



She's Got Balls

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*To Kevin Mullinax,
Thanks for everything.*

Love, Mia Watts.
;))

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Chapter One

“Don’t forget to tuck ’em, sweetheart.” Agent Jennings slapped Chris Tarpington’s shoulder. “God, I love fresh rookie meat.”

Chris tried to smile good-naturedly, but really, he wanted to storm out of the sector office and slam things.

“What are you complaining about? Your first op and you get to go undercover with the local police *farce*,” Mathis shouted after Chris, not even trying to cover his booming laughter.

“Swing your hips, Tarp. Hold your chest out,” Jennings coached.

I’m going to fucking annihilate this case, Chris thought. No fucking way would he be humiliated on his first big assignment by dressing in drag. The detective assigned with him would have to take that honor. He smiled in grim determination.

Clutching the case file in a white knuckled grip, he stalked through the office to the public area and the conference room where his new partner waited. Some of the desk jockeys snorted as he walked by. He shot them each personally designed death glares.

“You’re the big guy now, aren’t you, Tarp?” one of them mocked as he passed. “Or is that big *gal*?”

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch,” another of Chris’ old co-workers quipped. “Those big girl panties can *bind*.”

By the time he got the conference room, his shoulders felt tight. *God, what a nightmare*. Chris steeled himself with a deep breath and brushed the blond strands obscuring one eye off his forehead.

He almost snorted. Detective Vincent Pilk didn’t know it yet, but the tables were gonna turn. Detective Pilk would be wearing the dress through this op, and Chris would let him think it

was an honor to do it. With a new plan firmly lined up, he swept into the conference room to tell Pilk how things were going to be.

“Aw, *shit!*” Plans crashed into a heap and spontaneously burst into flame. This? This was Detective Vincent Pilk? A man whose name inspired visions of protruding Adam’s apple, knobby knees and sailor suits? “Damn it! You’re a fucking *bull.*”

Broad shoulders, dark curling hair and a tight ass turned slowly with a demeanor of being inconvenienced. Pale blue eyes zeroed in on Chris with laser intensity as mocking dark brows rose in arrogance. Full, chiseled lips quirked upward higher on one side than the other. All together, he looked to be patiently waiting out Chris’ perusal, taking his initial assessment in stride.

There was no way on God’s green Earth a man with the shoulder span and arm circumference of Vincent Pilk could put on a dress. A wide chest narrowed to lean hips and runner’s legs. And two hundred twenty or forty pounds of red-blooded American linebacker physique swallowed Chris’ five foot, eleven height, and slammed it down with another six inches, easy.

“How the hell do you detect anything without being spotted?” Chris wondered aloud. He circled the Detective, shaking his head. “You’d make one *fugly* woman.”

Pilk folded his arms across his chest, looking more immovable by the second as his smile disappeared. Amusement still twinkled in the blue eyes set in the olive complexion of pure Italian heritage, complete with high cheekbones, square jaw and what looked like a permanent five o’clock shadow. A pale scar curled from the side of his bottom lip toward the point of his chin and stopped just shy of a barely noticeable cleft. Chris would have to be an idiot to force the dress issue.

“Is this a set-up?” Chris laughed suddenly, realizing the sector guys had pulled a good one on him. “It’s a fucking set-up. Shit, for a minute there, I thought you were my ops partner. I mean, shit, what were they thinking, right? I could just see you tottering around in red heels and talking about your latest casserole recipes.”

Tears streamed from the corner of Chris’ eyes. He slapped his hip and peeled in another round of laughter.

“Oh, God, this is amazing!” Chris wiped his eyes and shook his head to show he was duly impressed. “*You’re* amazing. I mean, God, *look* at you. A gigantic bodyguard with attitude

is just what I need in a fucking wife. Damn, I sure as hell wouldn't fuck you in a dress, *Vincent*."

The breath slammed out of his body. Chris' feet dangled off the floor and two meaty fists wadded his shirt as the wall pressed unforgivingly against his shoulders and head. "What the fuck?" he gasped.

Pilk's stony face, and inch from Chris' nose, snarled. "You're a foulmouthed asshole who talks too much. You're careless and stupid and you will never, ever, ever call me Vincent again."

Chris' eyes widened. "Sure, okay," he gasped.

"My name is Vin, are we clear, rookie?"

"Clear." Chris' voice came out strained and wispy. "Can I come down now?"

"You boys done yet?" The gruff voice of Chris' sector head barked somewhere beyond them.

"Yep. Done," Chris agreed.

Vin smirked, dropped Chris to his feet, and tousled his hair. Chris wheezed, trying to catch his breath. Both men turned toward the room at large where the sector head stood shoulder to shoulder with the police chief. Neither looked pleased, although Chris suspected it was a glint of barely concealed amusement that glittered in the chief's eyes.

"This is serious business and we don't have time to whip out a tape measure for your dicks." The police chief tossed a manila file on the table and it slid several inches toward them.

Chris reached out and snatched it up first. The room felt like every bad covert ops movie ever created with stern faced department heads as a united front on one side of the table and the mismatched duo of investigators on the other.

"Why Feds?" Vin asked his chief.

Flipping through the file, Chris pretended that the answer didn't matter. Didn't want to acknowledge it was a good question. Especially given the case parameters of going undercover as a married couple. Another excellent question "the meat" could have asked—why not a woman Fed?

"Interdepartmental relations. The DEA is involved too, just not in the op. We've been asked to facilitate a new way of approaching crime involving multiple departments in a manner more amicable than historical cases," the sector head explained. "No more jurisdiction arguments, only shared resources and shared discovery."

Chris snorted. "Yeah, that'll work." He felt the regard of the others on him, but continued

flipping through the file until his eyes caught on the surveillance photos of soccer moms and women juggling kids or weeding in their gardens. How the hell did they expect him to fit into the community in *drag*?

“You see, genius,” Chris said, addressing Vin. “My question would have been, why the fuck are you having two men go in undercover as a married duo? There are women better suited to this work.”

“Are you declining your first mission?” his sector head asked.

“No sir. I’m declining the robust masonry of my so-called partner. Give me a *jenny* and I’ll have this case cracked in no time. Vin here will just fuck up my stats. This is a fluff case.”

“It’s a test op to see how we work together,” the sector head corrected.

Vin wrapped a beefy arm around Chris’ shoulders. “Aw look. Our first family spat.”

“Fuck off, meat locker.”

Vin dropped his arm after giving him a warning squeeze.

“Because,” the chief said, raising his voice to be heard, “Tarpington is going in as a wife who used steroids in her teens to get ahead of the athletic competition. It gives you two a viable start and explanation into why he’ll be involved in drugs now. Vin is leading this shindig, doing the background work. But the whole operation hinges on Tarpington’s infiltration. He’s the front guy. Girl.”

“The details are in the file. Read them carefully. Memorize the cover story we’ve set up for you and the main players. Chances are they will test you. There’s no room for error,” the sector head warned.

“A housewife drug ring?” Chris considered tossing the file back across the table, but pissing off his boss didn’t sound like a genius plan for instant success.

“Yes. Sixty percent of all drug transactions and users are in dense city populations,” the chief said.

“So why not go there?” Chris asked.

Vin’s lips curled into a sneer. “Where did you think the other forty percent came from? Dairy farms?”

“The suburbs,” the chief answered for Chris, though he didn’t have to.

“This case deals with importing drugs of several varieties and their distribution. That’s why we think a steroid user will work for this cover. The visual proof will go a long way toward

your credibility.” The sector head gave him a once over. “And you won’t be too ugly dressed in drag—passably masculine.”

Chris felt his lips twist unhappily. “And the beefcake? Why him?”

“He has a body builder’s strength with an immaculate case record. Not only is he great at his job, but pairing you with a leaner build would seem contrived. Vin is big enough not to find a masculine woman threatening,” the chief said.

“Glad to see the boys in blue haven’t given up stereotyping,” Chris muttered.

“Does the little guy ever shut up?” Vin asked his chief.

“I’m not fucking little, Gigantor. You’re just fucking super-sized.”

“Are you ready for me?” a chipper female called from the doorway.

Chris looked at the duffle-toting redhead. “And who the fuck are you, my daughter?”

“She’s your depilatory and image specialist.” The sector head’s chuckling amusement had Chris squinting at the girl.

“My what?” Chris asked.

“She’s your wax and buffer, moron.” Vin gave the girl a broad wink. “Give him a Brazilian. It’s critical to the case.”

“A what?” Chris repeated lamely.

“Yes, sir,” she said, smiling through an impressive blush.

“We should leave, Vin. Tarpington has some work to finish before you move in tomorrow.” The Chief circled the table and herded Vin out.

“You should wear pink. It’ll look great with your coloring,” Vin threw over his shoulder as he strode from the room.

Chris watched, transfixed at the swaggering, shoulder swinging harmony of Vin’s powerful body in motion. Agents and office staff cleared the way for him, unconsciously giving him a respectful berth.

“Yep,” the sector head said, coming up beside Chris. “Classy, Tarp. Less than ten minutes with your new partner and you let him take you up against a wall. Now you’re exchanging grooming advice. I’d say you lost that battle.”

“Fuck off,” Chris snarled.

The standard friendly razzing scraped a little too close to the truth. He’d never disclosed his sexual orientation—not the agency’s business—but being up against a wall with Vin didn’t

sound like such a bad idea. His adrenaline was still pumping after their zinging exchange.

He laughed, clapping Chris on the back like they mutually shared the joke. “Make sure she gives you mace. Three weeks without rowdy sex and a guy like that might come looking for it under *your* skirt.”

Chris shot him a baleful look. “Three weeks without sex and I’ll be hitting up one of the druggy housewives for sex. Vin can fend for himself,” he said with a smirk, playing into the expected locker-room talk.

“Just remember that one’s a detective. If you put up a fight, he might use his cuffs on you.”

“Damn, boss, it’s an op, not prison. The wife isn’t putting out anymore?”

Jennings’ smile faltered. “Yaste tell you that? Shit. Get the fuck outta my sight and do whatever she tells you,” he said, cocking his head toward the woman who had begun setting up tubes and lotions on the conference room table.

“Yeah, yeah,” Chris muttered.

The woman stepped around Chris and shut the door. She handed him a thin cotton dressing gown. “Here ya go,” she said, trying not to crack a smile. “They told me to tell you that the rest of your wardrobe will be on site when you arrive. But before you get there, we have some work to do on you.”

He stared at the gold and green, sixties inspired cloth with huge daisy print. He flicked a gaze to the woman who no longer tried to suppress her amusement. “You telling me you’d wear this thing?” he asked.

“Not even if it meant a week long paid cruise,” she said sweetly. She moved back around to her potions and assorted tubes, pulled out a bag and unrolled it. Clear plastic pouches with assorted paintbrushes, small and large powder containers, tubes of bright color, pencils, and beige creams stretched out before him.

Chris thought again about Vin, this time carrying a lady’s makeup case and sporting a pair of commando boots under a long flowing dress. The image didn’t compute and only made the reality that Chris was stuck with the role ever more apparent. “Fuck.”

“You don’t know how to put on makeup, do you?” Pity softened her voice. “First disguise?”

“Haven’t a clue,” Chris said. Sick coldness hit the pit of his stomach. The base of his

skull throbbed at the four-foot display. God, he so didn't want to do this.

“C’mon, I’ll show you. But first you have to strip and put that on, and then we gotta do something about those eyebrows.” She turned her back in a show of privacy and God help him, Chris stepped toward the dungeon of scented, color-coordinated hell.

Chapter Two

Fucking panties *did* bind, damn it. Or it could have been the hosiery trucking up his ass, and whichever sadist had fucking invented the bra was going to see a slow, painful death right after Chris had a chance to soak his cramped toes.

A couple of moving grunts wheezed by with the last few pieces of furniture. Chris tried not to reach between his ass cheeks and yank out the offending fabric. Being ladylike sucked. His ass would be chafed before the end of the day, and any prospect of sex would have to be avoided at the risk of additional irritation. Ass-burn wasn't a pleasant prospect.

