascombe," Luz finally said. "Or El, as he liked to be called."

Win frowned, fingers tracing over the too-smooth skin for a second. "Okay... and what does El have to do with anything? How do you even know who he was? I thought it was just the ink-circle who'd heard of him." He was prepared for pretty much anything. Except the bitter laugh coming from Luz's mouth and vibrating in the guy's chest. He tried to sit up then, only to have that hand in his hair hold him right where he was.

Luz sighed again and Win saw those gray eyes closing when he darted a glance up.

"Mom left when I was three," Luz muttered, just a bare trace of bitterness in his tone. "I guess she got tired of his girlfriends. Or maybe she just got sick of the random back-hands, you know?"

Okay, and ouch. That was a hell of a thing for Luz to remember from when he'd been so small. Win couldn't even imagine what that must be like. His own childhood had been less than a fairy tale, but nobody had ever hit his Mom. Of course, none of her boyfriends had stuck around for long, either. Still, he wished he could take that tone from Luz's voice.

But Luz was still talking, and Win was for damned sure listening. He'd be sympathetic later, if that was what Luz needed. Yeah.

"He always said I couldn't possibly remember. That I was making it up. But I know I heard them arguing. He told her she could go, but she wasn't taking me with her. I can only guess about the things that were going on—the things I missed seeing or hearing—because I always knew she loved me, but... she still left. Without me."

Win nodded against Luz's chest, almost sighing when those long fingers left his hair.

"It wasn't that bad, once I sort of got used to her being gone. He wasn't a monster or anything. He was just... very, very El." Luz chuckled, but it wasn't a happy sound. "He was more into his career than anything else. It took me... God, almost ten years to figure out he hadn't kept me because he wanted a kid, but more because he'd been pissed off that Mom wanted to leave. He was really excited when he noticed I could draw, though. He even used some of my stuff on his friends once I got older and had more control. I think he figured I'd end up working with him."

Okay, Luz was right. It didn't sound that bad to Win. Aside from the whole thing where Luz hadn't had a chance to really know his mother, anyway. He just couldn't figure out what any of it had to do with the patch of skin that was so fucking disturbing. He wasn't going to say so, of course. Not when Luz was offering up some of his history. "Mmm-hmmm..." he murmured, rubbing one roughened cheek against his lover's ribs.

Another sigh shifted Win's chest. "So when I was fifteen, I decided to get some ink. Like a moron, I went to El's competition and had him do the honors." Win groaned and felt Luz flinch slightly. "Yeah, yeah. I already said I was a moron. I can't say whether it was the fact that I'd gone to someone else or that it was Mom's name that really pissed El off. Either way, he didn't even look at me for a month. I guess he eventually told his friend Buster what was going on. I don't think he knew what Buster would do, though. Like I said, El was kind of self centered, but he wasn't a monster."

Jesus, he could see it coming, Win thought. He wasn't surprised that a fifteen-year-old Luz hadn't, though. He wouldn't have, himself, at that age. "He hurt you," Win offered, keeping his voice soft even though everything in him wanted to find the fucker and make him pay.

Luz laughed again, and this time the bitterness was far more than just a trace. "Buster got me drunk and had four of his asshole buddies hold me down while he cut the skin away. Then he dragged me home and threw me down in front of El. He was laughing while he told him how I pissed myself. He laughed even more when he got to the part about me shitting my pants like a fucking baby."

"Thank God her name was Mira, not Charlotte or something long, you know? But anyway..."

Win really wanted to say something, but he didn't know what. Hell, he didn't even know how to form the horrified sorrow he was feeling into words, so he just lay there, listening to Luz's heart and feeling that fine chest rise and fall with slow breaths.

"El sort of gave me this look," Luz finally went on, "Like... 'what did you expect?', you know? But he never talked to Buster again that I know of... and he never inked the guy or any of his friends, after. And I decided right then that I wasn't ever getting inked again. I haven't missed it."

Lord. Just... Lord. That was. Fuck, Win didn't know what it was, aside from fucked up. He still didn't have even a clue of how to respond, either. Not in words, anyway, so he shifted.

He moved slowly up Luz's tense, slightly shaking form, finally pulling the shuddering body against him, chests pressing together, just so.

His hands slid slowly, soothingly, up and down that long spine, offering silent comfort and unspoken understanding. He couldn't imagine anyone ever hurting Luz on purpose. The thought alone made him want to snarl.

The urge faded, pushed away by the soft, wide mouth touching his own.

There was nothing wanton in the kiss, Win noticed immediately. Just... thanks and admiration and a certain gentleness that was as welcome as it was surprising. The least he could do was return it in kind, grateful all the way down to his bones that Luz had been willing to share that much of himself.

It gave him hope, actually, that maybe this whole thing between them was more than just fucking for his lover, too. He hoped so, anyway. Because if it was, then maybe Luz wouldn't freak out and run when Win told him about wanting more. Yeah. Maybe.

They stayed there—with soft, simple kisses that meant so much more for their lack of intent—for what he figured had to be either moments or hours. Either way, it was good. Beyond good. It was... Well, fuck. It was something he shouldn't get used to.

With that in mind, he pulled back, putting a few inches between their mouths as he took a deep breath. "So, that's it?" Win asked gently, meeting Luz's eyes with what he hoped was understanding in his own. He barely swallowed his sigh when Luz shook his head, because Lord, how could things get any worse than they'd already been for his lover, back then?

"El died a few years later," Luz said. "A couple months before I turned eighteen. Nobody ever proved it, but the theory was that Buster and his friends were responsible. I was already out of high school so they didn't make me go into foster care... and when I was really legal, I sold everything. The shop, the equipment, you name it."

Win nodded slowly, just glad Luz hadn't tried to move any farther from him. He wasn't sure he could have let the guy go. "And?" he breathed. There was a conclusion coming. He could feel it in the way Luz was starting to relax, just a little.

