

The book cover features a romantic illustration of a young man and woman in a forest. The man, with short brown hair and blue eyes, is shirtless and has his arms around the woman. The woman has long, straight black hair and green eyes, and she is wearing a dark, low-cut top. They are both looking directly at the viewer. The background consists of dark, gnarled tree trunks and a soft, blue-toned sky. The author's name is at the top, and the title is at the bottom, both in a stylized white font.

CHRISTIE GORDON

THE FIRST
FULL MOON

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THE FIRST FULL MOON

BY

CHRISTIE GORDON

DEDICATION

*Bev, Jana, Katarina, and Vince – my critique buddies,
also, my sons, Jared and Nicholas.*

CHAPTER ONE

MEMORIES

“Get your sister first!” a woman shouted from somewhere in the shadows.

“I will. What about you, Mother?” As terror gripped Adam’s chest, a familiar tightness seized his breath. Heat rushed his face, making the hair dance on his head.

“Adam, help me.” A small girl with long hair in a ruffled, white pajama gown flailed a pale hand out while flames licked at her tiny feet. Hope mixed with fear on her cherubic face.

“No, Aloise, come closer, it’s hot. It’s too hot.” Stretching his arms out for his younger sister, he struggled against searing heat and roaring flames to snatch her, to pull her to safety. But somehow, she was always beyond his reach, always just a mere inch from his frantic clutch.

“Adam!” she shrieked.

“Hold on, I’m coming!” He tried again, swiping his arm across hot, empty air. Flames scorched the hair on his forearm. Heaviness dragged his legs. Why couldn’t he make them move?

“Adam...” Her calls grew faint, drowning in the roar of the ravenous fire.

Watching in horror, he stood motionless while it surrounded her, embraced her, devoured her whole, sucking her into its swollen amber belly.

“Aloise!” He lunged forward.

She vanished.

Tears pooled in sky-blue eyes. Oh God, he couldn’t save her. Grief squeezed his insides, making him gasp for air. Devastated, tears tumbled down both cheeks while sobs mixed with the roar of the fire. “I’m sorry, Mom. I’m so sorry.” The fire faded, leaving only remorse and loss aching

and grinding on his heart.

Taking in a rush of air, Adam Ross sat up straight in his double bed. White sheets crumpled below him, heavy with sweat. With wide eyes, his shaggy, light-brown hair stuck to his head in wet strands, long enough to almost cover his eyes and long enough to cover most of his ears. Tan skin glistened over a toned body in the early morning sun. In a strained whisper, he said, “Oh, Aloise.”

The small room blurred. His breath hitched. *Not again.* Drawing his knees to his chest, he reached his hands up to cover his face, a feeble attempt at stopping the tears from pushing through. *It's been eight years since that damned house fire. Why can't I get rid of those terrible visions and nightmares? Why did my family have to die like that? It wasn't fair, wasn't fair at all.*

The tears burst through, releasing the agony brought on by the nightmare. Soft sobs escaped him. He had to stop this. He knew that. He had to move on and forget. They're gone and there's no way for him to save them. He was only twelve when it happened, only twelve, just a boy.

The tears slowed and he turned to the wall next to his brass bed, sniffing. The picture still hung there, charred edges and all. Reaching out with trembling fingers, he tugged the black thumbtack out of the white plaster and brought the picture to his chest, unable to look at the contents quite yet.

Pain and grief swelled again in his chest. A single tear journeyed a wet trail on his cheek. Clutching at the picture, he willed it to tame his sorrow. This was all he had left of them. The only thing the wicked fire didn't steal from him.

He brought the picture up to his face. His eyes roamed down the smooth surface, taking in every detail. His mother—brown hair peeked out from under her white fedora. Her dark dress was tailored, showing off a delicate figure. He gazed at his father, wearing a pinstriped suit, black and dapper, befitting the lawyer he was. His kind eyes gazed back at him as if reaching out to comfort him from beyond the grave.

Adam inhaled, preparing for the last image. His sister, standing with her little hand entwined in his. With a sad smile, he ran his index finger over her image. She had always been so frail. Wearing high pigtails bound in red ribbons on the day of the picture, her auburn hair fell down over her shoulders. She had her best blue dress on, all frill and lace, and white saddle shoes covered her feet. She was only eight.

It was a sunny Mother's Day and they were going out to brunch in downtown Chicago, May of 1922. Only a month before disaster struck, snatching their lives from him forever.

"I'm sorry, Aloise." Tears stung his eyes. Shaking off his grief, he placed the picture against the wall and reinserted the thumbtack, careful to place it through the existing hole. When it was back in place, he reached an arm up and swiped at his eyes with the back of his hand.

Sighing, he let his gaze roam the room of his small cabin. The morning sun pooled onto an oval rug through mullioned glass windows, lighting up patches of green and mauve. He forgot to draw the curtains again last night. Cream linen panels hung straight down on either side of the window frame.

A hunter-green quilt bunched up at his feet. *What's it doing down there?* He must have thrown it when he had his nightmare. Shoving the white sheets covering his lap aside, he climbed to the edge of his bed. He stretched his arms high above his head, yawning. What he needed now was some coffee, a little breakfast and a brisk walk before the fog came ashore.

Because August on the northern California coastline always meant thick fog by noon. How he cherished his walks on the beach. They maintained his sanity, helped him cope with a past threatening to swallow him whole if he allowed it.

He stood from his bed, straightened his white boxers and ambled the short distance to the restroom doorway. A smirk crossed his lips. It was smart placing the bed next to the bathroom, easy access if he needed it at night.

He flipped on the light switch just inside the bathroom doorway. His eyes took in a pedestal sink and a mirrored

medicine cabinet hanging over top. He stepped to the toilet, did his business and glanced at a claw-foot bathtub. Good thing he installed that showerhead last month. A nice, hot shower was just what he needed.

When he finished, he washed his hands under tarnished chrome fixtures and stepped out the door over cherry-wood planks toward the far wall where a gas stove with two burners waited to do his bidding. He padded past a round kitchen table and stopped at a set of cabinets, matching the dark wood of the floor.

He opened a top cabinet and peered inside for a can of coffee. "Ah, there you are." He dragged it down and pried the lid off. Oh, it smelled good, he thought, inhaling the aroma, like nuts mixed with chocolate.

He looked to the right and glanced out a window perched above a porcelain sink as he filled the filter of a silver coffee pot. The sun sparkled off the waves of the Pacific just above the top of a cliff between bent boughs of cypress trees. Leaning over, he cranked the window open. The calming rhythm of the surf crashing to the beach below the cliffs floated over his ears.

He made his way to the stove, set the coffee pot on a burner and turned a black knob. It clicked a few times before it lit. He bent down to inspect the flame, looking for anything suspicious. *Got to watch fire. It can't be trusted.* He knew that better than anyone.

When he was sure the fire was adequate, but not too high, he turned and strolled toward a battered couch backed up against the wall opposite his bed. He smiled. Billy's wife, Martha, gave him this couch. She mothered him to death. She insisted on him having this couch, even though it barely fit in his one-room cabin. Oh, but they were good people, fishing people, and he loved working on Billy's boat.

He sat down and waited for his coffee to percolate, running his fingers over stuffing poking out of a hole in the arm. The blue, paisley pattern reminded him of the churning waves of

the ocean, just outside his cabin. It felt good to have water so close and air thick with fog. Just in case something went awry, in case fire tricked him somehow.