Which reminded him: He owed Vin for the fucking Brazilian bikini wax which still had him straddling ice packs whenever he had a chance to sit. That shit was just mean.

"I told ya you'd look good in pink," Vin said.

Chris glared up at him. "Seriously? You're going to start this now?"

"Pitch that a little higher, *honey*, you're sounding hoarse."

"Okay, let's start it then," Chris snarled. He shot a look around quickly taking stock of who'd get to see this next little stunt and how loudly he had to project his voice.

Vin's eyes narrowed.

Swinging his cheap Gucci knock-off and smacking Vin in the chest, Chris screeched feminine outrage. "How *dare* you? We haven't even moved in and you're already calling your girlfriend *on my cell phone*! You are a piece of work, Vinny. How do you expect us to make a fresh start when you can't leave the old life behind?"

Chris smacked him again and again until finally the baggie filled with oregano he'd been trying to dislodge flew out of the purse and landed on the sidewalk.

"Vinny?" Vin growled under his breath.

“You said I was special. You said I was the only one for you. But you think I’m fa-fa-faaaaaat!” Chris dropped his arms limply and began to wail dramatically.

“Oh, shit,” Vin said, his eyes as huge as saucers. “Shh! Hey, cut that out.”

“You said you liked my body but, but, but, but you *lied*.” Chris resumed smacking Vin’s chest, head, arms, anything he could reach with the ridiculous handbag. From the corner of his eye, he noticed the mover picking up the baggie and two women whispering over their fences nearby.

Vin looked about wildly, alternately ducking and trying to shush him.

Chris wailed louder. “Why don’t you love me anymore? Haven’t I given you everything? Don’t I go down on you whenever you want? Even when you ask me to do those nasty, nasty things, don’t I do them?”

“Shh! Yeah, baby, you do all that.” Vin held out his hands placating.

The bigger man’s hunched shoulders and panicked expression only fired Chris’ drama.

“And that time you begged me to put on the diaper and clown mask, you said no one had ever done that for you before.” Chris turned to the chuckling movers with tearful eyes. He gasped sharply. “Vinny! They’ve got my *oregano*! Vinny, make them give it back! I can’t make your lasagna without the oregano.”

“It’s okay, baby, I’ll get it back. I swear.” Vin turned and leveled a look at the mover with the baggie. “My wife wants her oregano. *Now!*” he thundered.

The hapless man tossed the bag into the air. Vin caught it and shoved it at Chris.

Nice save, Chris thought.

“Now, Christy baby, say you won’t leave me over a little call.”

Chris blinked, searched for something to harp on and came up dry. He sniffled instead. “Oh look, my mascara is going to run.”

“It’s okay. You look great. I think you’re sexy when you get jealous.” Vin said, a toothy grin mischievously split his lips.

“You don’t think I’m fat?” Chris wheedled.

“No, baby. You’re sexy as hell.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yeah, baby.” Vin gently cupped Chris’ hips and drew him closer. Close enough that Chris could see the way Vin flicked glances around them instead of looking at him. “Don’t like

those wimpy, flabby chicks. I like the way you give as good as you get.”

Interesting. How far could he push Vin?

“Oh, Vinny,” Chris sighed. Then with a wicked grin of his own, Chris threw his arms around him. “Kiss me.”

Vin’s nostrils flared and his icy gaze locked on Chris’ uncertainly. Chris tightened his smile and fluttered his lashes in challenge. He knew the moment Vin committed by the steely determination in his crystalline gaze and the half-quirk of his lips as he accepted.

He descended, swooping down to take Chris’ lips in heated assault. Firm and full, they crashed against his. Day-end whiskers prickled the outer rim of Chris’ mouth. Strands of hair from the wig stuck like loose netting on Chris’ perfectly applied lip-gloss, distracting but not creating any resistance. Chris’ lungs expanded sharply yet the air he breathed saturated his senses with a hint of mint and oak. Only enough to make him wish he could breath deeper still. His stomach plummeted, or soared, or both, and deep rolling tingles engulfed unsuspecting nerves in his pelvis.

Whistles and hoots from the movers filtered through the roar of blood in his ears.

When Vin’s tongue swept into his mouth, Chris’ knees weakened. He blamed the damn heels—oh holy hell, his dick was on fire!

Oblivious to the pain, Vin’s fingers tightened on Chris’ hips, dragging him forward. In defense, Chris pushed at Vin’s chest.

“Stop,” Chris gasped for only them to hear. Groin burning, he clutched the front of Vin’s shirt to hold himself steady. The pain lingered—none too subtle proof that his restricted *junk* didn’t take kindly to stimulation.

“Your dare,” Vin reminded.

“My rules,” Chris finished, still wincing. *Damn that man. He can fucking kiss.*

“You look pale,” Vin said, holding him as he ducked to see Chris’ face.

Onlookers would see it as a lover’s embrace. Chris tipped his head aside. It would be a cold day in hell before he let the guy see how badly he wanted to continue that kiss. But maybe next time without restricted blood flow to vital parts of his anatomy. Shit, that hurt!

“You okay?” Vin asked. He scanned the neighborhood. “We should go inside.”

Chris had no desire to move just this second. Maybe in another moment or two when things went completely dead in his groin region. “Why? We look like the happy couple making

up after a spat.”

“You look like you’re about to puke.”

“You mean you don’t get that reaction all the time? I’m shocked,” Chris said.

“Shithead.”

“Mutant.”

He ventured a look at Vin. Clearly, the lumbering giant had never tucked his stiffy before or there would be no confusion on his gorgeous mug. Admittedly, Chris hadn’t either, pantyhose being a new, and not delightful, experience. Well, he would hardly explain to Vin that the impromptu kiss had taken Chris well on the way toward a hard-on. Vin would never let that kind of information drop.

Pain subsided and Chris released Vin’s shirt. Chris shouldered his purse and swept past him, chin held high. He needed privacy to pull himself together. Okay, and let some of him out. Of pantyhose.

“By the way,” Chris said as Vin followed him into the house. “The Master suite is mine. You’ve got the guest room.”

He glanced back.

Vin scowled as though preparing to object.

Chris held up a finger to stop him. “It has a vanity table in the bathroom. When you have to put on makeup and set your wig, we can trade places. Until then, you can stretch your six foot huge on one of the twin beds across the hall.”

* * * *

Chris watched the slatted track of light swing from one wall to the other as dawn advanced into early morning. He strained to hear beyond his door to where he’d relegated Vin. *A man that big should snore. He should talk in his sleep or something.* Chris heard nothing.

After the night before, he hadn’t heard so much as a grunt from the other man. The door had closed early once they’d eaten bologna sandwiches and potato chips at opposite ends of the couch. Meager, albeit expensive, furniture already graced their appointed places, the kitchen had been put away and the closets filled with clothes and linens. All because neither of them spoke.

He didn’t think it was a hardship for Vin. For Chris, who wanted to know if Vin had any thoughts about that kiss, it was torture.

Can a straight man kiss another man like he needed it more than air? Could Vin *act* that

well? The Chief had said he had a blemish-free record of undercover work. There'd been nothing else to indicate Vin batted for the same team Chris did.

But that kiss.

It still made his breath catch and butterflies dance in his belly. And it still made his cock fill. The way it filled now. Chris reached beneath the sheets, firmly rubbing himself.

His breathing had just started quickening, his head just slicking with moisture, when Vin knocked on his door.

"What?" he yelled, pissed at the interruption.

"Get up."

"I'm up." *Understatement of the year.*

"Get dressed."

"I'm busy," Chris snapped, circling his thumb over his moist slit before sliding back down his cock. He watched the foot-shadows shift beneath the door. Finally, they moved away.

Chris quit stroking. He sighed and swore, then rolled out of bed. Looking around for a pair of jeans, he rolled his eyes when he realized there weren't any. "Undercover ops suck."

No evidence existed to prove he wasn't who he said he was. Not even a fucking pair of sweats. He sighed again and reached for the godawful daisy robe. "I'll fucking kill him if he laughs," Chris muttered.

He washed up and cinched the belt tightly around his waist. He stormed toward the kitchen with his daisy-covered dick pointing the way. "I'm coming!" he shouted.

Vin leaned in the kitchen archway to the living room and entry, a steaming coffee mug lifted to his lips. His eyebrow arched pointedly as his glacial gaze drifted over Chris and paused on his cock. Still sipping, he reached down the side of the entry wall. Vin lifted an umbrella and popped it open toward Chris. "Fire when ready."

"Fuck off."

"Pretty sure that's your department at the moment," Vin quipped. He closed and lowered the umbrella, giving Chris plenty of excuse to look at the expanse of naked, muscled chest.

"It *would* have been if you hadn't interrupted. What the hell was so important that I had to get up at the ass-crack of dawn?"

Vin took another leisurely sip of coffee. "Oh, there's no question that it's *wood*." He twisted toward the kitchen, hollering through the pass way as he walked away. "How do you take

your coffee?”

“Cream, no sugar,” Chris said, following him in.

The rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee permeated the air. Chris found himself tracking the nimble twist of Vin’s fingers as he uncapped the cream, the flex of tendons over the back of his hand when he lifted the carton and poured carefully. Metal circled and clicked against stoneware, held in Vin’s grasp.

“What’s that?” Chris asked, his eyes settling on a bright orange makeup bag.

“Gag gifts from your crew. Fuzzy cuffs, lube, condoms.”

“Assholes.”

“Whose?” Vin asked calmly.

Chris chose to ignore the barb.

Vin turned and offered the creamy brew to Chris, handle out, even as he took another sip of his own. Chris took it. He scrubbed his hair absently, not caring if the blond strands stood on end.

“God, this smells good,” Chris murmured. Tasted damn fine too and gave him an excuse to drop Vin’s gaze.

“Mm,” Vin acknowledged.

“You’re a big talker, aren’t you?”

“Mm-hm.”

“Thought so. Listen, I’m not sure about you, but I don’t think that a lot of housewives are ready to take visitors this early in the morning. Think you could let me sleep a little longer next time?” Chris asked.

“You stickin’ with that story?” Vin lifted his chin in the direction of Chris’ groin. “Gotta admire your commitment to the cause.”

“It’s been a good boy, chained up for hours at a time. Thought I’d let it out to roam and pat its head. What the fuck do you care?”

Amusement twinkled in Vin’s eyes. He shrugged a shoulder and quietly continued to sip his coffee.

“Bottomless fucking mug is what you’re holding. Sip, sip, sip. I think you’re hiding shit. Hard to trust a guy who doesn’t talk and hides behind a mug. Spit it out, already. I can see the wheels turning.”

“Your switch always on *pissed*?” Vin asked.

Chris clamped his jaw.

Vin refilled his mug. He swung the carafe toward Chris in offer.

Black coffee straight up. Figures. “No, thanks.”

Vin reached for a bottle Chris hadn’t noticed, and squirted a healthy dose of chocolate syrup into the cup, swirled the spoon, and resumed sipping.

Chris’ startled laugh spilled forth. Hot, ripped, and deadly—with a sweet tooth? It was like seeing a dog meow.

Vin studied him over the rim of his mug, motionless but for the tip and release of his cup.

He watched Vin too. One thick arm folded across his chest served as a surface for the other elbow. Even in relative repose, Vin’s musculature appeared flexed and taut beneath his tight skin. The barest sprinkle of tiny black curls dusted his pecs and veed downward into a slim trail, lost beneath the edge of his jeans.

Solidly built without an ounce of fat, on a wide-shouldered, thick wristed frame a Valkyrie would be proud of, Vin could kill a man in one lethal, fluid motion. Though he’d never been small compared to most men, he wouldn’t stand a chance against Vin in combat.

Vin propped his ass against the line of cabinets and casually crossed his ankles. “You were right,” he said, finally breaking the silence.

“About?”

“Your mascara smudges.” The amused twinkle had re-entered Vin’s eyes.

“Ah.”

“You look like shit.”

“I had a rough night,” Chris said.

“Looks like some woman jumped you, fucked you all night long, and left her makeup all over your face.”