"And I went looking for Mom," Luz answered with a sheepish smile. "Found her in Nashville and we spent a couple of years crying and hugging and just getting to know each other. She'd married an accountant, of all things. Guess she wanted someone stable for a change, you know? Oh, and I have three half-siblings. Two little sisters and a kid brother. They're really cool."

Win smiled a bit at that. At least something good had come out of things. He was still smiling while he pulled Luz closer and rolled onto his back, settling Win over his chest, much as Win had been on Luz's when this whole talk had started.

"I tried art there, you know," Luz added quietly. "In Tennessee. But without any formal training, it wasn't gonna happen, and I couldn't see forcing myself through even more school. Then I was out one night with a buddy of mine and he dared me to do karaoke. Some guy heard me. Turned out he was with one of the labels down there and he thought I had a shot but I was too... edgy, I guess, for country. So I went alternative, got a group together, and we got picked up by a small company out of Memphis. Been trying ever since." Luz blushed. Win could feel the blooming heat on his own skin. "We were on tour when I got lost and ended up here, and that's pretty much it. And how did talking about my scar turn into my life's story, Win?"

Lord, he could actually feel Luz's curious frown against his chest. It was... Fuck, it was cute, of all things. He would never tell Luz that, though. Win was pretty sure the guy would be offended.

"Don't know," he answered, one hand toying with long black locks. "Can't say I'm sorry, though. And I'd like to see your art some time. You know... if you ever get a break from your music and find yourself back in these parts." And that was as close as he was willing to get to begging Luz to come back because Win knew—suddenly and without a doubt—that no matter what he himself wanted, there was no way he'd be able to follow Luz around on the road. It had been one thing when he'd thought he might have to just move somewhere, but... No. It wasn't feasible. Who'd ever heard of a roaming, freelance tattoo artist?

That soft, mobile mouth yawned against his chest and Win smiled sadly. Best not get used to this, he reminded himself.

"Okay," Luz mumbled, soft gusts of air against Win's chest growing slower, deeper.

Win sighed softly, his arms wrapping more tightly around Luz's back. He would force himself to let go when the time came. But this wasn't that time and he was for damned sure going to have what he could, while he could.

He listened to Luz's breaths, his own becoming just as slumberous, and he didn't even notice it when he slipped off, still holding the younger man tightly to him.

Chapter Eight

He'd gotten four days more than he'd expected, and Luz once again made a mental note to send a thank you card to the snow plow drivers who'd blocked the parking lot entrance with a huge drift. Hell, huge was an understatement. The damned thing had topped out at close to six feet. He knew, because Win had barely been able to see over it when they'd woken up the other day to discover their firmly trapped state.

He didn't think Win had been any more upset than he'd been. Which was not at all. There was just something about being there, snowed in or not, that felt right.

He'd had a few brief moments of guilt that he was actually happy when he knew the rest of the band didn't know where he was, but there really hadn't been anything he could do about it, what with his cell phone soaked from his little jaunt through the storm and Win's shop phone out of commission until the phone company found the time to swing by and repair the downed line. Which they were currently doing. He could see them from the window of the bedroom he and Win had been using.

Luz sighed, his arms wrapping over his own ribs. All good things came to an end. He knew that. It sucked, but it was just the way of the world. And Win hadn't asked or even implied that he wanted Luz to stay. He wasn't sure of how he would have responded if Win had; mostly because it was still so new. So unexpected. He'd barely had time to wrap his mind around what he was feeling, between the mind-numbing bouts of sexual pleasure.

It was more than that, though. More than just sex. For him, anyway. Christ, he felt fucking whole when he was with Win, and wasn't that just the icing on the proverbial shit-cake? Because Win didn't seem to want anything but what they'd already had. Seemed to be just fine with knowing that Luz would make his phone call soon and be gone within a day, most likely.

He couldn't force the guy to feel anything more, though, and Luz knew it. He'd stumbled across Win by accident. He hadn't even tried to play hard to get. And he couldn't blame Win for taking him up on what he'd been offering.

That didn't change the fact that he wanted to stay. Even with the horribly boring appearance of ramen noodles at every meal, now that the soup and beans were gone, Luz wanted to stay. Enough that he spent a good five minutes every hour praying for more snow.

A small, bittersweet smile twisted at his lips and he leaned back as strong, warm arms surrounded him from behind. He tipped his head just a bit, making room for Win's chin on his shoulder. "Hey."

"Hey," Win answered, and Luz thought he sounded a little disappointed, for whatever reason. Maybe for the same reason Luz was, though. The men outside. Those strong arms

tightened just a bit more around him and Luz smiled as Win's hands settled against his chest.

"It won't be long now," Win murmured. "They should be done before dark." Then Win was chuckling and for the first time since they'd met, Luz didn't like the sound. "I'm guessing you'll be back to your real life by this time tomorrow, Luz."

Luz forced himself to swallow his next sigh. Well, he'd wondered if Win felt anything, and now he had his answer. "It's been fun, now be on your way". And why had he even hoped for anything else? It wasn't like they'd met somewhere and fallen in love. Except Luz had. And Win obviously just... hadn't.

"I guess," Luz agreed, something inside him dying right then and there. "The label's probably going bug-fuck with me just disappearing like that. Hell, they probably think I'm dead or something." He forced a laugh. "I'm not going to tell them I spent the last week fucking like a crazed weasel. That'd just piss them off. And the guys. And Thom, too." The chuckle he let loose with then was more sincere. "Thom would go ballistic. I'm the meal ticket, you know? Front man and all that shit."

"Boyfriend?" Win snarled, hands gripping harder on Luz's skin like he didn't want to let go, but hadn't he just seemed to be fine that their time together was ending? "This Thom. You two are..." Then again, the unexpected reaction seemed to imply something.