Today he'd have a nice breakfast at home and finish his walk in town at Frank's Place, his favorite speakeasy. Today he'd do his best to forget.

The first tendrils of fog wafted over the sun's rays. He strode in a red wool shirt and tan trousers through tall fennel, off a path and onto a dirt road leading into the town of Moss Beach. The plants held their heads of bright-yellow flowers high, towering over him as he passed. The scent of sweet licorice mixed with the cool ocean air to surround him. As he left the fennel patch, he breathed in deep. *Fish*. Smelling ocean air reminded him of the fresh fish he helped haul in from the fishing boats at the pier. Maybe he'd have fish for lunch.

A wide grin quirked his lips. It's going to be a good day—a little beer at the speakeasy, a nice meal of fresh fish, and a little conversation with his best friend, Peter. *Perfect*.

He strode down the road, watching his cabin pass slowly by him to the right. The dark planks along the side needed oil. Debris from the cypress trees littered the cedar shingles. *Fire hazard*. He'd have to sweep the roof when he got home.

His old Chevrolet sedan sat out front. Patches of rust littered the black roof from the salt in the air. *Metal sure didn't last long out here*. Oh well, he didn't use the car much anyway.

As he walked, the faint scent given off by a eucalyptus grove filled his nostrils, tangy like menthol. Unease rippled through him. It was smart of him to rent a cabin among cypress trees. The damned eucalyptus shed their bark and gave off oil, encouraging fire. The eucalyptus seed needed fire to germinate. As far as he was concerned, it was safer to stay far away from such wicked trees.

He watched his brown boots kick at rocks on the road. The trees gave way to an open area. He looked up. The outline of a white building appeared through the fog. A row of large,

brown windows cut through the buildings curved, stucco walls. It hung perched above the edge of the cliffs overlooking the beach.

How much engineering was needed to put a building in such a place? It boggled his mind. Especially since the area was known for quakes. He shivered, remembering the stories of the quake of 1906 and the fire that encompassed San Francisco. Don't think about it. *I need to forget.*

He walked around to the front of the building, hands in his pockets, and up the few steps of a cement stairway. Before opening a brown door, he glanced behind him to admire the curves of the Spanish colonial facade in front of the building. Turning, he tugged on the door and stepped inside.

"Hello, Adam." A platinum blonde with wavy, bobbed hair stepped in front of him. Brown eyes fluttered at him.

"Uh, hello, Suzie." He stepped to the side, determined to go around her.

She stepped in front of him again. "Aren't you here to see me?" She held a round serving tray to her well-endowed chest and tapped the black toe of a high heeled shoe on the cement floor.

"No, I'm here to see Peter." He looked above her, into the bar.

"Well, when are you taking me to San Francisco?"

Her whiny voice grated on his nerves. "Not anytime soon." He looked back down at her, confused. "Where'd you get that idea?"

"From Peter. He said you'd take me there." She leaned forward and nudged him with her shoulder. "You used to live there, you could take me to all the spots."

Anger filled in his chest. He grabbed her by the shoulders and moved her to the side. "I'm not taking you to San Francisco." Huffing, he strode in the direction of the bar.

"But, Adam, I—"

"Hey, Suzie, you've got customers." A young man called out from the dining room.

When he reached the bar, he swung his leg over a black, vinyl barstool and sat down. He rested his elbows on the bar and scanned the area behind it for his friend. Mahogany wood with intricate carvings made up the back of the bar and extended all the way up to the ceiling. He caught himself in the reflection of a mirror, behind brass taps.

He peered at his hair, wavy from the ocean mist and streaked with blond from working out in the sun. His gaze rested on his face. How could Aunt Betty tell him he was too pretty to be a boy? At least he was older now and his cheeks weren't so chubby and his jaw line held the angular shape of a man's.

A muscular young man with hair the color of milk chocolate stepped into his vision. He looked up the tall frame, seeing the black vest and the white dress shirt underneath. He gazed into the familiar brown eyes of Peter. The sight of his friend always made him grin. "It's about time you showed up. What are you doing telling Suzie I'm taking her to San Francisco?"

"Well, good afternoon to you, too." Smiling, Peter grabbed a frosty mug from below the bar.

"Really, Peter, you shouldn't tease her like that." He swung around and gazed out the row of windows fitted into a baby-blue wall, at the fog, billowing as if clouds had just fallen to the ground.

"Tease her? When are you going to get it through your thick skull? She likes you and she's a doll." Peter poured beer into the mug from the tap and set it in front of Adam.

"She is not. She'd like to be a doll. She's really just a pushy, pretentious, artichoke farmer's daughter." He raised his glass and took a gulp of beer.

"She's a nice girl."

"You think just about anyone is nice. Is there anyone in town you haven't dated?" His eyes roamed across the floor of the speakeasy. Tables lined up in neat rows with crisp tablecloths, fine china and silverware sat on their tops. Dark

chairs with curved backs surrounded the tables on all four sides. Customers sat at two of the tables, speaking in hushed voices.

He realized Peter never answered him. He shifted his focus to his friend.

Peter shook his head.

“What?”

Peter leaned forward, drying a glass with a towel. “I’m sure she’s better than those flappers you ran around with in the city.”

He winced. Flappers weren’t so great either. There just wasn’t anything else to get his mind off his cousin, Maxwell, at the time. He shifted in his seat, not liking the strange feelings his cousin brought out in him. “Listen, drop it. I want fish today. Does your Dad still have some of that salmon they brought in yesterday?”

“Yeah. I’ll tell the kitchen and be right back.” Peter walked to the end of the bar and through a set of metal doors. They swung back and forth after he passed through.

He picked up his beer and took a long gulp. It tasted good, high quality, not like the watered down stuff they got further down the coast. Good thing Peter’s father, Frank, owned a piece of the rum-running business. The secluded beach bordering the speakeasy property made for a great landing area to bring the liquor ashore from Canada.

Peter came back out from the double doors and walked behind the bar. “It’ll be right out.”

“Thanks. It’s good to have a friend whose father owns one of the better gin joints.” He chuckled and raised his glass to his friend.

Peter wiped at the bar with a rag. “Yeah, you’re lucky you’re so likable. Maybe a little stupid at times, but still likable.” His motions on the bar stopped. “Hey, you are supposed to go to the city soon, aren’t you?”

He clenched his fist under the bar. Anxiety flooded through him just at the thought of his visit. “Yes. I have to go out and

visit my Aunt and Uncle in two days. It's Maxwell's eighteenth birthday." His words were sharp.

Peter propped himself on his forearm on the bar. "I don't understand why you dislike them so much. They taught you so much about boats. I'm telling you, I've never met someone as talented as you when it comes to fixing them."

He let out a long exhale before glancing up at Peter. "Sure they taught me about boats. I was their damned yacht repairman, not their nephew." He brought his beer up and gulped the rest of it down, thinking back across the years spent with his aunt and uncle. They were the ones to take him in after the fire. What he needed were parents, what he got were slave drivers as far as he was concerned.

"But, they're filthy rich, aren't they? I mean, you'd have to be to be a member of the St. Francis Yacht Club." A puzzled expression crossed Peter's face. "And, you have that trust fund."

He glared at his friend. Damn Peter only thought about money. "Yes, they're rich. I, on the other hand, am not. The fund was from my father's life insurance policy. It might have allowed me to come down here when I turned eighteen, but it's not that much money. I still have to work, you know." He tipped his empty mug. "Give me another, will you?"

"Geesh. Sure, maybe you'll quit being so uppity."