A wry smile tugged at Chris’ lips. “My bedmates don’t generally wear makeup. It’s not a quality I find attractive.”

Vin shrugged a shoulder again. “I dunno. I think it’s kinda cute.”

Chris stilled. Did he mean women waking up with smeared makeup was cute or *Chris* smeared with makeup was cute? He mentally chewed on the words, searching Vin’s expression for a tell, but found nothing.

“Good call on the fight yesterday,” Vin said.

“Seemed like a good idea at the time. And it got the stash of oregano out in the open. I just hope the fight didn’t scare off any of the neighbors.”

“It didn’t.”

“How can you be sure? Most people avoid domestic issues, and we raised the roof,” Chris said.

“The two women talking didn’t like me. They sympathized with you even after the kiss.”

Chris felt his cheeks heat. He didn’t think he could stand the tension any longer, so he busied himself finding the bowls they’d unpacked yesterday. Snatching a box of cereal, he tried to convince himself he wanted breakfast more than he wanted Vin.

Vin set down his mug and made to leave. “Typical housewives *don’t* expect early visitors, but you require more maintenance than a typical housewife. You’re wearing old makeup, but you still look like a guy. By the time you’re done, there will be a knock at the door,” he said, alluding to their earlier conversation.

Chris grinned privately. Being forced to wear a dress, makeup, and tuck his parts emasculated him. Knowing Vin thought he looked like a guy despite that, pleased him.

“Tarp,” Vin called from somewhere down the hall.

“Yeah?”

“Pretty robe.”

Chris looked down at the huge floral imprint on puke green. At some point, his dick had slipped through the front of his boxers and poked its head from the folded material at the center of one gold-toned daisy.

His earlier blush drained away. Had Vin seen? Chris closed his eyes on a groan. Something told him he’d be left to wonder. “Goddamn it! That doesn’t look fucking desperate at *all*.”

Chapter Three

Vin had been right. Chris had barely slicked on his gloss and straightened his skirt when the doorbell rang. And in the process, he made another discovery. Vin looked ridiculous in a suit and tie. They reached the front door about the same time.

“Lose the coat,” Chris said.

“Office guys wear suits,” Vin argued. His face took a stubborn cast.

“It looks stupid and fake on you. Take it off before I open the door,” Chris ordered in a whisper.

Vin shrugged out of his coat and draped it over the arm holding his briefcase. Chris grabbed it back, shook it gently and folded it back at the shoulders before re-draping it.

“Office guys take care of their shit and know how to hang their suit coats. I thought you were good at this stuff.”

Vin opened the door before Chris could say anymore. The smug look didn’t disappear as they faced the two ladies from the day before and another on the front step.

“Hi! Welcome to the neighborhood. I’m Doreen.” The tall blonde smiled widely at Chris.

“Welcome. I’m Carla. We saw you move in yesterday and had to do the neighborly thing and drop by. Is this a good time? We brought a coffee cake. And oregano,” the second woman sang brightly. “Sounded like you go through a lot of it. I grow mine.” Her red hair glittered in the sunlight with shades unnatural to human coloring.

“I gotta get to work,” Vin mumbled.

“That’s okay. It’ll be all girl talk anyway. We’ll just catch her up with the gossip.”

Doreen’s stiff smile and cold eyes held no welcome for Vin. The others smiled woodenly too.

Chris bit his tongue to keep from laughing. “Guess you’d better go, Vinny.”

Vin ducked his head and started out the door.

“Aren’t you going to kiss your wife goodbye?” Doreen asked.

Mercifully for Chris’ cock, Vin dropped a cursory kiss on his cheek and took off. Chris stood aside to let them pass. “You’ll have to excuse our moving mess and my husband. He’s not much of a talker.”

“Except to his girlfriend?” Carla gently squeezed Chris’ arm, her eyes liquid with understanding. “We heard the whole thing, honey. I’m so sorry.”

“You have to forgive Carla. She’s doesn’t hold back,” Doreen said, fondly.

Chris held a hand out to the third woman, who hadn’t spoken yet. “Thank you all for the welcome. I’m Christy.”

“Nina,” she said, smiling widely.

Chris motioned them to the living room and then set another pot of coffee on. This was almost too easy. Drug dealers that came to him? What’s the catch? The case file said Christy would get a referral from another inside agent, but felt too simple. What had they been told? And Vin hadn’t said anything about disappearing all day to a fictional office while Chris infiltrated the ring alone.

Yeah, he wanted the glory, but this front man shit felt more like solo work. Dresses, drag, and now the neighborhood? Fucking fantastic. Now he had to figure out female small talk for God knew how long until Vin decided he’d spent enough time at a bar or something and came home.

And what did Chris do? Housework? Fuck that! Laundry? Hell no. And he wasn’t making Vin’s bed either. He might go smell the pillow—but he *definitely* wasn’t making his fucking bed.

What the fuck did women talk about anyway? Why hadn’t he paid more attention to his sisters?

Chris set out the pot of coffee and several mugs. Every trip back into the living room was greeted with silence and large commercial smiles. They looked like toothpaste ads for daytime programming. *Your teeth can be sparkly and new too, with DentaGreat.* If it had been Vin smiling like that, it would have had a distinct, shit-eating quality to it.

Doreen got up to get plates, forks, and a knife. It was all very tea-party. He worked hard to keep his pinky crooked like Nina’s and nibble on a corner of the cake like Carla before setting

it aside.

Chatter turned to gossip about babies and who was cheating on their wives—a not too subtle u-turn in bringing the conversation back to the fight between Vinny and Christy.

“Are you going to be okay? Does he ever hit you?” Carla asked.

He fought down the urge to defend Vin. Did he make something up? Would that make them more sympathetic or shut down communications for the drug bust by seeming weak?

“He’s hit you,” Nina said, interpreting Chris’ silence.

“Vinny gets a little worked up sometimes. He hasn’t hit me, exactly.”

“That’s fine, sweetie, you don’t have to tell us. We’re strangers, but you’ll come to trust us. If he lays a hand on you, we will take care of it,” Doreen said.

Chris had the distinct feeling he was being written off. That wouldn’t do. “Oh, don’t worry about me. Vinny is a pussycat most of the time. He lets me do pretty much whatever I want.”

A speculative gleam entered Doreen’s eyes. Carla grew quiet.

“I’m sorry. I owe you an apology.” Chris went with his gut instincts and kept talking. “Vinny likes things rough, but he hates upsetting me, which makes it convenient when I want something.”

He hoped he sent the women a sly smile. Having never seen his lips with gloss on them, he couldn’t say if it worked or not until interest caused Carla to lean forward.

“Like a new house in a new neighborhood with a garden,” he continued with a grin. Chris sighed dramatically. “He cheated on me once and it makes perfect leverage.”

Carla whooped. Nina grinned, and Chris caught the impressed nodding of Doreen agreeing with his conclusion.

“Christy, my husband and I are having our annual spring dinner party tomorrow night. Would you and Vinny like to join us?” Doreen asked.

The invitation came cautiously as though his answer mattered a great deal more than Doreen let on. He had no sense of what, just that this moment of networking could be critical to their *in*.

Chris leaned forward and flashed her a genuine smile. “We’d love to. Should I bake something?” *God, please no unless you want macaroni and cheese with tuna chunks.*

“Just yourselves.” Doreen stood. The others followed suit, so Chris rose too. “Girls, I’m

sure Christy has things to get done today. It was a pleasure meeting you. I look forward to tomorrow night.”

“Thank you for the welcome,” Chris answered.

“We’ll introduce you to the others at the party,” Nina told him.

Others. Excellent. Vin could fucking eat Chris’ awesome-ass undercover abilities because that invite felt fucking significant. “Can’t wait.”

“Keep the plate until the cake is gone,” Doreen said as she left.

Carla laughed, “Yeah, it’s not like we don’t know where you live.”

Goosebumps rose up on his arms. The three women left laughing. Chris laughed too, trying to share the joke. He tried to shake off the foreboding.

Where the fuck was Vin?

* * * *

“Where the fuck is Vin?” Chris prowled the hallway hours later.

The microwave read ten thirty. Chris had long since shut all the drapes, changed out of his outfit after going to the grocery store and finding ways to be seen around the nearby community. He’d also washed all the makeup off his face this time and then decided a full shower was required to detox his body from woman smells.

He’d searched the Vin’s room, being careful to put things back the way he’d found them, too. Vin used a triple razor head instead of electric and wore trunk boxer shorts. His pillow smelled like the coconut shampoo he used and Vin preferred *sports scented* deodorant.

He knew exactly what the well-worn gray sweatpants felt like on Vin’s skin because Chris was wearing them. He didn’t want to risk the peek-a-boo incident a second time. If he couldn’t have his own pants, he’d use Vin’s.

Chris had *cooked*, damn Vin, and he was late for macaroni and cheese dinner with a side of chicken ramen and fruit cocktail.

Finally he heard the lock on the front door turn. Chris ducked behind the couch and out of view of the open door, not risking the chance someone would look in and see him, un-womaned. When the door shut and bolted, Chris bounded to his feet.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Chris put his hands on his hips.

Vin smiled slowly, tiredly. “Oh good, something new. You’re pissed.”

“You couldn’t have called or something? Couldn’t have told me this morning where you

were going while I worked the case and schmoozed the neighborhood? Your dinner's in the kitchen. It's cold."

"Hi, honey, I'm home," Vin muttered. Propping the case on the entry table, he clicked it open and pulled out a file.

Chris ran a hand through his hair. "Whatever. Where were you all day?" he asked, biting back his annoyance. He circled the couch and motioned him toward the kitchen. Popping the ramen and macaroni in the microwave, he reheated the food and faced Vin.

"Running the case files. Cross-referencing. I.D. searches. Paperwork. Satellites don't show any grow-house hot-spots. No buildings putting off the kind of heat signatures it takes to grow weed covertly," he answered, tossing the file on the counter top.

Vin tugged at the knot on his tie and unbuttoned his shirt, pulling both from his body and wadding them up on the counter. His white undershirt strained across his chest, taunting Chris with semi-transparency and flat, dark nipples beneath.

His mouth went dry. Dryer still when Vin pulled off the band holding his hair back. The microwave dinged and Chris gladly dealt with the food. His own bare chest made Chris' hours in the gym and special training seem ineffective.

He'd look at the satellite pictures later. When there weren't prettier things, like dark nipples and handsome men, to look at. And why hadn't Vin *told* him he'd gone to research? Shouldn't they have discussed it?

"You didn't think I should know the plan this morning?" Chris asked.

"You had company."

"Over coffee would have worked."

"Wasn't thinking about it then," Vin said. He motioned to Chris' pants. "My sweats?"

"All I have are girl things. Figured you could share."

"The guy-look works for you."

Chris shot him a dirty look.

"So do the sweats."

Chris handed him the plate of warmed over pasta and a bowl of canned fruit. Vin looked from the food to Chris. So help him, if Vin laughed, Chris would scalp him. How, he didn't know, but he'd do it.

Vin wisely kept from comment and took his food to the dining room. Chris grabbed a

couple of beers and joined him, plopping down in the chair adjacent.

“Did you do each other’s hair?” Vin teased. He must have read something in Chris’ expression, because he let it drop into silence unanswered.

“Find out anything?” Chris asked.

Vin shook his head. “Thanks for dinner.”

They both looked at his plate. Vin’s gaze met his and they both started laughing.

“Yeah, sorry. I’m not much of a cook. There’s coffee cake, though. Doreen, Carla, and Nina were the women who came over this morning. By the way, we’ve been invited to Doreen’s house for a spring dinner party tomorrow night. Apparently they do it every year and they’re going to introduce us to more people.”

“Ah.”

“Trust me. This is a good thing. I get the feeling that I passed some kind of social test for women and they’re letting me in the club,” Chris explained.

“Uh-huh.”

“You’re invited too. But just so you know, I told them that you cheated on Christy once and have been trying to make it up to her ever since. Christy uses your guilt to get what she wants, yada, yada, yada, and you’re actually a sensitive teddy bear type.”