God help him, Luz hoped so because he actually liked the way Win was acting all possessive. He could even see himself getting used to it, for fuck's sake. Not that he seemed likely to have the chance, but still.

He leaned back harder against Win's tight, angry form and shook his head, still looking out the window, though he wasn't paying attention to the repairmen any more.

"We two are ex," Luz said softly. "Been ex for three months now. Never going to be anything else, either. Not even friends." He flushed slightly as he turned his head to meet hot, hazel eyes with his own deep gray. "We were together for almost two years, or I thought we were. Then I walked in on him and he was..." Luz swallowed hard. "He was doing things he knew I couldn't deal with. Wouldn't be able to handle. I... I don't want to talk about that, okay? But he's our manager. There's a contract. I'm sort of stuck with him."

And that was completely true, damn it. Thom had waited until Luz was all fuck-drugged and sex-stupid and Luz hadn't even read the damned thing before he'd signed. Christ, he'd been stupid that night. Next thing Luz had known, Thom had more or less sold him to the label, and while the businessmen were good at what they did, they only saw the business aspect, not the fact that Luz was an actual person.

"He'll be glad to hear you're alive," Win said after a long, silent minute during which Luz went from hopeful to sad more than once. "This Thom of yours. And hey. The band

will be thrilled that their singer's coming back. They'll probably fall down and kiss your ass until it's raw."

And that was the end of whatever fantasies he'd had about Win, Luz told himself with a purely internal sigh. The guy didn't really care that he was leaving. Hell, Win hadn't even tried to argue.

"Probably," Luz answered, closing his eyes and concentrating closely on the way Win's hands felt on his skin.

The memories were going to have to last him the rest of his life. Might as well hold every second in his head, Luz figured.

Chapter Nine

Win felt empty. Empty and lost and alone, even with Tyler and Grace right there across the table.

Two months since Luz had left. Eight fucking weeks since he'd watched the guy climb into the fucking limousine the God-damned label had sent for him, and didn't that just say a thing or two about how much they wanted their singer back? Limos weren't exactly a dime a dozen in his neck of the woods.

Sixty-one fucking days of feeling cold and damned lonely, even with his friends.

"I'm fine," he answered Grace, and he couldn't blame her for the doubtful look on her face. Not when he knew how surly he sounded. "Really, Gracie. I'm..."

Tyler's snort interrupted him. "You're fine like I'm a fucking figure skater, shit-for-brains," Ty said, brown eyes just hard and hot and too fucking knowing. "You haven't been fine since you hooked up with that fucking loser who left you. Which I could have told you would happen if you'd just fucking asked!"

"Luz. Not 'loser'. And he had a life to get back to, damn it." And yeah, Win sounded defensive. He knew he did. "You can't blame him for that, Ty. He didn't make any promises. I just..." He sighed. "I wanted something more from him than what he could give, okay?" And all of a sudden he understood how Rob must have felt, but deeper, he was sure.

He waved to their waitress, the gesture announcing their need for another pitcher of beer.

"If you want to blame anyone," Win went on, pausing a moment to drain his glass, "blame me. I mean, he didn't do anything but knock on my door. In a fucking snow storm. Sure, he was willing to get physical and shit, but he never said or even suggested that he wouldn't be moving on. He left. I let him. I didn't try to stop him, okay? So just... let it go. I'll be fine. I am fine. None of this is Luz's fault."

Grace actually laughed when her husband stood and stalked across the room to the bar, his growl clear as he left them. Her blue eyes twinkled while she shook her head, blonde hair swaying slightly with the motion.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think he was jealous," she said with a grin. "But seriously, Win. Are you that sure this guy doesn't feel anything for you? Because you're obviously in love with him and you never told him, so... What makes you think he wasn't doing that, too? Guarding himself until he heard some sort of declaration from you, maybe."

Her eyes narrowed just a bit, and Win knew he was in trouble.

“I swear to God, Winston St. James. If you’ve let go of someone you love, who might also love you, just because you were too cowardly to tell him? I’m going to stop letting Ty come out to play. You can just win someone else’s money on your poker nights!”

Fuck. There was a reason Gracie was so good in Collections that she’d made manager within two years. The woman was tough.

Of course, he’d known that even back in the sixth grade, which was when she’d been dating Tyler. The first time. When she’d mentioned to the guy that she’d thought Win was cute. Which had started the whole arch-nemesis thing on Ty’s side.

Even so, Grace didn’t know everything. She was smart, sure. And Win did love a big brain, be it male or female. But the whole thing with him and Luz was kind of beyond her understanding. And like an idiot, he told her so.

Like an even bigger idiot, he was both surprised and stunned by her reaction.

“You. Huge. Imbecile.” Grace glared, eyes almost going red, which told Win he’d been right from the very beginning, way back in the first grade. Grace was evil.

“You’re talking about love and relationships, doofus,” she went on, still glaring, “And that has nothing to do with gender. Except for the part where two guys are obviously too stupid to just own up to what they’re feeling and bite the damned bullet! I swear, Win, if I have to go find this Luz of yours and drag his ass back here, I’ll not only do it, but you’ll be paying for it for years! And so will he!”

“She means it, buddy,” Tyler assured Win as he returned to the table with three shots of tequila. “You might as well just give in and do what she wants, and right now. Because it’ll be so much worse if you make her wait until you realize she’s right.”

The funny thing to Win wasn’t that Ty meant it, or that the man looked so reluctant about saying the words. It was that Grace laughed, rather than being mad at her husband.

Yeah, he was in trouble, all right. Big trouble.

Fuck. Luz hated his life.

He should have been loving it. Would have been if he’d never gotten sidetracked a couple months earlier.