He watched Peter pull another mug out. "Let's talk about something else, okay?"

Peter poured another beer and set it down. He took the empty mug and washed it behind the bar. "Okay, how about this? You know them rumrunners they've been finding dead on the shore for the last two months?"

Leaning forward, his interest piqued. "Yeah?"

Peter looked both ways. "Well, I heard they were completely drained of blood. Had claw marks and bite marks all over them."

"Go on."

"Some are saying it's an old Indian curse that got them."

He leaned back in his seat, waving his hand at his friend. "What a bunch of bull, old Indian curse. I suppose you think they were attacked by killer mermaids out at sea, for Christ sakes. Sometimes I can't believe you're twenty-three, you're so damned gullible."

"No, really. I heard there's an Indian legend that tells of demons coming out on the night of the full moon. They're supposed to live on one of those islands out there in the ocean. See, no one's been out that way for years. The fishing's always been bad in that area. But, now with the coast guard catching onto the bootleggers, they're using those islands to hide from them and sometimes to stash their liquor."

He nodded. *Yeah, right.* "And I suppose these demons hang out with the Blue Lady too?" Snickering, he took a gulp of his beer.

"Oh stop it. She's real, I say. I've seen her." Peter grinned and put the mug back into a freezer under the bar. "Let me go check on your food."

He watched his friend trot off. He glanced around the speakeasy for a moment. It all looked normal to him. He never saw or noticed anything unusual. But still, the rumor of a female ghost, nicknamed the Blue Lady, haunting the speakeasy at all hours of the day and night, were turning into a legend. How could anyone believe in such things? After all, believing in an after-life meant believing in the God that went along with it. No God would have allowed his family to burn the way they had and left a boy so tortured by memories.

Peter returned and set a plate of broiled salmon with rice pilaf and buttered broccoli in front of him, along with silverware rolled in a cloth napkin. "There you go."

"That looks delicious." He grabbed his fork, stuffed a bite of salmon into his mouth and gulped it down with his beer. "So, what do you really think is killing the rumrunners? Rabid Coyotes, mountain lion, maybe?"

"I don't know. Why then, would they be drained of blood? And why only on a full moon?" Peter narrowed his eyes at

him, as if proving his point.

"Ah, who knows? Maybe just coincidence." He filled his fork with rice.

"Coincidence, my ass. Something strange is going on out there. There's a full moon tonight and I'll bet money there'll be more dead rumrunners washed ashore tomorrow morning."

He gulped down his food with another swig of beer. "Yeah, right. Rabid mountain lion." Soft fingers covered his eyes from behind.

"Guess who?" A female voice said.

"Suzie." His heart sank. She better not be off work already. If she were, he'd have a terrible time shaking her. The fingers released him and he opened his eyes.

"Aw..." Propping a navy-blue purse threaded with beads on the bar, she took a seat beside Adam. Her waitress uniform was replaced by cocktail dress matching the color of her purse. The hemline drew up, exposing her knees. "How do you always know it's me?"

"Two reasons. The first is, you're the only one who does that to me. The second is, I'd pick out your voice anywhere." He shifted his attention to eating his lunch.

She leaned closer to him. "Does that mean you like my voice?"

He didn't like being nasty to people, but she just asked for it sometimes. "No, I don't." He continued to eat.

"Well, that's not a nice thing to say. Peter, did you hear what he said?" She placed her elbows on the bar.

"What?" Peter asked.

"Your friend here isn't being very friendly today. I think he's got a wild hair up his ass or something," she said.

Spitting food onto his plate, Adam coughed and pounded his fist on his chest. He turned to her. "What did you say?"

"You heard me, Adam Ross. You're really on a high horse today. I expect you'll buy me a drink to redeem yourself." She pouted, waiting for his response.

He sighed. "Okay, Peter, get her a drink and put it on my

tab.” Could he just have a peaceful lunch?

Smiling, she reached her arms around his shoulders and gave him a tight squeeze. “Oh, thank you. I knew you wanted to buy me a drink.”

He groaned, rolling his eyes at Peter.

Chuckling, Peter poured whiskey into a short glass and set it in front of her.

He chewed a bite of salmon. “Damn, Suzie, since when did you start drinking whiskey?”

“I don’t know, since a few nights ago, I guess. This nice fella, Bobby was his name, came in here and ordered me a few glasses. Guess I decided I liked it.” Her tone taunted, as if testing him.

“Oh, Bobby, huh? Will you be seeing him again?” *Oh please, let her at least have a date with this guy.*

“Why, you jealous?” She swayed in her seat.

He gave a slow shake of his head. “God, no.”

“Ah, come on, you are too.” Peter chuckled and leaned closer to him.

“Really.” She ran her hand down Adam’s arm.

He glared at Peter. “I am not. Don’t you fill her head with such ridiculous thoughts.”

Peter snickered and washed another glass.

Picking up her whiskey, she sat back in her seat and took a sip. “Come on, you mean you’re not at all jealous?”

He shoved his empty plate forward and twisted on the barstool to face her. Hurt surfaced in her eyes. “Okay, maybe just a tiny bit.” If he told her what she wanted to hear, she wouldn’t push it.

Her face lit up. Leaning forward, she placed a hand on his thigh. “I knew it.”

He moved to twist back around.

Pushing her face close, she gave him a light kiss on the cheek.

His insides reeled back. He just wasn’t attracted to her and who cared what Peter thought about it. Now she was certain to

be at his side for the rest of the day. “Get me another drink, okay, Peter? I have a feeling I’m going to need it.”

CHAPTER TWO

CHANCE

Stumbling, Adam ambled away from the speakeasy. This was all Suzie's fault. If she'd just left him alone, he could've gotten home sooner. He looked down at the watch on his right wrist. *Oh great, midnight, the witching hour.* He chuckled. Peter gets so caught up in all these fairy tales of ghosts and demons.

He made his way up the road to his cabin. Fog billowed in swirling clouds around him in the glow of streetlamps. The steady pounding of waves against the shoreline swept over his ears while he passed a bend in the road, close to the cliffs. The boughs of cypress trees bent back from the ocean as if reaching for something behind them.

The burst of an explosion cut through the night from the direction of the beach. "What the hell?" He whirled around and looked out toward the ocean. A faint orange hue illuminated the fog spilling over the cliff.

He raced to the edge and peered downward. Gasping, he put a hand over his mouth. Three small oar boats and maybe six men lay scattered on the sand. A patchwork of fire dotted the boats, illuminating the scene.

A flash and a boom from another explosion made him flinch and draw back. "Oh my God." A memory flickered through his mind of his sister reaching out to him through a torrent of flames. He'd never let that happen again. He ran for the wooden stairway leading down to the beach and hopped down each step. Adrenaline took hold of his body, pushing the

alcohol aside.

Once he landed on sand, he raced to the first body on the beach and flipped it over. A man's pale face hid under a mass of dark hair. The open, glazed eyes didn't move. He scanned the body in the glow of the fire. Punctures like fang marks seeped on its neck and wrist. Ripped and shredded clothing barely hid the blood oozing out in ragged gashes underneath.

The man was dead. He tossed the body away and fell backwards on the sand. He'd never seen a dead person before. He'd never been allowed to see his family after they perished. His stomach lurched. Quickly leaning to the side, vomit erupted out of his mouth to splatter over the sand. His stomach calmed. Reaching up, he wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his shirt.