Vin nodded, scooped up another mouthful of macaroni and cheese.

What did it take to make the man talk? Chris tried a different tack. “I think we should go casual, but not in jeans because I don’t think these people wear jeans. It’s like living in a gated community but without posted signs on how to behave and what to wear. I think I need a manicure. They all had perfect nails and soft hands. You think they could have noticed my hands when I shook theirs?”

“Probably.”

“Shit. I don’t have anything to wear for tomorrow night. Do you think I should pull out that blue dress with the high waist?”

Vin’s expression turned blank.

“The white one, maybe, with the lace shrug? That one buttons over my throat but opens to show a hint of cleavage,” Chris goaded.

“Uh...” Vin lifted his beer and sucked down several gulps.

Chris waited for him to finish, plastering a patient smile on his face and widening his

eyes innocently.

“Sure,” Vin finally said, shrugging as he answered.

Absently, Chris scratched his arm and folded them on the table. The guy didn’t talk for anything. Not when freaked out, yelled at, insulted, or made uncomfortable. *Something* had to make Vin crack.

“What’s the plan for tomorrow?” Chris asked.

“Takin’ the day off work to help you unpack.”

“What a guy.”

Vin frowned. He put his fork down and pushed the plate away. He’d eaten every bite.

Warmth spread beneath Chris’ breastbone. Pride and pleasure. “You want more?”

“No. I’m good.”

“Cake?”

“Save it for coffee tomorrow,” Vin suggested. He leaned onto the table too. “You still pissed at me?”

“No. I’m good,” Chris mirrored.

“Are you?” Vin’s eyes crinkled at the corners.

Ah, I’ve said something to amuse the giant again. “What do you mean?”

“Can’t tell if you’re good or not, rookie.” Vin sat back in his chair. “Can you hack the party as a couple?”

“I can hold my own.”

“I don’t know. You wimped on the fight scene in the front yard,” Vin said, caging his words in doubt.

“I did not! I had you by the short hairs with the entire neighborhood for an audience.”

“I kissed you and you freaked out. We’re supposed to be married. What happens if I put my arm around you or pinch your ass at the party?” Vin asked.

Chris’ ass tingled at the suggestion. “One, you won’t be pinching my ass at a dinner party. It’s uncouth. And two—” God, he did *not* want to explain Vin’s kiss giving him a hard-on. “Breaking it off was all part of the rouse.”

“Sure it was.”

“It became part of the rouse when I made it part of the rouse this morning,” Chris defended.

“But you choked at the time.”

Not admitting to a hard-on. Damn uncomfortable getting turned on with your dick tucked.

“I knew it. You choked,” Vin announced. “So what will you do when I make a pass at you during the party?”

“You want to make a pass at me?”

“You said I’d do anything for you and you use me to get what you want. Only a lovesick moron would be led around by a leash.”

Chris snorted. “Fine. Make a pass at me and see what happens.”

“Now?”

Well, that’s not exactly what he meant, but seeing the alarm in Vin’s body language egged Chris on. “My couple acting ability sucks and you plan on making a realistic pass at me during the party, right? If I’m so bad, don’t you want to make sure I don’t screw up the op?”

Vin squirmed.

Great. I’ve got the hots for my homophobic partner. “Just pretend I’m in drag, all right? I’m not squeamish. Or pretend I’m a chick or something. Whatever floats your boat.”

“Should brush my teeth first,” Vin mumbled.

Now we’re getting somewhere. “Fine. We’ll go brush up and meet in the living room. It’s work, Paul Bunyon, quit freaking out.”

As he brushed his teeth, the same question circled his mind. *Do I even want to kiss a guy who’s homophobic and I’ve got no shot keeping?* Great fucking question.

It was a great fucking question when he flossed and rinsed and it was still a great fucking question when he ended up in the living room with a Neanderthal hottie who looked nervous as hell. Did Neanderthals get nervous?

“We could tell people you aren’t demonstrative.” Chris spoke first, giving him an out if he wanted one.

“Too late for that.”

“Yeah, I guess move-in day kind of blows that one out of the water.”

Calm descended on Vin. He slipped his hands into his pockets. He arched a brow. It was the same look he’d worn when Chris had first stormed the conference room.

What was he waiting for, an invitation?

“Ready?” Vin asked.

Hell no.

“Yeah.” Chris shrugged.

Vin closed the four steps between them before Chris’ shoulder had finished dropping. Cupping Chris’ face between his hands, Vin swooped in. His mouth covered Chris’ roughly, possessing it instead of accepting permission to be there. Sweet peppermint lingered on Vin’s lips and flavored the firm sweeping pleasure of his tongue as it plunged past Chris’ defenses.

For the second time in as many days, Chris’ knees wobbled. But this time, pain didn’t force him to push away. Chris clutched Vin’s ribs, holding on as much as he dared while Vin tasted and branded every part of his mouth.

Vin changed angles, smashing their noses together. Chris didn’t care. Pulling further away to do the same maneuver would have been an unbearable distance.

His lips felt raw, bruised, scorched, and still Vin coaxed Chris’ response with the skill of a deft seducer. He hung on, powerless to do anything else. Not wanting to stop him, ever.

Vin’s tongue lapped, rubbed, stoked. His teeth closed gently on Chris’ tongue to scrape when he withdrew it, then suckled him back in only to release and chase after.

Chris’ head swam dizzily. Vin moved one hand to sift through Chris’ hair, tickling his scalp far more gently than he laid claim to his mouth. Chris’ moan couldn’t be stopped, having been ripped from his soul by a master.

And then all the sudden, it ended. Chris swayed as Vin abruptly let go and moved away. Aside from the flush beneath his olive complexion and kiss-roughened lips, Chris saw none of the signs of devastation in the other man that Vin had ravaged in Chris in the wake of that kiss.

Bereft, cold, and in shock, Chris stared dumbly.

“That’ll work,” Vin murmured.

Chris commanded his lips to move, his voice to speak, and managed a loose-headed nod in place of words.

“Aw, damn. I didn’t put the dishes away. Since you did dinner, I’ll clean up, okay?”

“Uh-huh.” *Where in God’s name was his voice? Vin’s tongue stole it, that’s where.*

He should walk away. Go to bed. He should do something else besides stand around looking like an idiot.

Water turned on in the kitchen. Plates clinked together. The water shut off. “Tarp?”

“Yeah,” he answered, so grateful his voice had returned that he didn’t mind the huskiness.

“The sweats look better than that damn robe. Keep ’em.”

“I’m gonna,” Chris pointed down the hall, searching for the word he needed. Apparently, not all his words had found their way home. Not that Vin could see him pointing. “Sleep,” he said. “Gonna sleep.”

“Night.”

Perplexed, he looked toward the kitchen. “Night,” he answered.

Chris shook his head with wonder and confusion, then headed for his room. Where he laid in bed when Vin turned off the last light and shut his door. Where he continued to lay for another couple of hours, wondering what the fuck he was going to do now that Vin had permanently imprinted himself on Chris’ every waking thought.

“Fuck me,” he swore. “I’m screwed. I should just tell Vin I want him and get it over with.”

Vin would probably think Chris’ crush on him was funny. Or appalling. Chris had never been ashamed of his orientation, though, just guarded, and he wouldn’t start now. He threw back the covers, swung his feet to the floor, and marched to Vin’s room before he lost his nerve. Vin had a right to know that his gay partner wanted a piece of his ass. He’d be a little less careless with kissing Chris, but that would spare them both when the case ended.

Chris tapped on the door. “Vin, you awake?”

Chris entered his room soundlessly. Vin sprawled on his belly across one of the twin beds, naked. A streetlight glowed through the blinds to touch his body with a lover’s admiration, skimming the dips and silvering the rises. He slept with his face propped on folded arms allowing his black hair to spill like ink over his cheek, jaw and shoulders, reaching only the top of his back where the ends snaked in a twisted pattern on glowing skin.

Chris’ chest constricted with longing. Vin’s upper back sloped to a dip before the sudden rise of Vin’s round, sculpted ass. Chris’ gaze followed the perfect symmetry of Vin’s spine to the dark crevice hiding the sweet spot Chris wanted to nudge with his now insistent cock. Thick, rounded hamstrings, dimpled knee backs, wide square-ish calves to knobby ankles and pale soles shimmered in masculine beauty on twisted sheets.

As he watched, Vin bent a knee and shadows crept tantalizingly away from his upper

thighs. Chris tried in vain, willed his eyes to adjust better than humanly possible, to see the sack nestled there.

“Vin?” he croaked.

Vin sighed in his sleep. Chris watched the light play on his ribs as they expanded and contracted on each deep breath.

“Shit. For a top detective, you sleep like the dead,” he whispered.

He sidled over to the bed. Like a kid unable to stop himself from reaching into the candy jar, Chris dragged the tips of his fingers from Vin’s shoulder blade to his hip. He hesitated, wanting to touch more, lower, but didn’t dare tease the sensitive skin of Vin’s cheeks and be caught doing it.

Closing his eyes to block Vin’s naked image, he managed to draw his hand back. “God, you are fucking magnificent.”

He left before he could change his mind and jumped back into his own bed. Pulling the covers up tightly under his chin, he turned away from the door to discourage himself from thinking about waking Vin with intimate caresses. Then he started counting sheep to distract himself.

Except the fence became Vin’s naked back, and the repetitive jumping of sheep turned into Chris dry-humping Vin’s ass.

Definitely not a sleep aid.

Chapter Four

Chris sighed, picked up his pillow and crammed it over his exposed ear. How many weeks was this assignment going to run? Chris would deserve a fucking medal when it concluded, for his show of restraint.

Many more kisses from Vin, and he'd be the first wife in history to tent her own dress. Not to mention the cum stains—from the inside.

Something fuzzy touched his wrist. Chris flung his arm to dislodge whatever vermin had crawled into bed with him. The pillow joggled off the side of his head and he heard the distinct *snick* of cuffs closing.

“What the fuck?” Chris bellowed.

His arm yanked upward forcefully and Chris twisted around to see Vin loop the long chain joining furry cuffs around several thick spindles. Wide, warm chest filled Chris' vision. In a disjointed link of reality and surreality, he tried to piece together what was happening with what he knew. His free wrist held down, it all came together in a matter of seconds when the final furry cuff closed and locked on his other wrist.

Vin sat back, surveying his work.

Chris tugged instinctively. Metal scrapped wood, but he couldn't lower his arms.

“What the *fuck*?” he bellowed again.

“Actually, I don't sleep like a rock,” Vin said.

Chris' eyes widened, his heart kicked up in crazy tempo, and his ears rang with the realization that Vin had heard everything, and well enough to comment on the few words Chris had spoken. “Shit.”

Vin sat by Chris' hip in dark silhouette.

Two nights on duty and Chris' partner felt he had to cuff Chris in order to avoid sexual harassment in his sleep. That didn't bode well. In fact, it sucked big and hairy.

"So now what? You going to leave me chained up all night to protect your modesty?" Chris asked.

Vin nodded. "Yeah, you'll be chained up all night." He stretched, reaching for something just out of Chris' sight, and with a click, soft yellow lamp light filled the room.

Chris sucked in a sharp breath. Vin was still naked. And holy fucking missile silos, Vin was *hard*.

Vin reached behind him and dropped the orange makeup kit on Chris' sheeted stomach. He arched a brow and pulled out the box of condoms and lube the agency boys and thrown in with Chris' wardrobe.

His stomach twisted in knots. Did Vin pull them out in invitation or condemnation? "You already knew about those things. You saw the gag gifts before I did."

Vin's expression turned inscrutable. He rested his hands lightly on his massive thighs and seemed to wait for Chris to explain.

Chris licked his lips nervously. He tested the cuffs again. They rattled in the silence between them.

"You came into my room," Vin said, after a moment.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Why did you come into my room?"

"I thought you'd be awake and I needed to tell you something about the case. I swear," Chris explained. Foreboding etched worry in his belly.

Vin folded his arms across his chest and tucked his chin.

"I, uh—fuck man, not like this. At least allow me some dignity when I'm talking to you." Annoyance gave Chris something to hang on to. To fight with.