Ironically, even to him, the enormous offers from the venues he and the guys had been playing before his little adventure in the land of snow and ice would never have come about if he hadn’t been “missing and presumed dead”.

He wasn't dead, though. Even if he sort of wished he was at the moment.

Luz frowned, admitting that wasn't true. He didn't wish he was dead. He just wished he'd never called the label. Wished he'd let them believe he'd wandered off and died, never to be seen or heard from again. At least then he'd have been happy; not making himself crazy with what-ifs.

His entire body clenched roughly, teeth gritting hard as he walked past the dressing room the latest club had given to him and the band. He didn't know who was in there, but they were clearly abusing whatever fan had been desperate enough for a brush with fame to go along with them.

There had been a time when he'd been able to just grin and keep moving. Before Win. Before he'd really understood just how empty his life actually was. Now, though... Well, now he had to make some hard choices.

As it turned out, Luz thought with some surprise a few minutes later, the hard choices weren't really that difficult.

He pulled his cell phone from the pocket of his jeans, fully aware that it really belonged to the label and as such wouldn't be his for much longer. If he was lucky. Then he dialed a number he rarely called, knowing he'd be glad for doing so; sooner, rather than later.

"Hey, Trisha," he greeted, smiling hugely at his sister's excitement. "Mom around? I need to ask her a question." He listened for a moment. "No, sweetheart. Unless his parents will be there. You're only eleven." And there was definitely something wrong with a fifteen-year-old boy wanting to date his little sister in secret, though he'd never tell her that. It would likely make her that much more determined to sneak around. "But if you went to a movie or something, Mom could sit a few rows back. That'd be just like being alone, right?"

And thank God Trisha was happy with that suggestion, though Luz doubted the boy in question would be. Which was good. Four years wouldn't be that much when Trisha was Luz's age, but the difference between eleven and fifteen was huge.

He listened for a little while longer, smiling slightly at her innocence. "So... Mom, Trisha?"

It was only a few seconds that he waited, but it felt like ages. As did the ten minutes or so during which he and his mother caught up.

Finally, though, Luz had to ask the question that had made him call.

The answer wasn't quite what he'd expected, but in the good way.

He thought he might actually be able to pull his idea off, and if so? Then he was pretty sure he hadn't lied to his Mom when he'd told her he'd be happy. If he was lucky, anyway, but she hadn't needed to know that part.

Chapter Ten

Four fucking months gone and Win wasn't any closer to being over Luz than he'd been on the day he'd watched Luz leave.

Oh, he was faking it well enough that even Tyler and Grace believed he was okay, but the truth was, Win was far from okay. Hell, he was in an entirely different zip code from okay.

He closed his eyes and he saw Luz.

Opened his eyes and wanted to see Luz.

Fuck, every time he slept, he dreamed about that week, memories rising up to torment him into wakefulness.

At least he'd finally managed to advertise for a new assistant, even though he wasn't offering the upstairs apartment this time.

He just couldn't. Not when he spent hours up there every night, holding the pillows close while he sought out the long gone scent of Luz's skin. Hair. Come. Just Luz. He hadn't washed the sheets since the guy had gone away.

He knew he was pathetic. Knew he was acting like a fucking jackass. But he just couldn't manage to let go. Couldn't forget.

So, no. The upstairs was his. So much so that he'd put in a dead bolt, just to keep anyone else from wandering up there, be it accidentally or otherwise.

Win counted himself lucky that Ty and Gracie had never bothered with the apartment. And that they'd not noticed the new lock. They would have freaked, he figured. Freaked and then beat him almost to death for nursing his obsession along.

Win frowned, forcing himself to look at the three resumes in front of him. They were the best of the lot, going by the art that had accompanied the typed pages, and he did need someone. To help with the shop, he clarified silently. Because there was no way he was ever going to replace Luz. No way he was going to date or even have some sort of semi-regular thing like he'd had with Rob.

It had taken him a little while, but he knew now. Knew for sure.

Grace was right. He loved Luz. And even though he knew Luz wasn't ever coming back, Win couldn't see himself settling for someone else. Someone... less.

That being recognized, he figured he might as well look at the actual resumes, not just the drawings attached.

“Okay,” he said out loud, just to hear something other than the sound of the dryer rattling in the otherwise silent shop. “Thomas Rafferty. He has experience, but no. Not hiring anyone named Thom. Ever.” And he knew that was petty, but he was the boss, damn it, so he could be as unfair as he liked.

“Justin Mowry,” he went on, frowning at what wasn’t on the kid’s resume. “Like I don’t know he’s been trouble ever since grade school. Not for my shop. Don’t want a scene like what happened last year at the Stewarts’.” And that was true enough. The last thing he needed was three different baby-mommies fighting it out in his parking lot. “The kid must have a solid gold dick,” he said with a small laugh. “Or tongue.”

That left one.

The interesting part about the last resume was that it wasn’t from somebody even semi-local. In fact, the address on the thing was so out of the area that Win wondered how the guy had even heard he was looking. The drawings, on the other hand, were good enough that he didn’t care.

The lines were obviously untutored, but all the more real for it. It was why Win had set Mike Elmira’s work aside in the “possible” pile, after all. Whoever he was, he had a bold certainty to his pencil strokes that was intriguing. And he wasn’t a Thomas... or a trouble-making little shit who couldn’t keep it in his pants, as far as Win knew.

Decision made, he relaxed just a bit and stood, going through the closing routine that Mike would be responsible for once he got there.

It would be a while, but that was okay, Win figured. He still needed to find a place for the man to stay, after all. Assuming this Mike was even still interested, a month after applying.

He went home, driving the three miles or so with empty eyes.

There should have been another person there with him. A long, lean body pressed right up against his side. There should have been dark gray eyes smiling at him when he spoke or cursed or sighed. But that wasn’t happening. Never would, either. Fuck.