He stood up on shaky legs and walked over to inspect the next man. The head twisted too far to one side and both arms and legs spread at odd angles, giving it the appearance of a hastily discarded marionette. Coughing into his hand, he moved on to the next. Each man in his sight wore the look of death, all having bloody wounds or contorted beyond reason.

Another explosion boomed. Heat rushed his body. Instinct took hold and he dropped stomach first into the sand, covering his head with his arms. After a few seconds, he dared peek up. His gaze traveled to crates with flames pouring out of them, sitting on the boats. *Liquor*. Liquor bottles were exploding and spreading the fire.

Movement by the far boat caught his eye. *Was someone alive?* He jumped to his feet and raced toward a body separated from the rest, so close to the fire the flames practically reached for it. He seized the body under the armpits and dragged it away from the flames, making ruts in the sand as he went.

Panting, he looked it over. Black hair spilled down a broad back, so long it continued halfway down. Dark trousers covered a small waist and hips. *A woman in trousers?* He rolled the body over. The flat chest and broad shoulders under a dark shirt suggested a younger man, maybe even a teenager. He

leaned down for a closer inspection. The face was beautiful, angelic. Long lashes sprawled from closed eyes and full lips parted slightly under a straight, narrow nose. Putting his head to the young man's chest, he listened for a heartbeat. It was there, beating strong.

Something in him stirred, making him immediately uncomfortable. It was the same feeling he'd gotten around his cousin. He shifted his pants, noticing arousal taking hold of him. *Stop it.* This was a younger man, maybe not even eighteen and probably an Indian.

He glanced at the fire. Fear and remorse ate at him. The faint outline of Aloise reached out from a tendril of flames. Her calls snaked through his mind. Impulsively, he reached under the young man and lifted his lean body up out of the sand.

"Whatever or whoever you are, I won't let you die here, like this." He held him close to his chest and trudged back toward the stairway. The young man's scent caught his nose while they walked—sensual, like spice mixed with fresh-cut wood. Desire rushed through him to pool in his aching groin.

He rounded the top of the stairs, panting from exertion, and heard sirens off in the distance. *Police.* He took a quick glance at the beautiful face of the young man in his arms. "No, you won't be going to jail either." The strange young man was probably a rumrunner after all. Heading off toward his cabin, he quickened his pace. He'd be safe there.

After turning the knob, he kicked the door to his cabin open. The door smacked against the stopper. He winced. It better not leave a mark he'd have to fix later. Using his elbow to hit the switch, he flicked on the domed light above him, made his way to his bed and carefully set the young man down.

He looked him over. He had to. He had to check his injuries. The skin was pale, but held the promise of a darker tone below it, almost translucent in a way. Reaching out, he held up one of the hands. The fingernails looked more like the

claws of a dog than a human nail. He gazed at his face again in the light. *So beautiful.*

He unbuttoned and opened his shirt and looked for puncture wounds or gashes on the toned muscles of his chest and arms, but found none. He found himself running his fingers over the young man's skin, feeling its softness, its smoothness. His hands roamed down below the young man's navel, to unfasten his trousers.

The young man stirred, letting out a soft moan. His brows tensed for a second and his head tilted toward him.

He jerked his hand back. The erection straining against the inside of his trousers drew all his attention. His heart pounded in his chest. What the hell was he about to do? If there weren't any wounds on his chest, there certainly weren't any wounds hiding under his pants. Collecting himself, he pulled the young man's shirt back over his chest and re-buttoned it.

He stood up, adjusted himself and went to close the door and turn off the light. He should just lie on the couch and sleep. Get a good night's rest and see who this young man was in the morning.

Heat pressed against Adam's cheek. His eyes fluttered open to an exotic set of light-brown eyes with flecks of gold gazing back at him. "Whoa." Startling, he clamored to crawl up against the back of the couch, tilting his body up at an angle. The eyes, framed by long, black hair, followed him. "Ah, so you're awake?"

Sitting on his legs on the floor, the young man continued to study him as if fascinated by everything about him. His hand came up to rest over Adam's.

He flinched and yanked his hand away. His breath quickened from the contact and his morning erection felt hot.

As if on cue, the young man's gaze roamed Adam's chest and rested on his groin.

Feeling self-conscious, he draped his arm over his hips in an attempt to cover himself.

The young man leaned forward. Reaching up with a quizzical gaze, he ran a clawed finger down Adam's cheek.

The touch tingled all the way down into his groin. *Why is he touching me like this?* And how was it his mere presence aroused him? He melted further into the couch. "Um, do you understand English? Do you speak?"

The young man focused his attention on the hand covering Adam's groin. Reaching over, he took it, absently brushing Adam's erection through his trousers.

He gasped, closing his eyes for a second. His hips moved forward ever so slightly with the contact.

The young man pulled Adam's hand toward him and inspected it. His delicate thumb arced across the top, giving it a light caress. His fingers probed underneath. He held up his other hand, fingers splayed, and examined it as if comparing the two.

An abrupt tug on Adam's hand made him jerk forward to mere inches in front of the young man's face. He became mesmerized, lost, in the beautiful eyes. The shape was like the Chinamen he saw in San Francisco, but not as pronounced. Not quite Indian either.

Lifting himself up on his knees, the young man reached his free hand out and cupped Adam's chin, pushing a thumb into his lower lip. He ran the thumb along the thick flesh of Adam's lip, moving it gently to the side, before releasing it.

"Ah..." Adam whispered, despite himself.

"Your breath and pulse quicken when I touch you."

The young man's voice was soft and smooth, but much lower than Adam expected. It held a soft accent he couldn't place. "What? No it doesn't." Snapping back to reality, he yanked his hand away from him.

The young man grinned, showing long eyeteeth. "I excite you."

He scoffed, but his face flushed in embarrassment. "You don't. It's just normal, that's all. All guys our age get a morning woody."

Clear confusion swept over the young man's face. "A morning woody? What is that?"

"Never mind." He shoved himself up and climbed to the edge of the couch. *That's enough inspection.* He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and yawned.

The young man watched his every move with wide eyes.

"So what's your name anyway? And who are you?"

The young man looked down at the couch cushion for a moment. "My name is...I think it is." He put a clawed hand to his forehead. "It's, Necalli, I think." Dropping his hand, he gazed back up at Adam. "Yes, Necalli."

Adam leaned toward him. He may have been hurt more than he'd let on up to this point. "You okay? Do you remember anything from last night?"

Necalli gave a slow shake of his head. "Um, no." He looked into his eyes. "Why are you so different? Why are your hands so strange?"

"My hands? You're the one with strange hands." He gestured to Necalli's mouth. "And your teeth are a little funny, too."

Reaching up, Necalli fingered his teeth.

He let out an easy chuckle. "What, did you come from another planet or something? What have they been feeding you over on the reservation?"

Hurt spread across the features of Necalli's face and he sat back, lowering his head and hiding his hands under his thighs. He whispered, "You're beautiful."

His heart fluttered with Necalli's comment, but he ignored it. *This kid must have had a hard bump to the head.* Leaning forward, he reached his arm out and touched Necalli's shoulder.

Necalli flinched and drew away.

"Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean nothing by it. I like Indians, actually. I think your whole culture is sort of interesting."

Necalli kept his head lowered, his voice soft. "I'm not an Indian."

"Well, what are you then?"

"I, I don't know. I don't remember." Necalli's gaze drew slowly up to Adam's face while he kept his hands hidden.

He smirked. "Well, if you don't remember, how do you know you're not Indian?" *That was a stupid thing to say, Adam. Don't need to rub it in.*

"I know I'm not." Necalli furrowed his brow as if trying desperately to remember.