"I'm waiting. Can't image how the case has anything to do with touching me or commenting on my body."

Chris searched his brain for an explanation that would make the truth more palatable to Vin. His silence answered guiltily for him.

"I thought about it after you left. Couldn't come up with anything to explain it, case or no case, that didn't sound sexual. I tried, Tarp. I tried to think of any possible meaning to that one,

and couldn't do it. S'why I'm here. Trying to get the truth. You gonna give it?" Vin asked.

Chris huffed. "Probably not anything you're going to like."

"I'm awake. What did you have to say?"

"We can talk about this in the morning. Clearer minds, fresh start, all that," Chris hedged.

"And you can rest assured that I won't lay a hand on you."

"You got me up. Let's hear it."

"Fine." He rolled his eyes. He yanked on the cuffs again. "Seriously?" he asked, holding up his wrists and delaying the inevitable.

When Vin didn't move or alter his expression in anyway, Chris licked his dry lips one last time before confessing. "I'm gay. As my partner, I thought you should know that before we play the happy couple and start making out again."

"Why is being gay a problem?" Vin asked, flatly.

"Wow. You just aren't going to make this easy for me, are you?"

"No."

"Of course not. It wouldn't be a problem, never has been a problem with any agent I've had to team up with for regular cases. This may be my first undercover gig, but it's not my first partnership. It's a problem now because I'm way too attracted to you and it pisses me off."

"Ignore it," Vin said. His expression shifted thoughtfully.

"I *would* fucking ignore it if you didn't keep deep-throating my tonsils and walking around like a half-naked god, leaving me with the mother of all hard-ons. *Capisce*?"

"*Capisco*," Vin answered back that he understood. "You want my ass."

"It's a great ass," Chris agreed, lamely. And he was fairly certain Vin was about to hand him *his*.

"Haven't seen much of it."

"Take my word for it."

Vin leaned forward, bracing himself on his hands at each side of Chris' chest. "I will."

"And now you'll uncuff me?" Chris asked.

"No." Vin quirked a smile. His cool blue gaze flitted over Chris' face thoughtfully. "Why did you tell me to stop when I kissed you in front of the house?"

"Have you ever tried tucking your cock and then getting a hard on? Just about fucking killed me."

“Thought you’d stop me tonight.”

“Wasn’t tucked,” Chris said, his voice hitching. His gaze slid to Vin’s mouth. “Fuck. You going to quit asking me questions anytime soon? It’s the middle of the night, for fuck’s sake.”

“Inhibitions retreat when fatigued.”

“Who are you trying to un-inhibit? Me or you?” Chris asked. The cuffs were becoming a tired addition to the conversation. Vin either needed to let him go or tell him what the fuck he wanted already. Hadn’t he already confessed the worst of it?

As though in slow motion, Vin lowered his head. Chris’ breath caught. Was Vin going to explore his sexuality on the confirmed gay man? He didn’t look to be teasing. Aside from the furry handcuffs anyway.

The heat of Vin’s breath teased Chris’ lips and he relaxed his mouth to take whatever Vin decided to bestow. God, Vin was a fucking wet dream. Faraway, up close, on his damn head, Chris suspected.

Vin sweetly molded their lips together.

Chris groaned, lost in the warm stubbly slide of parted lips on parted lips through heated gasps. Their tongues touched almost timidly before another pillowy testing of their mouths against one another. When Vin finally broke the kiss and sat up, Chris felt almost as light-headed as he had last time, when Vin had all but devoured his mouth.

“Fuck,” Chris whispered. “You’re clearly into torture.”

“You liked that, did you?”

He couldn’t read Vin. What did the kiss hope to accomplish and why the fuck was Vin tormenting him. If he so much as looked at the tented sheet, Vin would know exactly what effect he had on Chris. As though there were any question. It’s not like Chris could reject Vin’s experimentalism.

“Not an *observant* detective, are you?” Chris mocked. His good humor flagged.

Vin’s brows rose. He’d seen that look before. Right before Vin had taken the challenge to kiss him in front of the neighborhood. *Fuck. Note to self: never fucking challenge Vin and think you can save face.*

Vin laid his palm on Chris’ chest. He dragged it down, knocking off the bag of gag gifts and taking the sheet lower. He stopped at his belly. The head of Chris’ cock touched the back of Vin’s hand and left a drop of moisture.

Inscrutable, he stared at Chris for a long time. Chris was in agony to know what he thought, or to break the fucking cuffs and make Vin touch his throbbing cock.

Chris clamped his jaw. He wouldn't play this game of cat and mouse, waiting for the physical torment just to see what Vin would do next. Chris wasn't that guy. He made things happen, he didn't wait for them to happen.

In a show of defiance, he kicked off his sheet, baring himself. They both knew how his body reacted to Vin's kiss, his touch. Chris lifted his hips, displaying himself unselfconsciously.

"This," Chris taunted, "is what's called an erect penis."

Vin hissed sharply through parted lips.

Chris' cock dripped pre-cum. Each pulse beat visible in the slight lift and fall of his engorged shaft. Bared and stretched, Chris wanted Vin to use him, satisfy them both.

"Are you going to use it, or memorize it for posterity?" Chris asked.

An enigmatic smile tugged a sexy smile from Vin. His eyes twinkled as they narrowed in some unknown amusement. "Use it?"

His husky voice shot strait to Chris balls. He watched in heady anticipation as Vin finally touched him. His palm rubbed up the underside of Chris cock.

Horror flashed like cold sweat. "Oh shit!" Chris' balls tightened, sharply. He tried to hold back the tide, but couldn't. Cum streaked up his cock and spilled in hot spurts over his chest and Vin's hand. Chris' stuttered groan punctuated each milky jet.

Vin lifted his hand, looking at the spay that glistened on his fingers. "That was easy."

"Fuck! No, wait, that never happens. I swear."

"Be right back," Vin said. He stood and Chris caught sight of Vin's cock, jutting forward as he walked away.

"What about you?" Chris asked, twisting in the furry cuffs to reach the enticing rigidity of male flesh. God, he wanted to taste it so bad.

"What *about* me?" he said as though the thought hadn't occurred to him.

"Where are you going?" Chris yelled so Vin could hear him from the bedroom. Fucking giant had fucking left the fucking room with him still fucking cuffed to the fucking bed.

Vin stepped back into the room and dropped a warm, wet washcloth on Chris' chest. He wiped him down, then folded up the cloth and tossed it onto the lamp table.

"You can't leave me cuffed all night," Chris said.

“You sure?”

“*Vincent*. Don’t fucking leave me cuffed all night, man.”

Vin’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “What was that, rookie?”

“You heard me.” Chris hated this game. Who knew the Jolly Green Giant was a cock-tease with a sadistic twist?

For a moment Vin stilled, then with a sudden burst of motion, he planted his hands on either side of Chris’ head and kissed him. His hot, muscled body grazed his, turgid cock prodding Chris’ abdomen as he climbed over and dropped down next to him on the bed.

Chris caught Vin’s lip with his teeth, pulling when Vin tried to retreat.

“Ow,” Vin muttered, sounding pissed.

He kissed Chris hard, punishingly, licking against his teeth until Chris couldn’t resist him. It became a dance of dominance with lips, breath and tongues as weapons. Prone, with Vin having leverage and advantage, Chris fought a losing battle. The room spun and his ears rang. His body responded with a familiar ache.

Oh, God, I want him.

Vin brought him to life. His nerves, his skin awakened in excruciatingly raw newness with passion Chris hadn’t felt for any other lover. Chris wanted to explore him, touch him, taste every last inch.

Damn cuffs have to go.

Vin combed his fingers through Chris’ hair, trailed over his cheeks. He nipped at Chris’ lips. Harder than playfulness, but not hard enough to hurt, it fired Chris’ blood with desperation. Vin quit tormenting his lips, suddenly dipping to suck his neck, then close his teeth sharply on Chris’ collarbone while he smoothed his hands up his arms.

Curling his fingers, he gently scored Chris’ flesh as he brought them back down and farther to roll unobstructed nipples. Chris bucked. Soul-deep, his groan ripped from him like the waking cry of a dead man.

“I want to touch you,” Chris pleaded on ragged gasps.

Vin laughed, a low rumbling chuckle that made Chris’ cock weep. “I know.”

He ran his hands over Chris’ stretched torso, temporarily turning his ticklish sides into untried sensual zones.

“Please.”

“Shut up. I’m busy.” Vin detoured, not missing an inch of Chris’ chest or shoulders with his curious hands. Sometimes he alternated pressured fingertips, soft caresses, gentle kneading with the sharp edge of his nails.

Chris twisted against the cuffs. His voice left him in an open-mouthed cry when Vin feasted on his nipple, taking and pulling it between his teeth. Oh, God, rough sex had never felt so good.

Vin ventured lower. He grasped Chris’ cock and the swift, firm pumping made Chris senseless with need. Eyes rolled back, he was vaguely cognizant of more than hands, lips, teeth and cock toward the sublime pleasure of release, he barely noticed when cool gel touched his ass.

One finger then two plied him, rhythmically fucking Chris in sync with his tugging cock.

“Oh, God! Oh my fucking—I’m gonna fucking cum.”

Vin’s wicked chuckle closed the deal, and for the second time, Chris spilled. His hips jerked off the bed. His body clenched on Vin’s thick fingers and Chris slid headlong into shouting, thrusting bliss.

Chris melted back. Vin removed his fingers and continued to milk every ounce from Chris’ cock. Distant ripping reached his ears. Delayed awareness shortened the two-second gap between recognition of tearing condom wrapper and Vin pushing Chris’s knees against his butt.

“My turn, rookie.”

Sudden hilt-driving cock and ass-slapping balls brought Chris groaning back to life. Vin rammed forward, grunting at full entry. He slid almost all the way out while Chris’ body shamelessly tried to hold its prize. The loss didn’t last long. Vin slammed forward and drew out slower, grazing Chris’ prostate with every well-aimed thrust.

Chris could barely keep up. Bombarded with sensations and lust, he hung on to what he knew. Vin—sexy, silent, maniac-in-bed detective—fucked his needy body perfectly. Didn’t he do *anything* badly?

Vin’s cock seemed to swell inside him. Chris wrapped his fingers around the headboard slats, keeping his body steady when Vin’s need took on a demanding pace. Like Chris’, Vin’s body gleamed in the lamp light from their frenzied coupling.

“Harder,” Chris moaned.

Vin slammed into him, their bodies grinding in the gray area between pleasure and delicious pain. With a violent shout Chris felt to his bones, Vin threw his head back and fucked

through the tide of orgasm as though he were raging against the powerful storm.

Chris stared in dazed wonder. The image of his lover, taut, glistening, his eyes sealed and lips curled back at the moment of orgasm, would be imprinted on his memories forever.

Several shuddering thrusts later, Vin's head sagged forward. Their labored breathing rasped together in sawing fashion, like mystical lovers pumping on one another, in their own right.

Wordlessly, Vin pulled out. He snatched the wet washcloth and cleaned Chris' chest and abdomen, then carefully swiped Chris' cock and ass. A lover's gesture or consideration, surely.

Chris didn't know whether to smile or laugh or question what had just happened, so he said nothing when Vin got up and went to the bathroom. Water ran in the next room and whooshed from a wrung cloth a few times, then it shut off. Vin came back clean and gloriously naked. He also made another cleaning pass on Chris' body before tossing the cloth to the table.

Chris waited for Vin to say something.

Could be overwhelmed. That was fucking amazing!

Maybe Vin thought so too. The longer he took, the less Chris felt like smiling.

Vin fished inside the bag and pulled out a small key ring. He unlocked the cuffs. Chris winced as he lowered his arms and rubbed the tired muscles. He had a feeling he'd be sore in more places than that tomorrow...today. Whatever.

He'd just about given up hope of conversation when Vin sat by his hip. He leaned over like he had before, but this time Chris sank his fingers into Vin's hair and pulled him down. Vin let himself be taken, kissing Chris back in soft sucking caresses.