Win shook his head as he pulled up in front of the house, then slid from his car.

He fired off an e-mail to the address on Mike’s resume, jumping a few minutes later when his computer dinged in its “new mail” way.

Christ. The guy would be there in two days.

He really needed to see what was available as lodging. Assuming Mike wanted to stick around once he learned what a broody fucker the boss was.

In all honesty, Win kind of hoped he wouldn't. Once tourist season came and went, anyway.

Yeah, he told himself. Gracie needed to kick his ass. He was even more pathetic than she thought. She also needed to do what she'd promised. Find Luz and drag him back, even if he was kicking and screaming.

Win had been fine before that storm. Before he'd known what he was missing. And he should be fine now, when what he'd only had for six and a half days was gone. But he wasn't. Couldn't be. It was damned unfair.

Two months. Two fucking months to negotiate his way out of his fucking contract, once he'd made the decision to try. Two months while Thom actually acted like Luz's manager and made nice with the label, finally getting them to settle.

It had cost him just about everything he'd earned from the investments he'd made using the seed money from selling El's shop and tools, but Luz knew it was worth it.

He hadn't been happy doing music after Win. And now he thought maybe he never had been, even before. He just hadn't known enough to recognize it.

Still, there had been no guarantees. There still weren't, even though he was standing in front of "St. James Ink-firmary" with his jaw clenched and knees weak.

Okay, he'd sort of been invited back, but he couldn't be sure of how Win would react to seeing him.

In his happier daydreams, Win rushed toward him and pulled him close, lips crashing against his own while those strong, masculine arms crushed him against the muscled body he remembered so well.

In the less happy ones, Win just sneered at him and sent him on his way.

"Fuck," Luz whispered. "Just... fuck. Let him at least not hate me."

He straightened the knotted bandana on his head, then swallowed hard, steeling himself for whatever might happen once he actually went inside. "Let him love me," he added, just on the off chance that there was someone not only listening, but willing to help him out.

That done, Luz forced himself to stand up straight. "Okay. Faint heart never won fair... Win." With that, he strode across the few feet of cement and pushed through the front door, only to stop and stare at the big, beefy, blond man standing there looking at Luz

were he stood in the doorway. And the much smaller though equally blond woman who was doing her own examining.

“Uh...” Luz said, unable to find words. “Uh, I’m supposed to start working... here.” And yeah. Win was nowhere to be seen, so just like that, his mouth was working. “Is Win around? Winston St. James, I mean.”

He watched as the guy and the girl exchanged a speaking glance, then blushed deeply. “I, uh...” God, he had no idea of what to say. He’d planned on Win being the one he’d have to explain himself to.

The woman snorted, which had Luz frowning, but not as much as her following words.

“I’m guessing you’re Mike. Or should I call you Luz? He’s drawn you like a million times, you know,” she said, looking smug. “Win’s putting the trash out; he’ll be back in a minute.”

The considering look she gave him then had him squirming, but he bore it. The woman seemed to know about him, which was maybe a hopeful sign.

“He’s... okay?”

He hadn’t meant to ask the question, but it had slipped out before he’d even known it was there. He felt himself blushing when the woman snorted again, this time with obvious disdain.

“Of course he’s not okay,” she said, a very clear ‘you moron’ right there in her tone. “He loves you and you left him. You came back, but he doesn’t know that yet, does he? So until he does, he’s definitely so far from okay that he’s on a whole other continent. No matter how hard he tries to pretend otherwise.”

Luz shivered when her eyes sharpened. Then he noticed the blond man shivering, too, and he decided he wasn’t quite as much of a wuss as he felt like. Of course, the guy was also glaring at him, all of a sudden, so maybe he wasn’t the right person to be using as a template. The man obviously hated him, and they’d barely even met.

“I...” he started, only to be cut off by a sharp hand gesture and one more snort, this time less amused and more... warning, it sounded like.

“Shut up,” the woman ordered. “Win is our friend and we love him. He’s been a pitiful mess since you left. So if you’re just here to visit, do us all a favor and turn right back around before he sees you. Because I swear, if I have to spend the next year picking up the pieces you leave behind, I will be a very cranky Grace. Got it?”

It was the blond man's smug, somehow malicious chuckle that had Luz believing every word, and even though he hadn't planned on telling anyone but Win first, he kind of figured he didn't have a choice anymore.

He could feel the bright red of his own cheeks heating while he nodded. "I can't promise anything," he said, forcing himself not to shudder at the sharper than steel gaze that got him from the woman. "But I love him, okay? That's why I'm here. It's why I let go of everything that didn't make me feel the way he does. Win. The way Win does. I."

He closed his eyes, willing the lump in his throat away. "I'm not going anywhere. Unless he makes me."

The woman's satisfied hum was met by the blond guy's disgusted groan. "Happy now, Gracie?" Luz heard, then feet were moving across the wood floor, the woman—Gracie, obviously—answering, "Not until we don't hear from Win for three days or so. Because he's busy with his boyfriend and not being a big depressing jerk".

Luz chose to believe that meant he had the friends' seal of approval. At least from the woman.

Now Luz just needed to see Win. Tell him he loved him. And do whatever it took to make sure Win believed it.

Easy.

God.

Win dropped the top on the small dumpster behind the shop, then frowned at the loud revving coming from the front lot. It sounded like Tyler's car. Hell, it was definitely Ty's car. He'd know the sound of that engine anywhere.

He couldn't figure out why his friends would be leaving without even a goodbye, though.

Still, maybe something had come up. Ty was on call, so... yeah, that probably explained it. It didn't help with feeling lonely, though. Of course, nothing really did; not even having Tyler and Grace there.