"Well, I'll bet your parents will be looking for you." He stood from the couch and looked down on the young man.

"No, I don't have parents." Necalli's gaze ran from Adam's feet up to his face.

Immediate compassion raced through him. This young man was like him, orphaned. "No parents? You're a little too young to be on your own. Who are you living with?" He raked a hand through his hair. Had the rumrunners taken advantage of his situation?

"No, I'm not young. I'm very old actually." His gaze slowly swept the room as if taking it all in.

He let out a soft chuckle. "What do you mean, you're not young. You couldn't be older than eighteen. Much too young to be hanging around with them rumrunners I found you with."

In one quick and graceful movement, Necalli darted up to a standing position. "I'm not eighteen."

He startled. "Jesus. How'd you do that?"

"What?" Necalli tilted his head to look up into his eyes.

"Stand so quickly. You must be pretty athletic. Too bad you're so short. You'd never play basketball." He let out a nervous laugh. Necalli must be around five-foot-three, since he was five-ten. This young man puzzled him. "Um, if you're over eighteen, how old are you?"

"I don't know. Just old, much older than eighteen." Bewilderment filtered through his features. "I can't remember."

He sighed. Could he believe anything Necalli told him? "So you can't remember anything, but you're sure you're not an

Indian, you don't have parents and you're much older than eighteen."

Necalli took a step closer to him, so close their chests almost touched. His inquisitive eyes roamed Adam's face. "Yes."

He flushed and stepped backward, not wanting to re-ignite his awkward feelings toward him. "Uh, d-do you remember what you were doing with the rumrunners?"

"Your heart beat has gotten faster." Necalli stepped close to him again, maintaining eye contact.

Walking backward and turning around, he struggled to steady himself. "I'll take that as a no." This young man unnerved him, made him think about things he shouldn't. He strode over to the kitchen area before facing him again. He looked over the white tiles on his kitchen counter for a moment and returned his attentions to Necalli. "Hey, you hungry?"

Necalli nodded his head.

He gestured to the table. "Well, have a seat and I'll make some breakfast." He busied himself with making a pot of coffee and pulling out eggs and bread. He thought for a minute about Necalli's predicament. "Hey, I heard that sometimes people who've lost their memory can get it back if they go to the place where they lost it or something like that. So how about we head over to the beach after breakfast and we'll see if you remember anything?" He turned around to gauge Necalli's reply.

Necalli sat at the table, his arms underneath its surface in his lap, eyes still studying him. "All right."

He let a wide grin spread over his lips. "Uh, I'm Adam, by the way."

Adam strode up to the cliff edge with Necalli close behind. The fog was thick again today. Would they be able to see much from this vantage point? He glanced at the top of the stairs. Police rope cut across the entrance. He peered over the edge

of a cliff filled with succulents. The dead men were gone, as expected, and policemen roamed around, securing the scene and looking for clues as to what happened last night.

Necalli stepped up next to him as if hesitant. Gasping, he turned his body into Adam's chest with his arms drawn up. "Adam, don't let them see me." He trembled.

On pure instinct, he threw his arms around Necalli, holding him against his chest. He ducked his head to look into Necalli's face, but the young man's long hair blanketed over it. "What's wrong? Do you remember something?"

"I don't like the men in the uniforms." His voice muffled in the fabric of Adam's shirt.

"Why?"

"I-I don't know. Just don't like them." Necalli's voice shook with fear.

His mind raced. Had Necalli spent time in jail? Was he fleeing from the law? Was he a runaway? Necalli's arms gently surrounded his waist, halting all his questions. His breathing grew heavy and heat rushed his groin. Giving in to his bodies urges, he closed his eyes, pressed his cheek to the top of Necalli's head and breathed in deep. The spicy scent shivered through him.

Necalli's arms tightened around him. His head buried deeper into Adam's shoulder. "Take me away from here."

His eyes opened. He released his hold and stepped back, feigning a cough. "Uh, okay. Let's head back." He better be careful or Necalli might notice how he felt. This strange young man noticed things like this after all. He turned around and headed back in the direction of his cabin.

In a flash, Necalli appeared at Adam's side, clawed hand gripping tight to his.

Okay, this is normal, isn't it? To hold hands with a young man while they strolled back to his cabin? He glanced at Necalli. Were those tears he saw in his eyes? His heart ached for him. What horrible thing could have happened to make him so distressed at the mere sight of policemen?

When they reached the cabin, he released Necalli's hand to open the door. Standing aside, he let Necalli enter first, keeping a watchful eye on him, still curious about the reaction at the beach.

Once inside, Necalli walked to the center of the room, stopped and lowered his head.

"What's wrong?" He closed the door and walked to Necalli's side.

The mysterious young man stood still.

Sighing, he placed a hand on his shoulder. "Tell me. What did you remember down there? I know you must have remembered something to be so upset about it."

"Nothing, I didn't remember anything." Necalli let out a long exhale.

"I don't believe it. Listen, I'll help you, but you've got to start being straight with me." He tugged on his shoulder and turned Necalli to face him.

Necalli lifted his head and gazed into his eyes.

Stunned, he saw pure agony in the brown and gold eyes. He'd seen that look on only one other person, himself, following the death of his family. "Talk to me." He reached down and took Necalli's hands in his. The improper feelings he had been damned. "Don't you trust me?"

"I...yes, I do." Necalli's gaze darted back and forth between his eyes as if searching for something in them.

"Then tell me what's going on."

Necalli's brows furrowed. "I don't know. I can't remember." His voice wavered.

With his frustration building, he tightened his grip and shook their hands. "Damn it, just tell me what you remembered at the beach!" The words were harsher than intended.

Ripping free from Adam's grasp, Necalli leapt onto the bed in one blur of motion.

He gasped, not fully comprehending what he saw.

Sitting against the wall, Necalli glanced at Adam as if afraid

of him and drew his knees up to his chest, wrapping his arms around his legs. He let his hair veil over his face.

He stepped to the bed, climbed onto the edge and crept forward until he sat on his legs in front of Necalli.

Visible trembling shook Necalli's lean body.

Reaching out, Adam caressed his arm.

Necalli flinched.

It dawned on him. Maybe the deformities in the young man's hands and teeth caused him to be abused? *It's a little stupid to just think of it now.* "Look, I'm sorry. You don't have to be afraid of me. I'm not going to hurt you. I promise. I just want to help you." He saw himself in this young man. He was the same way after the fire, jittery and unable to talk about what happened.

Necalli whispered, "If you want to help, than help."

"What does that mean?" He found himself at a loss. He thought back. What was it he needed most the day after the fire? Climbing next to Necalli, he wrapped his arms around him. The young man's body grew rigid with his touch, but he drew him in close anyways.

Gradually, Necalli softened into Adam's hold. He leaned into him, sighing, and rested his head on Adam's shoulder.

He held him for a few minutes, finding comfort for himself in the embrace as well. Tension and anxiety he took for granted released. *This is good, so good.*

"I remembered just bits and pieces." Necalli's voice was soft.

His heart leapt. Necalli was finally talking to him. He struggled to remain silent and still, to not disturb him in any way so he'd continue.

"Mostly what I remember are feelings. I was scared. Something went wrong. I didn't like what I was doing. I didn't like it." Necalli's breath hitched. "I didn't like it." He twisted his body fully into Adam's and threw his arms over his shoulders. His shoulders shook with silent tears.