He took hold of Chris' wrists and forced them back onto the pillow.

"What?" Chris' brow furrowed.

Vin sealed a final kiss on his lips. "Good night." He reached for the lamp and plunged them into darkness.

"What the fuck?" Chris called out, groping for Vin with aching arms.

"Might not suck being tied to a rookie after all," Vin said, easily avoiding him and walking to the door.

Chapter Five

Chris awoke to the smell of sausage. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, wondering how he could have drifted off after Vin's cutting goodnight. The red welts on his wrists, rug-burn—fur burn—reminded him with cock-thickening clarity.

"Fuck you, Frankenstein," he muttered sleepily.

Dragging himself out of bed, he showered and pulled on Vin's sweats. Rich breakfast sausage, butter, and coffee crumbled his stubborn resistance and Chris sullenly went to the kitchen.

"Morning," Vin said, holding out a coffee mug.

Chris reached for it, but Vin grabbed his forearm out of nowhere, a scowl on his face.

Shit, morning after regrets?

"From the cuffs?" Vin rotated Chris' arm, studying the fur-burn.

"Matching pair," Chris said, lifting his other hand for Vin to see.

"Damn. I'm sorry." He tenderly placed a kiss on the inside of both wrists.

"I'll wear long sleeves today," Chris said past the tightness in his throat. A kiss the next morning. That meant something, right?

Chris sipped the strong brew. Cream, no sugar. He'd remembered.

Vin flipped the last pancake out of the skillet and handed him the plate, along with a container of syrup. Chris' spirits rose as he took it to the table and discovered an impressive array of breakfast food. Pancakes and syrup, sure, but sausage, scrambled eggs with onions, tomatoes, green peppers, along with butter, hash browns, and biscuits with sausage gravy, cut melon and fresh strawberries.

"I got carried away," Vin said, shrugging. He took a seat and motioned for Chris to join

him.

“You cook?” Chris asked, incredulously.

“Dad was a chef.”

Chris dropped into his seat. A blush warmed his cheeks. “You can cook and you ate re-warmed ramen, mac and cheese, and canned fruit cocktail?”

Amusement crinkled Vin’s eyes.

“Why the fuck didn’t you say anything?” And why the fuck had he devoured every bite of it and thanked Chris like it had been appreciated?

“It was good.”

“No, it wasn’t,” Chris said.

Vin passed him the hash browns. A smile softened his lips. “You made it for me.”

He said it like it the answer should have been obvious. Chris would have got up from the table to kiss those lips if things had ended differently last night. Instead, he sat confused, humbled and shocked as all hell.

“Eat,” Vin admonished.

Chris loaded his plate. At first he settled in and ate, scarfing down the food, but the flavor slowed him to savoring appreciation. “Oh my God,” he said, his mouth full. “This is incredible.”

“Your girlfriends stopped by.”

“When?” Chris swallowed, his mouth already watering for the next bite.

“Nine.”

Chris should have been suited by then. “Fuck, why didn’t you wake me up?”

Vin quit chewing and shot him a look of disbelief.

“We’re on a job. I should have been up at *seven*.”

“They’re coming back in an hour to help us unpack. You’ve got time.” Vin’s look turned smoky, knowing. “Besides, you were up late.” He sank his teeth into a strawberry, closing the morsel away from sight as he chewed.

Chris wanted the right to kiss him, swipe the strawberry from his lover’s mouth with a deep taste. Or ask Vin to put those teeth on Chris’ body again. His dick seemed to think the idea had merit.

“Want something?” Vin asked, his voice dark and low.

You. “Thanks for breakfast,” he choked out.

“Welcome.”

Vin’s gaze dropped to Chris’ mouth, his chest. “I’ll do the dishes. You get into drag.”

“I can—”

“I got it.” Vin hooked his head toward the hall. “Not much time.”

“Right.” Chris stood. Belatedly, he realized his erection still pushed at the cotton sweats.

“I *really* liked breakfast,” he said, heading toward the hall.

Vin choked on his coffee, barely swallowing as laughter rolled forth.

* * * *

“You sure you want to give him up?” Carla whispered three hours later. “He’s really something else.”

The women’s admiration grated on Chris’ nerves. He’d watched Vin smile and flirt casually with them for the past hour. Seen the way they twisted to look at his ass. And Vin didn’t seem to mind.

Fuck him.

Oh, God, he *had*. His body quivered knowing exactly what it wanted more of.

“Course not. I like my toys,” he said, flashing what he hoped was a sincere smile.

“You ever want to do a threesome?” Doreen asked.

“What are you ladies whispering about?” Vin asked. He flashed his sexy smile and Nina blushed.

“Vinny?” Chris sang.

“Yes, baby?”

“Can’t you unpack the office or something?” Chris asked sweetly.

“And leave you? With them?” Warm and teasing, his smile charmed the women. It set Chris’ teeth on edge.

“Yep.”

Vin caught him around the waist and hauled Chris up against his hard, sweaty body.

“Yes, ma’am.” Vin’s eyes grew serious. “Whatever you want is yours, honey. Just ask.”

Carla *aw-ed*.

Did he mean it? It looked—real. Chris wanted a lot of things, and they all included Vin naked in some form.

Vin bent, his eyes trained on Chris’ lips. The moment stilled. Flutters hit Chris’ belly.

Memories from the night before when Vin had looked at him that intently brought other memories of thrilling ecstasy and ass-pounding pleasure. He thought of Vin's face as orgasm took him so hard he shouted with the force of it, gnashed his teeth and flexed into shooting proof of his satisfaction.

Sharp pain seared Chris' groin. Gasping, he reeled with the double attack of pain and regret.

Concern clouded Vin's eyes. "Hey," he murmured. "You all right?"

"Christy? You okay?" Doreen asked.

If possible, Vin's tender concern made the situation worse and Chris planted a hand on his chest to push him away. "Fine. Cramps," he bit out, loud enough to be heard by everybody.

He saw confusion, disappointment in Vin's eyes.

"Don't," he snapped, hoping Vin took the hint.

"Yeah, sure." He dropped his arms and turned stiffly away. "I'll see you ladies tonight."

Chris didn't look to see whatever smile he conned them with. He didn't feel much like losing Vin to a gaggle of women. Damn these pantyhose.

A kiss. Just one kiss! Please?

Someone up there hated him.

"Aw, poor guy." Doreen tracked Vin's movements until he'd disappeared.

Now or never, Chris thought, taking a breath. "Do you know where I can get seedlings?" Chris pretended to polish the statue she pulled from the box. "You know, of um—*oregano*?"

The ladies exchanged looks.

Chris ducked his head and reached for another newspaper wrapped knickknack.

"Vinny—he eats a lot of Italian food. Before we moved, I had my own set-up. Of herbs."

Carla snorted.

Nina elbowed her and Doreen smoothly stepped between them.

"Your own herb garden? How nice," Doreen cooed.

"Some specialty stuff," Chris hedged, looking at her meaningfully.

"Oh?" Doreen's smile twisted knowingly.

Chris darted a glance toward the direction of the office. *Time to drop some key words from the cover story.* "My friend, in Emerson, said she heard of someone in this neighborhood who could help me get my garden started. She said she'd put in a good word."

“We might know someone,” Doreen said.

“Cut the crap, Doreen. We knew she was coming,” Carla said. She rolled her eyes at the blonde in obvious irritation. “You’re the grower—”

“*Gardener*,” Doreen corrected sharply.

“Gardener we’ve been expecting. We heard you might settle in one of the other three regions,” Carla enthused. “God, are we ever glad you settled here!”

Nina nodded. “The Green-Queen.”

“Shh!” Doreen glared at her cohorts.

“Oh, please, Doreen. We need the business help. We asked the boss and the boss delivered.”

Chris smiled, making a show of his relief. “Oh, thank God. I thought I had the wrong contacts. You had me worried there for a minute.”

Carla laughed openly. “What made you choose us? With your references, you could have gone anywhere.”

Hot damn, it worked.

“I needed a change,” Chris answered. With any luck, fictional Christy *had* moved into a change.

“But why represent three gardeners instead of a dozen in Morrison or Pendleton?” Doreen asked.

Those weren’t among the list of other territories in the case file. Chris pursed his lips, studying Doreen. “Hinkner and Washal?” he corrected.

Doreen’s smile brightened ten-fold. “Exactly.” She wrapped Chris in a big hug.

Passed the test. “Less competition. Greater room for expansion,” Chris answered the earlier question.

“Well, whatever the reason, we’re glad you’re here.” Carla said. “We’ve got something special for you tonight.”

“Very special,” Nina said.

“Can’t wait.” Chris heard the distinct sound of a shower running and darted a glance toward the office. “So the seedling?” he asked.

“After tonight,” Doreen promised. “But now you should get yourself fixed up. I have the caterers at the house working, but you know how they are—constantly wandering without

direction. Come on, girls. We have a lot to celebrate tonight.”

“Amen to that,” Carla whooped.

The thought of Vin’s incredible body slicked with hot water distracted him. Part of his brain still worked, though, and Chris hooted a pathetic cheer. Right about now, the bathroom lighting would glisten of his muscles. Vin could be soaping up his rock-hard cock. Pain shot to Chris’ groin. “Ow! Fuck!”

“Aw, honey, take some Midol and lay down for a few minutes. We’ll get out of your hair.”

Chris didn’t know which of the women had spoken. Didn’t care either. His brain and his cock had one thing in mind—had *two* things in mind. Taking off the damn pantyhose and finding a way to fuck Vin.

He barely got the door shut but already, he hauled up his skirt and tucked it into the front waistband. Chris reached inside the mesh death-trap-for-males and freed his junk. “Okay boys, let’s see what Chef Vincent’s cooking up in the shower.”

Kicking off his flats, he sauntered toward the hall bathroom. *Time to settle up, Vin.*

Chris eased into the bathroom through billowing steam. He could easily see Vin through the glass encased shower block. With hands pressed to the wall as though holding it up, Vin hung his head and let the water beat between his shoulder blades.

Rivulets formed translucent snakes on his back and over his perfect, round ass. Vin groaned, rolling to his back on the adjacent tile. He lifted and rested the back of his head on the wall, eyes closed, letting the spray touch every part of his front.

Vin’s cock strained upward, taking the insignificant pelting of water on its rigid length and shone with the same reflected light as its owner. An uninvited voyeur, Chris couldn’t tear his gaze away from the sheer beauty of Vin’s form, the composite of the man whose dry humor and hard body stole Chris’ breath and filled his thoughts.

What had last night meant to Vin? Had he used Chris to satisfy his libido and knew that he’d be willing, or did it open the door for something else? Vin had flirted more with the three growers than he had with Chris.

Seeing Vin exposed, vulnerable in his shower as he rested against the cold tile, Chris felt inadequate to the need. Inadequate and disposable.

Chris willed himself to say something so Vin knew he had company. Desire to join him

in the shower, even fully dressed, and take Vin's dick in his mouth lost to fear. Will and desire battled, holding his voice silent and staying his feet.

Inevitably, Vin took his full cock in hand, rubbing up and down the length. He barely strangled off the end of a groan when he thumbed his slit. Eyes still closed, he reached between his legs and fondled the drawn skin of his scrotum. He lifted and rolled them in his palm and up against the base of his shaft.

Chris chest ached and he realized he'd been holding his breath. He could almost feel the ticklish, waking nerves began their ache. His own body sympathetically tingled. Chris reached into the restrictive mesh to pick up Vin's rhythm, to make it his own.

Vin teased himself with feathery strokes to the underside of his engorged cock, like he had with Chris. Dark and deep from his gut, an involuntary groan slipped from Chris' lips. He didn't care if Vin heard him. Vin already knew he wanted him.

He flicking his gaze upward. Vin's slitted, glittering gaze trained on him. Watching Chris watch him.

Vin's soft, quickening pants escalated. Soon. Vin would come soon.

He devoured every nuance of Vin's excitement as it built, from corded neck and flexed body, to the pump and twist of Vin's fist around his gorgeous cock, his excitement escalating when Vin swept from base to crown, jerking faster.