He kind of thought maybe he'd been wrong about them believing he was okay now. Gracie hadn't tried to set him up even once, thank God. And she'd been sort of sweet to him lately, which was a little bit scary and a whole lot appreciated. He was feeling... Fuck. He felt fragile. Not "going to sit in the corner and cry" fragile, but more on edge than anything else.

It still kind of freaked him out that he was so fucking wrecked from less than a week with Luz. It shouldn't have been that easy to fall so far and hard. He never had before, damn it. But life went on and Win was for damned sure going to keep plugging away until he found some sort of balance.

"Just let it go and move on," he told himself sternly, for probably about the ten thousandth time that day alone.

"Get over him. Be happy for what you had, but it's over." Jesus, saying the words out loud still made him cringe. So much so that he didn't notice that anyone was in his shop, right at first.

God. Win looked like shit. That was the first thought Luz had on seeing the guy. It was followed quickly by the realization that even so, Win still looked better than anything else he'd ever seen. Then the words he'd heard actually registered and Luz couldn't control his own hopeful hiss of breath. "Get over him." That sort of implied that maybe Win wasn't yet. And if that was true, then maybe Luz really had as much of a chance as that Grace woman had said.

Of course, his gasp had hazel eyes pinning him, Win's features sharp and dangerous for just a moment before that long-missed body staggered. Then Win caught himself and it was just time. Time to be a man.

"I..." Luz started, only to stop right there with no idea of how to say what he was feeling. God, Win was right there, and Luz was lost and it was just... "I..."

"Shut up," Win grated out, and God, there was something in that tone that had Luz standing at attention already. Then Win went on. "Just... shut the fuck up. Why. Why are you here?"

Okay, any other day, being told to shut up right before being asked a question would have had Luz laughing. But this wasn't some nebulous other day. It was a moment that could make or break the rest of his life, and he knew it.

He shifted a little bit, moving from foot to foot as he tried to find the right words, those suddenly anxious hazel eyes looking at him like he held the answer to every question ever asked.

And maybe he did, Luz somehow understood. Or at least the answer to the question that mattered right then. But he still didn't have the words.

Words were over-rated, he decided then, and not for the first time. Words could be tricky and mean too many things. But actions? Well, actions spoke louder; there was a reason that was a cliché.

He mirrored the one step Win had taken, then added another, the breath he hadn't been aware of holding just shuddering from his mouth as Win moved a few inches closer, as well.

And then time stopped. Or moved really fast. He didn't know which.

He didn't care, either, because Win was right there, less than an inch away. He could feel the heat of that strong body just radiating toward him, pulling at him like a magnet of some sort.

"You, Win," he finally whispered. "I'm here because this is where you are." And then he couldn't speak, couldn't even begin to formulate more words, because there were soft lips hard against his own. There were strong, capable hands tight on his waist. There was Win's longed for body pressed up against his own and Luz didn't care if he never spoke again. Ever.

That was a good start, Win thought fuzzily, losing himself in the long-missed sensation of touching Luz again. A damned good start. He'd need more of an explanation eventually, but not yet. Not for a while, even, because right then he had more important things to do. Like take Luz to bed and show him—remind him—of just how good they were together.

Of course, that meant trying to get his hand into his pocket, which would be difficult considering how tight his jeans were all of a sudden. It meant unlocking the deadbolt and... Fuck, he'd have to change the sheets, too, because he really didn't want Luz to know how fucking pathetic he'd been all these months... and shit, his new assistant was supposed to be showing up any time now, which just sucked big, hairy donkey balls, and... "Wait," he grunted, trying to pull away. "Wait, baby. We can't... I mean, someone's coming here, and we should talk, and..."

Luz growled, holding on tighter, fingers digging into Win's flesh through his T-shirt and Win honestly thought he'd never felt anything so good. Or so bad, depending on how long Luz was planning to stick around this time.

"We're both gonna be coming here in a minute, Win." Luz was almost begging and some sick part of him loved it. Loved that Luz sounded so desperate, so fucking needy. "God, just... I locked the door. Now, touch me, Win, okay? Please, Win. Please. I know you're mad at me, but please... It's been so long. Need you. Need you, Win."

And Mike fucking Elmira could wait outside, Win figured. Unless the cries and screams scared him away. If they did, then fuck it. He'd manage on his own. With Luz. Because no matter what the Luz wanted, Win wasn't letting him get away. Not again.

“Y-yeah,” he agreed, meeting hot, wild, gray eyes that looked at him with what he hoped was love. “Need you, too, baby. I... yeah.”

Just like that, they were pressed together again and Luz seemed to be trying to crawl into him from the lips down. Which was fine, as far as he was concerned. It wasn’t like he was going to last long enough to get naked this time, anyway.

Later, though. Definitely later.

Chapter Eleven

Luz was almost entirely sure he liked Win's house. Only almost, though, because he hadn't really seen any of it, aside from the bedroom.

Oh, he'd passed through it, but he'd been too focused on 'naked' and 'want' and 'need' and 'now, damn it' to pay much attention. Even more focused on the way he was feeling for those first few hours of touching and stroking and kissing and sucking.

He still wasn't ready to get up and wander. Not when Win's arms were wrapped tightly around him from behind, that lightly haired chest up hard against his back.

He thought he might actually be bruised, just from the hold Win had kept on him ever since they'd left the shop. He was pretty sure he would find small, purple ovals on his thigh from the drive over, if he looked.

He wasn't looking, though. He didn't care. Or not in the bad way. Hell, he hoped there actually were reddish spots turning darker as time went on. It would mean Win was as fucking helpless as Luz was.

He felt his lips twitching, smiling as Win's teeth nipped roughly at the top of his shoulder, and Luz just about purred. "Mmmm..." he hummed. "I think I was right. I really do love your bed, Win. It's... God, it's fucking comfortable. So are you. This."