"Shh..." He held this strange young man tight and stroked

the back of his black head with his hand. He understood. They made him do something so terrible, he blocked it out of his memory, the bastards. He'd find out what happened and right whatever wrong was done to him.

After a few minutes, Necalli pulled away from him. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and stared across the room. "You're so nice to me."

He almost grinned, but caught himself. "Of course. It's how people should be."

Necalli turned his head to look directly at him. "Do you like me?"

He took a sharp inhale. "Uh, sure, why wouldn't I?" The question flooded him with unease.

Necalli's gaze dropped to his lips.

A sudden and overwhelming urge to kiss the young man in his arms washed over him. Instead he clamored off the bed and stood up, feeling himself blush. "Ah, well, why don't you get some rest?" He turned around as the heat left his face. To his surprise, a flush covered Necalli's face as well. "Will you be okay if I go down to Frank's for a little bit? I have a friend there, a bartender, and I want to see what he heard about last night."

"Okay." Necalli lay down on his side. His black hair spilled out around him and his beautiful eyes followed Adam around the cabin until he left.

After entering Frank's Place, Adam strode directly to the bar. He sat down at a stool and waited for Peter to notice him. The place bustled and waitresses dashed behind him. Laughter and conversation hung in the smoky air.

"Hey, buddy. Finally up and around after taking Suzie home?" A wide grin played on Peter's face.

"Oh, stop it. I didn't take her home. I sent her on her way." He rested his forearms on the bar.

"Great, now she's going to be pissy when she comes in to work tonight." Peter grabbed a mug and poured a beer.

He waved his hand in front of him. "Oh, no, I don't want a drink. I just want some information."

"Ah, come on, it's on the house." Peter set the filled mug in front of him.

Sighing, he grabbed the handle on the mug.

"So, what did you want to know?" Peter stood in front of him with his hands resting on the bar.

"What did you hear about the dead rumrunners from last night?" He took a gulp of beer.

"Ah, see? I told you it'd happen again." Peter grinned. "I thought you weren't interested in my fairy tales."

"Come on, I just want to know what you heard. Did the police find anything?"

Peter leaned forward. "Well, the police think this time the men fought back. Apparently, they set the liquor bottles on fire and tried to burn whatever attacked them or made some sort of bombs with them." He chuckled and stood back. "Good idea, actually. Very resourceful, those damned bootleggers."

"But all the men were killed, right?" He took another swig of beer.

"Yeah, didn't do them much good against demons."

"Stop with the demons." A vision of Necalli entered his mind. "Hey, are any of the rumrunners Indians?" He leaned forward as if it would help him hear Peter's answer better.

"God, no. That would be a whole other bunch of issues. You know the problems they have with drinking on the reservation. All the damn liquor would be gone by the time they got to shore." Peter chuckled while he gave a quick nod to a man walking through the tables.

He twisted his mug on the bar. After lifting his beer, he gulped the rest down. His mug came back down on the bar with a thud. "Thanks." He stood to leave.

"Where you going already?"

"I got stuff to do. Gotta prepare for my damned trip." He waved to Peter and walked out of the bar.

CHAPTER THREE

SURRENDER

Adam glanced at his watch as he strode back to the cabin. It was mid-afternoon already. Where'd the time go? Thick fog surrounded him and the ocean air felt colder today. He turned his collar up on his shirt. He never did change out of the clothes he wore yesterday. He'd have to shower and change when he got home.

He passed three policemen standing at the top of the stairs leading down to the beach. Curious, he strolled over to them. "Good afternoon, officers."

A pudgy officer in a dark uniform turned around and looked him over under the lip of his hat. His blue eyes narrowed at him. "What can I do you for?"

"Just wondering if you'd found anything of interest." Tucking his hands into his front pockets, he did his best to be casual.

"Nothing we care to discuss." The policeman turned to one of his colleagues.

"Ah, but, can you tell me if any of the dead rumrunners were Indians?" He hopped a little, waiting for a response.

The policemen turned back around, chuckling. "Indians? Oh, that's a good one. Bootleggers wouldn't dare get involved with Indians. They might sell to them, but this is strictly a family business if you know what I mean."

He nodded. "Have there been any reports that you know of, of missing Indian children, maybe a teenager?"

The policeman stepped toward him with narrowed eyes. "Why would you be so interested in Indians?"

"No reason, really. I've just heard some silly stories floating around about the murders and wondered how this Indian curse might be connected. Of course, I don't believe a word of it." He grinned at the policeman, turning on as much charm as he could muster.

The officer glanced back at his colleagues and walked to Adam until he stood right next to him. Leaning in, his voice became soft. "Tell you one thing. These murders are creepy. Never seen wounds like this on a corpse before and I've been working homicide for twenty years. To answer your question, no, there have been no reports of missing Indians. In fact, with the rumors going around, we've been forced to keep tabs on them." He stepped back.

Frustration churned in his gut. He was sure Necalli was an Indian. Maybe his disappearance just hadn't been reported yet? He nodded to the officer. "Thanks."

The policeman tipped his hat to him and went back to the others.

He strode through the fog, in the direction of his cabin once again.

Adam sat hunched over at his dining table, reading a book about ship hulls under the dome light. It was late and fatigue crept over his body. He glanced over at Necalli, slumbering peacefully on the couch all curled up in a ball.

Necalli stirred, but didn't wake.

A contented grin spread over his lips. All the excitement from the day must have exhausted Necalli. The poor guy's been sleeping since he came home. He set the book down on the table. *Time for bed.*

He went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. When he finished, he walked back out to the light switch. Hesitating, he glanced at Necalli.

On pure impulse, he padded over to Necalli. He reached

down and gently moved a lock of black hair off his forehead. Necalli looked so beautiful and peaceful sleeping on his couch. His gaze wandered over Necalli's beautiful face to rest on full lips. It surprised him, how much he yearned to taste those lips. His pulse raced, his breath quickened and heat filled his groin. He absently palmed the swelling flesh under his trousers, feeling desire rush his body.

It'd been a few days since he pleased himself. Being so close to this young man sparked something in him. But it wasn't right. He had to control himself.

Pushing a hand through his hair, he made his way back to the light switch and flicked it off. The room went dark except for the two nightlights he kept at opposite ends of the room. He never liked it too dark.

He went back to his bed and undressed down to his boxers. After pulling the covers down, he slid between the sheets. A cool smoothness covered his skin as he pulled the sheets and quilt over him. Turning over onto his side, he glanced up at the picture of his family on the wall. "Goodnight, Mom, Dad, and Aloise."

He closed his eyes and drifted off, listening to the far away surf. As he surrendered to sleep, his bed jiggled. Keeping his eyes closed, he let out a soft grunt. The bed jiggled harder. He rolled lazily onto his back, slowly opening his eyes. Long, black hair tickled his face while light-brown eyes gazed down at him.

Necalli was on all fours, his face hovering over Adam's.

He let out a soft gasp. What did Necalli want? The look in his eyes lit up his desire. His heart pounded and need filled his groin. "What are you doing?" His gaze rested on the sensual flesh of Necalli's lips. He couldn't help it.

"I excite you, don't I?" Necalli's voice was low and seductive.

"Uh, wh-what do you mean?" He gulped hard. Necalli knew. Somehow this young man knew about his strange cravings for him.

Reaching a hand down, Necalli ran a pointed fingernail

over Adam's erection, through sheets and underwear.

A soft moan escaped his lips.