Chris groaned wordlessly, parting his lips, giving Vin a visual to imagine as he seamlessly pumped his cock. Vin's seemed to take the invitation, locking his gaze on Chris' open mouth. His expression burned with arousal.

"Come for me, damn it. Lose control," Chris pleaded, feeling his own orgasm advancing.

Vin pumped his hips into his fist, grunting as he stroked harder, faster.

"More, Vin," Chris commanded. "Because I'd fuck you harder than that."

Vin bellowed as thick, ropey cum shot into the falling water.

Chris let himself go, gasping as orgasmic jets shot from his cock in answer.

Sluggishly, reluctantly, Vin pushed away from the tile, glancing at Chris before turning his face and body into the shower. He blew out, sending droplets flying, then twisted the nozzles until the steady drum ceased. Vin shook back his hair. He opened the glass closure and dripped his way over to Chris.

He touched Chris' cheek, descended in cautious gradients to cover his mouth. Droplets

hit Chris' face. Chris didn't care. They transferred from Vin's body to his like smaller wet kisses.

Vin's moist lips smoothed and warmed before retreating.

"Earlier, in the living room, that was about the tucking?" Vin asked.

The near kiss. He'd been thinking about it in the shower? God, Chris hoped so. He needed encouragement. Needed to know their mutual attraction didn't come about by libidinous necessity but mutual desire.

"Yeah," Chris said, hoping Vin understood the full implications of the confession.

Vin traced Chris' bottom lip with his thumb. This close, the telltale signs of a hidden smile couldn't be ignored, and Chris wondered how many times his sexy partner had masked his true feelings—feelings that would put Chris out of his misery, or create more.

"I turned you on," Vin said, his voice taking a husky edge. "Before I even kissed you, it turned you on knowing I would."

Yep, Vin understands the full implications of that confession.

"Turned me on? Turned? For a detective, you can be really dense," Chris chided.

Say it back to me, Vin. Tell me I turn you on, too. Tell me this isn't a one-sided deal and you want me around like I want you around.

"Good." Vin moved away, reached for his towel.

"Right. Good," Chris repeated, shaking his head. Fuck that hurt. Might as well have said *thanks for the yank off duet, let's find some chicks.*

"Never seen a woman jack-off," Vin teased. "But I think your legging-things are shot to hell."

Chris didn't need to look. He could feel the cool, sticky cum smashed between his dick and the hosiery. He pressed his glossed lips together.

He'd smudged some on Vin. Didn't think he'd tell him though.

But lip-gloss meant Chris hadn't changed out of drag. Wig tape irritated his hairline and the fucking bra pinched. He must have been a sight walking in with the front of his skirt tucked out of the way and his falsies jiggling while he fucked his fist and drooled. It was a damn miracle Vin had been able to get off once he'd laid eyes on Chris.

"I gotta go get ready." Chris didn't think he could hang around any longer, waiting for an admission that wouldn't come. He paused just outside. "I'm in with the ladies. They've accepted the cover. It looks like they've got something special planned for Christy tonight, so I'm going to

put on the wire and call in.”

“That’s good.”

Chris huffed, wincing over the overused word. “Yeah, it’s all *good*, isn’t it? I’ll catch ya later,” he said, not caring if Vin heard his disappointment.

Chapter Six

“No, really, I don’t dance,” Chris told the leering older man for the second time.

“C’mon, it’ll be fun. Let’s give them something to talk about. I’ll even keep my hands to myself,” Harold promised in booze-saturated words. His eyes, however, never left Chris’ falsies. And if the spittle in the corners of Harold’s mouth meant anything, Chris could be sure he would make a grab.

Tall and distinguished, Harold did have attractiveness going for him. And a head-full of thick, white hair. Chris casually searched the room for Vin. He almost smiled when he found him in conversation with a couple, his gaze locked on Chris.

“In that case, yes,” Chris said, sending Harold a forced smile.

He took Chris’ glass and put it on the table. Harold pulled him close. “You know, dancing is like sex with your clothes on.”

Great.

“Christy,” Doreen said, waving to him.

“Hi, Doreen. Oh, I’m so sorry. Well have to finish this later, Harold.” Chris slithered out of Harold’s hold.

“I’ll be waiting,” Harold promised. Threatened.

Chris steered Doreen in the opposite direction. “Thank God you interrupted that. I owe you.”

“Lucky you, there’s a chance right now.” She laughed at her own cryptic joke. “Don’t worry about Harold. He likes women, especially bigger ones.”

Should Chris be affronted? “Bigger, huh?”

“I don’t mean anything by it, darling. He just doesn’t appreciate scrawny girls in size

twos.”

“And you let him grope? What about his wife?” Chris asked.

“Every wife is Harold’s wife, to hear him tell it. Hush, now, don’t say any more.”

Doreen redirected their path and led Chris away from the party. Carla waited for them and ushered them in to another room.

Nina smiled as they all came together. She handed them each a filled champagne glass. A fifth glass bubbled serenely on the coffee table. *Whose?*

“Welcome to the neighborhood, Christy.” Nina raised her glass.

“Welcome to the neighborhood,” the other two murmured.

A fifth person hadn’t materialized, yet Chris kept the question to himself. He followed their lead, raised his glass and accepted the toast. The air hung heavy with meaning.

Had Vin seen him leave?

Chris continued to sip, wondering what happened next and hoping to hell his wire worked. There hadn’t been confirmation from the sector office after punching in the keypad sequence to notify them of possible activity tonight. He could only assume a tech guy listened to everything on the other end and got it on tape if necessary.

“That’s what I like to see. All my women in one place.”

Harold’s voice slid like cold oil down Chris’ spine. He reached Chris’ side and draped an arm over Chris’ shoulder.

Nina giggled at Chris’ eyeroll. She handed Harold the fifth glass.

Doreen winked at Chris.

You’ve got to be shitting me.

Harold dropped his arm and slapped Chris’ ass. Chris kept his irritation in check. This time. If the shit tried it again, he’d break his fucking wrist. His ass had a fucking *reserved* sign on it even if Vin didn’t collect on the invitation.

“The Garden Club has a new member,” Harold quipped. “We’re a dedicated group with connections, Christy. Our clientele grows stronger daily.” He snorted drunkenly. “Grows. Get it? The clientele grows, like weed?”

“Harold,” Doreen snapped.

“Hush up, woman. We’re all associates here. All friends. Isn’t that right, Christy?” he teetered against Chris, planting a wet sloppy kiss on his face.

“We meet on Wednesdays at the children’s library,” Carla said. “Second conference room. Great cover, don’t you agree?”

“Brilliant,” Chris agreed. Who’d suspect a meeting of drug dealers in the affluent suburban children’s library?

Harold leaned heavily on Chris’ shoulder, breathing flammable gases onto his neck.

“And the seedlings I need? I’ll require three different varieties of your best stock for the hybrid we need to boost production,” Chris said.

“That’s the beauty of it,” Doreen said. “It’s all right here. Beneath us, actually. Using solar conservers, our power usage is off the grid and excess stored, or would be if we were a simple family using average power.”

“But we aren’t. The amount of power we get and store, and buy from the power company takes care of the grow house consumption.” Carla added, excitedly.

“It’s here? In the basement?” Chris asked.

Nina giggled. “All our basements and soon yours.”

“Racks and racks of beautiful green weed,” Carla agreed. Her eyes glittered.

Chris thought of the infrared satellite images Vin had showed him. None of the houses showed up as hot-spots. “How do you hide the heat signatures?”

“That’s Harold’s doing. He’s not just our supplier, he’s the brilliant mind behind the high-tech, sensor laden insulation panels,” Doreen explained.

Carla downed the last of her champagne. “It actually absorbs the energy output we use and the plants put off, then converts it and insulates it into cool cells where the rest of our solar energy goes.”

“That kind of financial investment is huge,” Chris said. The idea showed incredible ingenuity and creativity. But how did it convert? How did Harold the drunk know to do it?

“My money. My company. My resources. My free pot.” Harold dragged his hand up and down Chris’ back, far more interested in sniffing than listening to the conversation. “Can’t make money without spending money.”

The implications loomed large. The sales would sky rocket in only a matter of time. With minimal direction and fewer shares to fewer growers—larger numbers would be unnecessary overhead with the income doubling, tripling with the new system for every grower—Harold and his ladies would corner the market.

They'd control drug flow and prices. With premium product and low costs, they'd choke out the other growers until they had the majority. From there the possibilities were endless. Withhold the premium stuff until users got desperate.

And there were users everywhere. Every school, every business, every branch of government.

Unchecked, they'd hold the power. No wonder they wanted what they thought Christy could offer. Organization, networking, resources to reach into several communities—hell *yeah*, they'd want Christy around. *She* provided them a shortcut to the top.

"Harold is a genius," Nina murmured.

"And if Harold wants something. Harold gets it," Doreen said.

"Ladies, why don't you clear out and give me and Christy a chance to get to know each other better," Harold suggested. His arm cinched Chris' waist.

"Fuck, no." Chris stiff-armed him.

Doreen's face twisted, her drawn face and sneering lips classic signs of a reprimand in formation. All interrupted by the door swinging open and DEA agents waving guns.

"It's about fucking time," Chris said.

He ripped the wig off his head and tore open the top of his button down dress. His huge, practical white bra jutted out. Trailing beneath it from cleavage to navel, a black wire told the Garden Club all they needed to know.

"She's a boy," Harold exclaimed, falling on his ass in his effort to get away. "She's a *he!*"

"Busted, so to speak." Chris said with a wry grin.

* * * *

Chris wadded up a dress and shoved it in the suitcase. "Go back and pack up your gear, Tarp. The cleaning crew will take care of the rest," he repeated out loud. "Good, job, Tarp. Nice tits," he said, repeating someone else. "You gonna celebrate? Get laid?"

All things guaranteed to grate on his nerves. He'd showered, scrubbing Christy into oblivion and donned Vin's sweats. Then because he was pissy, he went to Vin's room and took one of his shirts too. He fucking swam in that thing.

He tucked the front of the soft cotton shirt into his sweats and grabbed another skirt.

"You avoiding me, Vin? Afraid I'll want a goodbye fuck and you aren't feeling

charitable?” he said, sneering on the words.

God, his heart ached.

Chris wadded up a pair of stupid hose. “Damn it.” Closing his eyes on fresh pain, he fought the truth, except now he knew he fought it. He was in love with Vin.

“I get tongue-tied,” Vin said, quietly.

Chris looked around, surprised. Well, Vin was back. But what did getting tongue-tied have to do with the case?

“I get tongue-tied,” Vin started again, then paused. “Around *you*. You make it hard for me to think straight.”

Chris faced him, giving Vin his complete attention. Hoping he heard what he thought he heard.

“I can’t slow down. I touch you and I don’t want to quit touching you.” Vin looked away for a moment, his eyes troubled. When he looked up again, he walked toward Chris. His white shirt opened to the waist with another of his thin cotton undershirt hiding his gorgeous chest from view.

“I thought you wanted women,” Chris said, thinking of the three Vin had flirted with just that afternoon.

“The woman I want—she’s got balls,” Vin said, grinning. “And most of the time, he doesn’t wear a dress. If I had it my way, he wouldn’t wear anything.”

A breathless laugh escaped Chris. Could it be possible? Vin wanted *him*?

“Do you know how dangerous you are for me?” Vin asked. He stroked the side of Chris’ face, traced his jaw before sliding his hands into his hair. “Not my job. That could get complicated, but I’d survive it. You, I’m not sure I could survive.”

Chris’ chest ached. More, he wanted to hear Vin say more. “You going to kiss me? Because it looks like you’re going to kiss me. Call it wishful thinking, if you want. You could wipe a man’s RAM with a pucker like yours.”

“Shut up,” Vin murmured against Chris’ lips.

“Shutting up.”

Vin covered Chris’ mouth with his own. He held the sweet pressure for a moment before releasing, before allowing some space between them again.

Vin had spoken more tonight than he had their entire acquaintance. And Chris didn’t

want it to stop. His words held too much weight for Chris' future, their future, hopefully.