Because he was finished with trying to be all suave and cool. Suave and cool hadn't gotten him anything other than four months of feeling lost and alone and fucking stupid for not just speaking his mind instead of making the damned call that had dragged him away in the first place.

Luz had learned his lesson, and he'd be damned if he didn't learn from his mistakes.

Lord. That almost sounded like Luz was trying to say something real. Like Luz was repeating his earlier words about the mattress—the ones he'd first spoken when they'd collapsed on it within minutes of getting to the house—in order to tell him something. And while Win thought he might have an idea of what that something was, he was still too broken and uncertain to trust to what he thought he heard.

Yes, Luz had come back. That was definitely a good sign.

Hell, he hadn't even hesitated when Win had insisted they go to the house, and that was—maybe—an even better one.

They'd kissed and touched, stroked and rocked. There had been lube and condoms involved in their reacquainting. Repeatedly. And God knew they'd exchanged words, but none of them had actually been informative. Or declarative, if Win was going to be honest with himself about what was bothering him.

Yeah, they were good together. He'd already known that. Had known it even before Luz had shown up out of the blue—again—and pressed right up against him. And yeah, there were definitely emotions involved.

Win didn't know whether the emotions on his side were the same as those Luz was experiencing, though, and that had him just... tense.

Even in the midst of the best afterglow he'd ever known, he was tense and worried and not entirely certain that Luz showing up again meant what he wanted it to mean. Or that he really had it in him to make the guy stay for good if Luz had some other scenario in mind.

It was sad, Win figured, but entirely true, that the time they'd been apart had let him think. Had let him harden himself to certain realities.

And it was time he shared that knowledge with his younger lover. No matter how badly Luz might take it.

He forced himself to pull his lips away from the nape of Luz's neck, and even though he paused a moment to admire the dark circle he'd sucked to the surface of the pale, soft skin, he still shook his head.

"It's not," he answered, finally responding to Luz's words about comfort. "Well, okay. The bed is, yes. But I'm not, Luz. This isn't." And God help him, but his arms just held on tighter when Luz stiffened against him and then tried to pull away.

"It could be," he added, words flowing from him and hopefully directly into Luz's brain through that pale, perfectly shaped ear. "Fuck, this could be so damned comfortable, and so easily, baby. But I don't know what it is we're doing and I don't know whether you're even staying past tonight and... Fuck, Luz! I know I'm old enough to know better, but... What is this? Why are you here? And none of that 'because I am' shit, okay? Just... tell me what this means to you." And there. That said it all, and in words he figured Luz couldn't misunderstand. He hoped.

Luz's eyes were tearing. He thought there might be some dust in the air or something. Or else he was just as much of a girl as El had called him when Luz was fourteen and El had found out about him and the being gay.

Either way, though, there was no way he could pretend. No chance he could try to finesse his way around answering. Win was too smart to be fooled by tricky words. And even if he wasn't, Luz didn't want to deny the truth. It was just harder to tell than he'd expected.

It had been one thing before. When he'd been back with the band and Thom. When he'd been getting out of the fucking hole he'd gotten himself into.

He'd been able to tell himself that once he was free, he'd go to Win and just be honest.

Now, though... Well, it was different when Win was right there behind him, those strong, agile hands on his skin while the questions—which were really all just different versions of the same one—just came at him.

His hands sought out and found Win's, his fingers working their way between thicker digits and tangling there as Luz forced himself to breathe slowly. Evenly.

He was a little bit scared out of his fucking mind. He could feel Win pressed up against his spine. Feel the long, deep breaths the guy was taking. Hell, he could sense the way Win was waiting for some sort of reply. And he couldn't do it.

Couldn't speak to empty air, even with knowing Win would hear him. Couldn't lay his soul bare and not see the way those hot, hazel eyes lit or dimmed in reaction.

For fuck's sake, Luz grumbled to himself. He couldn't stand not watching Win's face when he said what he needed to say.

He couldn't bear to be looking away and take the chance of not seeing joy... or even revulsion. One would make him feel reborn and new. The other would have him wanting to die. But he couldn't just... not know. Not any more.

"Win," he whispered. "Let me... God. I need to. Let me look at you. Please." And yeah, he was sort of begging. He didn't care. Hell, Luz figured he owed Win that much, now that he kind of thought he maybe understood how much it had hurt when he'd just left, the way he'd done.

When Win hadn't asked him to stay, a part of him pointed out, but then again, that part of him usually noticed everything in a way that made it someone else's fault.

But those strong, muscled arms were loosening and Luz was turning, just like that, and when he finally let his gaze meet Win's, he... gasped.

He gasped at the heat in those eyes. Gasped at the need and longing and fearful desire. He gasped at the sensation that this was the make or break moment he'd thought was already past.

Then he made himself smile, well aware that the effort was shaky, at best.

“It’s true,” Luz whispered, eyes still caught in Win’s focused stare. “Why I’m here, I mean. I wasn’t lying before. It’s because you are, Win. And if you were in Alaska or Antarctica or at the God-damned North Pole, I’d be there, too. Even with the fucking crazy-ass snow, okay?” He bit his lip. “I. Everything was. Christ.” Luz sighed. “It was all wrong. Nothing felt right or good any more, okay?”

God help him, but Luz had a feeling that his eyes were begging just as much as the rest of him. But Win was holding him tighter, big hands pressing him hard against all that warm skin and toned muscle, and there was something in Win’s eyes that implied the same sort of feelings, though there was a certain reserve there, too.

Luz would get past that, though. Or so he hoped, because whatever it took, he was there for good. Or until Win threw him out, which he hoped wasn’t going to happen.

Then those hands were harder on his skin and Win was breathing roughly.

“Just say it,” Win demanded, and regardless of the words, it sounded more like a plea than an order. “Tell me, Luz. Fuck, just...”