Necalli closed his eyes for a moment as if relishing in the sound of Adam's voice. "You've done this many times today."

"N-no, I haven't. It just happens, sometimes. You should know that."

Necalli fumbled under the covers, grabbed hold of Adam's wrist, and dragged his hand out of the sheets. Placing Adam's palm between his legs, Necalli closed his eyes and let out a low moan. He ran Adam's palm over the fabric of his trousers, rocking gently into the motion. "Yes, I know. It's happened to me, too."

He was stunned. The hard flesh of Necalli's erection slid against his palm. "We shouldn't do this. It's wrong." His voice sounded far away, like it belonged to someone else. His breath grew heavy.

Letting go of Adam's wrist, Necalli lifted his limbs to straddle him. "Why is it wrong?" He leaned his face down to hover closer above Adam's.

He licked his lips. All his attention focused on tasting the beautiful young man just out of reach. "L-lots of reasons." He took a deep breath.

"Like what?" Necalli came down lower on his elbows, almost touching noses with him.

He shifted in the sheets. How he wanted to close the gap, to surrender to his need. His words came out slowly. "Uh, it's, it's just wrong." His chest rose with each breath as if trying to make the connection he craved.

Necalli lowered again. His lips barely brushed Adam's. "But why?"

Necalli's gentle breath puffed over his mouth. "B-becau..." He pushed forward, submitting to his hunger. As his lips crushed Necalli's, his tongue penetrated, probed, danced over the long fangs inside the delicious mouth of the young man so close above him.

Letting out a deep moan, Necalli dropped his body over

Adam's. Immediately, he ground his hips into Adam's erection, thrusting and writhing above him, stealing sweet friction. His arms wrapped around Adam's head as if holding on to the promise of more.

He groaned, feeling the pressure on his cock pulse pleasure through him. He wrapped his arms around Necalli, placing a hand on his lower back, guiding him to press harder against him, heightening the sensation in his erection. Shuddering, he sent a loud gasp into the room.

Necalli's mouth kissed a trail down his jaw line and onto his neck. He nipped gently on the tender skin, tracing long teeth over the surface.

The feel of Necalli's teeth sent a shiver through him. But somehow, his senses dragged him away. *This was wrong, very wrong!* "No, Necalli." He shoved Necalli off him.

Necalli fell to the side with a sharp gasp. "Adam?" Lying on his stomach, he propped himself up on his elbows and looked at him. A wounded confusion tensed his face.

He sighed. His body tingled from the brief tryst. He glanced at Necalli's beautiful face. Desire, fear, regret and shame raged a war inside him. "I'm sorry."

Necalli dropped his forehead to the bed, between his arms. "Is it my hands? My teeth? Do they bother you so much you can't bear to touch me? Am I not pleasant to look at?" His voice resonated with pain.

He rolled to his side and placed a hand on Necalli's back. "Oh, God, no. You're more than pleasant to look at. You're the most stunning and beautiful thing I've ever seen. I don't care about your hands and teeth. You've been driving me crazy, wanting you, since the moment I saw you on the beach."

Necalli lifted his face to him. His eyes shimmered with unshed tears. The tender display of emotion stole Adam's breath.

"Then why won't you take me?"

"Don't you know? It's indecent. It's not done. Well, not done by most guys. Are you, uh, like that?" Shocked, he hoped

his answer was yes.

"I don't know. I don't remember it being indecent. But, if you're asking if I've been with other men, then, yes, I have. I think." Confusion knitted Necalli's brows. "It's not wrong, it can't be." Anguish returned to his face.

"I don't understand you. You're strange and mysterious and alluring all at the same time. I'm drawn to you, but I don't know who, or even what you are."

"Does it matter?" Necalli leaned in close to his face again.

His eyes rested on Necalli's lips. The taste of them lingered on his tongue. Desire rushed through him, destroying any reason. "No, it doesn't." Pushing sideways, he kissed Necalli, hard and insistent.

In a flash, Necalli pinned Adam down on his back, arms up over his head, legs spread wide. "Then, take me." He flicked his tongue over Adam's lips, teasing and taunting his flesh. Licking down Adam's neck, he bit gently into soft skin. His hips thrust into Adam. Low moans, one after another poured out of him.

Thrusting back, he felt delicious waves of pleasure race through his body. Necalli's taunting drove him mad. He gasped as the long teeth brushed along his skin, down his neck, onto his chest. Necalli sucked and bit on his nipple, making him buck with need. His cock became sensitive, too sensitive. Release beckoned him. He broke free from Necalli's grasp and pressed down on his shoulders, craving the feel of his mouth on him. He never had a male before, but he'd had plenty of women.

Necalli obliged, positioning himself over his hips, pulling the sheets and his boxers down to expose Adam's erection. He ran a slick tongue up the underside of Adam's cock.

He groaned and thrust up, desperate to get more.

Necalli licked him again and swirled his tongue over the head of Adam's erection, over and over.

He squirmed. Delicious pulses sent shivers through him. "M-more, take all of it." He wrapped his fingers in Necalli's

long hair and pressed down on the back of his head, yearning to uncoil the tension mounting inside him.

Necalli continued to tease him, with only his tongue, licking his cock, swirling the head.

“Uh, p-please.” His thrusts came faster, more urgent. Ragged breathing tore from his chest.

Necalli stopped and looked up at him. “Do you want me?”

Shuddering, he gazed down at Necalli. “Of course I do. I don’t think I’ve ever wanted anyone more.”

“Will you take me?”

Confusion muddled his mind. What the hell was he talking about? Why is he asking such questions? “I’ll do whatever you want.”

With a mischievous grin, Necalli sat up on his legs. He pulled his shirt over his head and threw it to the floor. He unfastened his trousers.

He watched the languid movements of Necalli’s naked body in the faint glow of the nightlights. Toned and lean muscles flexed and relaxed. Reaching down, he ran his hand along Necalli’s hairless chest and down to the grooves of his taut stomach.

Necalli gazed up. Lust burned in his eyes. His brows tensed and a soft gasp escaped him. His eyes glazed over for a second as if lost in Adam’s caress. “Touch me more.”

A coy grin spread over his mouth. “As soon as you get those pants off, I will.”

Necalli’s frantic hands clamored to open his belt and unzip his trousers. He sat to the side and slid the pants down before tossing them to the floor with his shirt.

He let his eyes roam down to Necalli’s cock, standing tall and thick against his stomach. He’d never touched another male, but he did want to touch his cousin once. “Necalli, I’ve never done this.”

Necalli gave Adam a puzzled glance and rose up and over to lie down on top of him, propped on his elbows. Their cocks pressed against each other. He brushed Adam’s cheek with the

back of his fingers. "Why not?"

Adam looked at the wall. "Because, like I told you, it's indecent."

Necalli's fingers continued their movement over Adam's cheek as if trying to calm him. "I've never heard such a thing."

He turned back to Necalli and studied him for a moment. "That's a convenient thing to forget. Although, maybe it's not such a bad thing in the Indian culture."

"I told you, I'm not Indian." Dropping down, Necalli claimed Adam's lips again, sucking and licking at his mouth.

His hips rocked, rubbing his cock over Necalli's, slowly at first, then with urgency, in time with him. Saliva still slicked his erection and it pulsed between them as pleasure rushed over him. He moaned into Necalli's mouth, feeling his tongue converging over his own. His hands roamed down Necalli's broad back, stopped at his buttocks, and gave it a tight squeeze.