"I could easily fall in love you. You say what you think and don't give a damn who hears it. You're an ass. A funny ass, and even wearing a ridiculous flower-print robe with your cock sticking out, you turn me on without trying. You can't cook worth a damn. I lose my mind with lust until I have trouble speaking. So I don't speak at the risk of telling you I want you only to hope you feel the same way. You aren't afraid of going after what you want. You kiss me and I feel like I'm the only place you want to be, but still can't get close enough. You leave me guessing, wanting, wishing."

"Vin," Chris groaned, speechless, aroused beyond reason.

Vin silenced him with a shake of his head. "I'd never get over you. You're dangerous for me because only two days have passed and I already know that every guy I'll ever meet will be measured against what I'm feeling for you right now." Vin backed off. "I need you to walk away, Chris, because I can't say no to you, and I'm not detached enough to think this is strictly physical."

"Walk away? Does it look like I'm not interested?" Chris asked, disbelieving. How many times did he have to come to the man, *cum* for the man before Vin knew it was different for Chris too.

"For a roll, sure. What I want is a lot more lasting than an all night fuck in your tight ass. I don't think you're ready for that."

"What do you think I want then? I'm dying for enlightenment on the subject," Chris retorted.

"I haven't told you much about me, but you seem to like the visual aid."

"Meat?" Chris asked, dumbfounded. "All I want is a hot body to sink my dick into? Guess you have to stick around longer and learn a few more things about me. I know stuff about you without being told."

Vin folded his arms across his chest. A classic Vin challenge-stare. See? Chris knew *that*, didn't he?

"I'm in love with you, moron, even if your mamma did jack you up with growth hormones," Chris said, smiling. "Confessing that you *could* fall in love with me got too detailed to be anything but *already* in love with me. You say a lot for a guy who doesn't say much. Your body language shares the finer points. Your parting speech filled in the blanks. Even a half-assed

detective would see that. You're counting on the rookie to overlook a few details. Not a chance."

Vin's expression softened. "Like?"

"Let's continue in the same tone, shall we?" Chris asked.

"I'm listening."

"You are tough enough to throw me up against a wall without straining, surprising enough to prefer chocolate syrup in your coffee, and gentle enough to tease me with kisses. You care when you think you've hurt me," Chris said holding out his wrists. "Hell, you even try to kiss me better. You've got mad-chef skills, learned from your dad, but you aren't a snob who looks down his nose at others who can't do what you do. Your research is immaculate, and you keep things close to your chest. Sometimes too close. You're passionate and demanding as a lover. Generous and compassionate and knowing you love me knocks me off my feet."

"I didn't say love," Vin grumbled.

"You didn't have to."

Nothing had been left unsaid. Vin excited the hell out of him with a love that blended fear and hope in a cauldron of lust. The kind that would mark Chris' soul for a lifetime.

Vin shook his head. "Your fault," he said through quickened breaths. "You're a fucking temptation."

"Not tempting enough to make you say it," Chris said.

"Say what?" Vin blew out a pent up breath, clearly pleased with Chris' deduction. A slow sexy smile lifted his lips. "You're smart, bold, sexy and horny as hell. Even your incessant chatter turns me on."

"And?"

Vin interrupted him to capture and release Chris' bottom lip between his. "I love you too. You gonna shut up so I can kiss you?"

"Shutting up."

About the Author

Mia makes her home in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she divides her time between a job and spying on people. Mia enjoys long walks in Como Park, daisies, dancing in the snow ...(Delete prior sentence, meant for personal ad)...

Mr. Perfect may apply in person for a thorough evaluation and trial. All others will be towed.

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Mind F*cked by Mia Watts

Sage has the ability to read minds, but only in high passion moments when thoughts transmit at a higher frequency. But the gift is double-edged. Sage is inordinately handsome. Some might even say he's a walking orgasm. So what's a half-breed to do when every person he meets seems intent on seducing him, and how will he know if the man he chooses will love him for more than his looks?

Joe has never been the object of anyone's lust before. Now Sage, the hottest guy he's ever laid eyes on, has Joe starring in his sexual fantasies. It would be perfect if only Sage could shut up for one minute, and quit talking about his own hotness—or about how he can read minds.

Meanwhile, Joe and Sage must secure the last three Zodiac Stones and prevent their theft while they wait for exhibition. Can they put their sexual tension aside long enough to stop a clever thief? And even if they do, will Joe's heart be a casualty of their inevitable fling, or could Sage really be looking for more than a one-night stand?

Scorcher by Celia Kyle

Phoebe's a salamander with a problem. Fire is her element, her very best friend, and the core of her nature. But she can't control it worth a darn. One decent temper tantrum and *poof!* Fire galore. Good thing she lives in the desert with nary a tree in sight. Well, there are a few bushes and such. And her house. And a few cacti...sorta. At least until she'd gotten mad over getting stuck by one of the darned things...

Brant lives by fire and dies by fire. Literally. As Fire Chief, it's his job to stamp out fires in Winthrop, making sure residents of the small town in the back woods of Arizona don't have to worry about fire taking their businesses and homes. As a phoenix, he has the ability to sense fires the moment they start. It's a handy talent that keeps the residents safe. Except for his girlfriend, who seems to be able to blow up just about everything, including the stove.

Oriana and the Three Werebears by Tia Fanning

Oriana Ricci has taken over the family business—flying cargo and rich tourists around Alaska's barely inhabited Kodiak Archipelago. When her plane malfunctions and she's forced to make an emergency landing, she finds herself stranded in the middle of a National Wildlife Refuge. With no civilization for miles and no hope of rescue, she thinks all is lost...

Until she stumbles upon the entrance to an underground bunker.

Jack, Jordan, and Jonathan McMathan own and operate a secret intelligence firm contracted by the US Government. Hidden away in an old Cold War spy station located the middle of the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, the brothers are not only able to do their top secret jobs safely without fear of discovery, but are better to protect their other, more personal secret: they have the ability to shift into Kodiak bears.

Like a fairy tale gone bad, the brothers return home to find their lunch tasted—or eaten, their computer chairs adjusted—or broken, and a beautiful blonde sleeping in one of their beds. This situation poses a big problem for the brothers...

Their location is now compromised. But more importantly, what are they to do with the lady?

***Extinction* by Carol Lynne**

Professor of Environmental Science/Wildlife studies at UNLV, Jack McBain has spent his adult life trying to track a legend overheard during his youth. Born and raised in the Canadian Province of Newfoundland, Jack remembers his grandparents telling stories of a race of people eradicated by European settlers in 1829. According to the legend, the Beothuk people didn't die out as first thought, but were transformed into wolf shifters.

When Newfoundland wolves began to appear in great numbers, the European settlers began killing them under the guise of population control. In 1910, the last of the Newfoundland wolves was shot, making them one of the few extinct species of wolves in the world.

Following spotty leads, Jack begins to track what he believes are Beothuk/Newfoundland shifter wolves. His search leads him to the Lake Mead National Recreational Area outside of Las Vegas. There, on Spirit Mountain, he finally comes face to face with not only the shifter he's been looking for, but the man of his dreams he didn't know he needed.

***Tropical Hedonism* by Dakota Rebel**

After a boating accident, Sean Harris wakes up staring into the eyes of a handsome doctor. Even when he discovers that he is on an island within the Bermuda Triangle, and there is no way for him to get back to his old life, he can't be too disappointed if it means being stuck with the doctor.

Dr. Wesley Carpenter cannot believe that the younger Sean Harris would want anything to do with him. After half-heartedly turning down the advances of his patient, he realizes that resistance is futile.

The men find themselves falling for each other quickly, but ghosts from their pasts and outside

influences try to get in the way of their happiness. Sean and Wesley may be on the island forever, but neither is sure if that guarantees they'll be able to continue their Tropical Hedonism.

Going Deep by GA Hauser

Dylan Conway thought he had a chance at the big leagues when a pro football scout invited him to try out for the team. After a successful college career, Dylan figured it was a sure thing.

It wasn't.

With his dream of playing pro ball shattered, Dylan takes a job in LA delivering pizza until he can figure out a new direction for his life. What he doesn't expect is to be propositioned at every delivery, and to his amazement, he's asked to work for a photographer of male nudes. He accepts, and begins his journey into a deeper, darker industry.

Sean Dean, AKA 'Rippin Long', is tired of working as a gay porn star. For seven long years he was the top earner for Tartarus Studios, but now he's sick and tired of the demands. He yearns for a real life and respectable work.

But even the jaded Rippin Long is stunned to see the latest addition to the Tartarus studios stable of stars: The delectable Dylan Conway. To make matters worse, Dylan makes no effort to hide his instant attraction to Tartarus' prized stud, and he's after more than sex. Dylan wants a 'relationship', something Sean has avoided after continuously being idolized as the porn star, and not the human being behind the façade.

One man jaded and at the end of his porn career, the other fresh and just beginning a new life in the industry—the possibility for any kind of future between the two seems daunting. Yet, the two men collide on set, burning up the screen like no other men before them. Could there be a chance for a real bond between them? With faith, hope and a little help from karma, could true love bloom from what was once two broken lives?

Handcuffs and Lace

Resplendence Publishing's Erotic Romance Line of Law Enforcement Themed Stories

***What the Cuff?* By Celia Kyle**

God really should have reconsidered making werewolves. That, or Lyssa needed to get better taste in men and stay away from those with wandering eyes—and other things. Drunk as a wolf, she stumbles to her best friend's house to sleep off her whiskey induced haze and wakes to...*cuffs*?

Caleb sees his chance and takes it. His buddies on the force ribbed him but good for buying silver plated cuffs. But with a werewolf in his bed, the woman he's yearned for since they were teens, he wasn't taking any chances. Lyssa was his. She just didn't know it yet.

***Ticket Me More* by Tia Fanning**

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the "living" world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered—Officer Michael Johnson. Though he doesn't seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention...using any speed necessary.

***Handcuffs and Lies* by Bronwyn Green**

Sometimes promises to friends are the hardest to keep. Undercover police officer, Michael Tanner, promised his dying partner that he'd take care of the man's little sister. Trouble is, after her brother's death, Doctor Tori Spinelli wants nothing to do with Michael—or any other cop for that matter.

Tori has always fought against overprotective men and deception. Forced into protective custody

with Michael, she's now faced with both in the same package. Despite their differences, Tori falls in love with him, but how can she trust a man who lies for a living?

***Search Me Baby, One More Time* by Melinda Barron**

Wren Thornberry's life isn't going according to plan. She let her father talk her out of marrying Bryan Stockard, the man she loves, and moved halfway around the world. Now she's back home in Texas, babysitting her grandmother while grandma and her boy-toy work through their list of sexual exploits, making themselves the talk of the town.

But what Wren doesn't know is that things in her hometown are about to heat up even more, and it will have nothing to do with her grandmother. It seems that Bryan Stockard is still around, he wants to get back into Wren's life—by any means necessary, and now he has just the tools to do it: A police uniform, handcuffs, and the authority to make Wren *assume the position*.

***Cuff Me Lacy* by Demi Alex**

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with "The Bull" she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacKlick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

***Going Commando* by Catherine Chernow**

Bounty hunter Shyra Lawrence listens to her favorite radio station one morning where the DJ's are discussing "going commando" —*a.k.a* wearing no undies. Captivated by their conversation, she decides to shed her panties in favor of the freedom that wearing no underwear brings.

Enthusiastic, Shyra sends an email to her best friend, Donna, detailing the delights of panty-freedom, but unbeknownst to Shyra, she's hit the send key...to the wrong email addy!

When Derek Grayson opens his emails that morning, he discovers that his #1 employee and top bounty hunter has sent him an erotic, enticing message about going commando. Derek has always been polite, professional, and so damned attracted to Shyra that it's almost painful. Working day in and day out with voluptuous woman has sent Derek's hormones into overdrive on more than one occasion.

Now, Shyra's shed her panties and Derek's got all he can do to contain his lust when she announces that she's... GOING COMMANDO.

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