“I love you,” Luz announced, his entire body trembling at just throwing it out there like that without having any real clue as to how Win would react. “Fuck! I love you, you big jackass! Need you! Why else would I be here? Why would I be all ‘Mike Elmira’ if I didn’t? I. There’s nothing for me, without you! Don’t you know that?”

It was only the smallest portion of Win’s mind that noticed the comment about his new assistant and it would remind him later, but for right then? The rest of him was in control, and hearing those words—‘I love you’—spoken so insistently, while Luz looked at him like he was a God who might choose to bless or smite on a whim, had him lost. Wanting. Needing.

God, he wanted and needed to tell Luz just how much those feelings were returned. But he needed to know Luz meant it. That Luz trusted him enough to believe that Win would never do anything to harm him. By intent or accident.

He pulled Luz closer, his own swiftly hardening shaft meeting Luz’s softer one. “Show me, baby,” Win whispered. “Ride me, Luz. Right here. Right now. I’m clean, baby. I swear it. And I need you. Need you like breath.” This was the moment, Win knew. The moment when Luz would either believe him or not. Trust him all the way or pull back.

He wasn’t lying, either. Of course he wasn’t. He hadn’t done anything unsafe in years, but he still got tested every six months. Hell, he’d show Luz his results from two months earlier if the guy wanted him to.

He kind of felt bad for pushing without displaying the paperwork. He was even about to take it back when Luz's stunned stare registered.

But then those wide, gray eyes lightened, the fear fading, and Luz was pushing him onto his back. Then one long, toned leg was thrown over his thighs and Luz was right there. Right there on him, that long, thin cock hard again and sliding just a bit on his own thicker one while those gentle, talented hands pressed onto his chest, his nipples peaking beneath Luz's palms.

Then Luz was staring deep into his eyes and Win could feel himself shaking on the inside as that taut, toned body shifted on his own bulkier form. "Been clean all my life," Luz said softly, his voice so intense, Win could almost have come from that alone. "Never even sucked anyone without latex until you, Win. And I trust you."

Lord. Luz's even, white teeth were latched on that pale bottom lip, and fuck if Luz's body wasn't just sliding onto him, stretching around him, but so slowly. He could feel every fraction of an inch gained as Luz opened to him, took him in. It was... fucking amazing.

"I trust you," Luz said again, and Win couldn't help the pride swimming through him at the fact that Luz's voice was more of a whimper than anything else. "And I love you. I love you, Win. Love you. Never knew what I needed 'til I met you, love. Never knew. Thought it was fame, but I don't need a bunch of strangers wanting me or admiring me. Just need you, Win. You. Just you, and God, I need to move now, okay? You feel so... God, it's so fucking real with you. And bare, I..."

Yeah, Win thought. Yeah. Real. True. Them. Win and Luz. Win and lose. And they'd done both. Won and lost and now... maybe won again, for good.

His hips arched up, hands tight on slender hips that had already been bruised and would likely hurt later with how hard he was gripping them again.

He couldn't help it, though. Not when Luz was just rocking and heaving and shifting on him, that stunning fucking ass sliding up and down on his thick, burning shaft.

"Close," Win whispered, fingers flexing roughly and pulling a loud, startled shout from his lover's body. "Already close, baby. So fucking close. Love you, Luz... love you, too. God. From the minute you sh-showed up at my d-door, I think..."

And Luz's hole clamped around him like a vise, the hands on his chest flexing over his nipples. His own ass tightened in time with his lover's, their bodies just writhing and rocking, shaking and shivering into orgasms so simple and yet complex that Win thought they'd be decades figuring it out. Which was fine. That would still leave them plenty of years to find more things to explore.

“Love you,” he whispered again. “Never letting you go.” And that was all the warning Luz needed, he figured.

Fuck... Luz was pretty sure he'd never come so hard in his life. Not without even a touch to his cock. Not even with Win. But Win was keeping him, which had him pretty much happier than he'd ever been, so it was fine.

It was also fine to just lay there on top of Win's stockier body and breathe, that thick shaft slowly softening in his ass while big hands danced slowly up and down his spine.

He could feel the liquid heat inside him. Not as much as he'd felt it when Win first came, but it was like a subtle, pervasive warmth that told him what they'd just done. Naked. Bare. Together. And God, he'd believed Win when he'd said he was clean, but the amazing thing was... Win had believed Luz, too.

Luz would never have lied about something like that, of course, but it just felt so damned good that Win knew it.

“Love you,” Luz murmured, the words mostly lost in the crook of Win's neck, but he had a feeling the guy heard him anyway.

Then those arms tightened around him more, holding him right there, so simple and easy, and Luz knew for sure.

“Jesus,” Win muttered back, still sounding stunned. “Jesus, Luz. Mine. Forever, right?”

“Yours. Always,” Luz mumbled, the last four months of tension and fearful hope finally catching up to him. Not enough to push him into sleep, not yet, but enough to have him treasuring the languid heat of the moment.

“I could take a few days off, baby.” He felt Win's lips pushing the suggestion into his hair. “Just stay right here where we can... be, hmmm? And you can maybe explain that whole Mike Elmira thing.” Then Win chuckled softly and Luz thought he was falling in love all over again. “Or not. There are more important things to do with our mouths than talk. For a while, anyway.”

That was a very good point, Luz told himself, even as he nodded against Win's chest. He really wasn't going anywhere, after all.

Win had hired him, sight unseen, because of his drawings. Which was really just a bonus, he figured. He'd be able to earn his own keep, now that he was effectively broke.

Even so, he felt like the richest man in the world, for having Win. Win's love. Win's heart.

That was more than enough for anyone, Luz admitted with a smile as he finally let himself drift off, still spread wide by his lover's softening shaft.

End.