Necalli's body trembled. His hips thrust harder, faster, into Adam. "Take me, now." Desire laced through his pleading voice.

Heavy breaths heaved his chest. "I-I don't know what you mean." Sensitivity teased his cock. The exquisite rubbing over soft skin had him teetering on the brink. "Necalli, I-I can't hold on." His climax surged through him, making his whole body tense as his peak hit. "Oh, God." His sac tightened and seed spurted out between them. Sharp gasps filled the room as each delicious wave ravaged his body. As he slowed, Necalli pawed at him, pressing his forehead into the nape of his neck.

As Necalli rubbed himself over the slick fluid between them, his breath hitched. He pressed his cock hard and fast into Adam's stomach, moaning loud with each thrust of their hips.

He held on tight, sensing Necalli's urgency. "What do you want me to do?"

"Touch me, all over. I want to feel you all over me."

He ran his hands down Necalli's back, kneading the flesh as

he went. Placing both hands on his buttocks, he pulled Necalli's hips harder against him, helping Necalli increase the friction on his erection.

Necalli's body quivered and shook. He drove hard and urgent and his body grew rigid. Calling out in a growl, his hot fluid surged between them, mixing with Adam's. He rubbed up and down, over and over as contractions made his body shudder. When it slowed, he lay lax and panting on Adam's chest.

"I'm sorry." He traced a circle on the small of Necalli's back.

Necalli squeezed him. "For what?"

"I couldn't give you what you wanted."

Necalli lifted himself up onto his elbows and gazed into Adam's face. "I got what I wanted. You. You are everything to me."

Shifting his gaze to the ceiling, he held his breath. The room spun. He didn't get close to people, because people disappeared, people died. Even though his heart longed for what Necalli told him, he couldn't allow it. He didn't even know who he was or where he came from.

"I sense fear in you. Why?" Necalli brushed a lock of hair off Adam's forehead.

"Ah, well, because I just met you. I don't know anything about you and you're saying such serious things. It's not right, its, it's—"

"Wrong? Indecent?" Strain filled Necalli's voice. His gaze darted between Adam's.

"No, it's, it's—"

"Frightening?"

Necalli was absolutely right. He seized Necalli, pulling him close, forcing him to drop back down to his chest. He couldn't utter a word.

"If it frightens you so, we won't discuss such things." Necalli held Adam tight.

He lay enraptured in Necalli's embrace, in the intimacy that

had occurred between them for a few minutes. What the hell was this young Indian man who so easily drew out his feelings and made such an improper act seem so wondrous and right? After a moment, he loosened his hold. "Let's get cleaned up and go to sleep."

Adam lay in Necalli's arms, staring off into the darkness of his cabin. He listened to the steady rhythm of Necalli's breath and thought. His mind returned to what they'd just done. It didn't seem so indecent and immoral anymore.

Come on, Adam, although you shut it away, you always had sexual yearnings for males. Sure, he never experimented the way some of his friends had in San Francisco. He was too shy. But, at least he lived in a place where homosexuality wasn't completely out of the norm. At least he knew where it would be accepted and where it wouldn't.

Closing his eyes, he snuggled in closer to Necalli's chest. He wouldn't dwell on it, not now. For once in his life, he'd accept this sweet gift that was given to him and be happy for as long as it lasted.

A warm body behind Adam stirred. An arm, draped around his waist, grew tight against him. His eyes fluttered open to gaze upon the white plaster of his wall. The bright beams and shadows of the morning sun set the room aglow, shining through cypress boughs and mullioned windows.

Finding the strange hand with the clawed fingers on his belly, he entwined his fingers in it and squeezed.

"Are you awake?"

"Yeah." When was the last time he allowed someone to spend the night with him? Maybe never. It felt good, waking in Necalli's arms.

"What is that picture?"

He gazed up at the picture of his family tacked to the wall. Reaching up, he carefully removed it and brought it down. Necalli moved away from him, allowing him to roll onto his

back. The two lay side-by-side on the bed. He held the picture up over them for Necalli to see. "This was my family. My mother." He pointed to her. "My father." He pointed to him. "And, my little sister, Aloise." His finger stayed on the picture, over her image.

"Why does the picture sadden you?"

He looked at the ceiling. Sudden tears stung his eyes. Not because of the memory so much, but because of the pure concern in Necalli's voice, his uncanny ability to already know his feelings without being told. Reaching a hand up, he rubbed his eyes with his thumb and index finger. "They passed away, in a house fire, when I was twelve, eight years ago."

"And you miss them?" Necalli placed his hand on Adam's arm.

"Yes, terribly. Especially my sister, she was so precious. But, I couldn't save her."

"You tried?" Necalli turned to his side and propped his head by an elbow.

A tear escaped Adam's fingers and rolled down the side of his face. "My mother pleaded with me to, but I couldn't save her without being killed myself." Another rebellious tear worked its way free to fall down his cheek.

Reaching up, Necalli took Adam's hand from his eyes and brought his arm down to rest at his side. "It's okay to feel sorrow for the ones you've lost. Just don't let your loss frighten you into being alone."

Gasping, he dropped the picture and rolled into Necalli's chest. He grasped at his sides in a desperate attempt to hang on to him.

Necalli surrounded Adam, holding him tight.

"Damn it. How do you know so much? Who are you?" His voice muffled against Necalli's chest.

"I can be whoever you want." Necalli kissed the top of his head.

He quickly took control of his emotions. Necalli's comment forced an idea to surface. He raised his head and gazed into

Necalli's stunning eyes. "Today, you'll be an Indian." He grinned.

Tilting his head, Necalli gave him a quizzical look. "I told you, I'm not an Indian."

"Sure, but today I'm taking you to Frank's. I want you to meet my friend, Peter, and you'll be an Indian. Because, I honestly don't know how else to explain you." Reaching down, he held up one of Necalli's hands. "You'll have to wear gloves and I think we need to buy you some new clothes first." His gaze roamed Necalli's face. This young man made him so comfortable. He had this ability to calm him and make him feel things he never felt before. "I'll take you to San Francisco with me tomorrow. You'll meet my Aunt Betty, my Uncle Richard and Maxwell." His heart raced at the thought of seeing Maxwell, like it always did.

"Who is Maxwell?" A look of worry washed over Necalli's face.

"My cousin. It's his eighteenth birthday party tomorrow night. Why?" He watched Necalli closely, sensing a change in him.

Necalli's brows furrowed and he looked away. "You like him."

"Don't be ridiculous. He's my cousin." He gave Necalli a playful shake. Maybe if Necalli was with him, it wouldn't be so bad. Maybe with Necalli at his side, it would be easier.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRANK'S PLACE

Adam opened the door to the cabin, shopping bags in hand, wearing a white oxford and gray slacks. "Ah, reading I see?"

Necalli sat on the couch with one of Adam's books in his lap. "Yes. You have so many books on boats. You must really like them." He put a hand up to his forehead and rubbed it.

He set the bags down and closed the door. "Are you okay? Does your head hurt?" He paced to the couch and plopped down next to Necalli, laying a hand on his shoulder.

Reaching up, Necalli covered Adam's hand with his own. "It does a little. I think I must have hit it back here." He took Adam's hand and brought it to the back of his head.

He fingered a lump through Necalli's hair. Guilt rushed over him. Why didn't he ever check for it when he brought him home? "Would you like some aspirin?"

Necalli shook his head. "No, I'll be fine."

A wide grin spread over his lips. "Well, I bought you some new clothes, sort of spiffy if I might add." Looking Necalli over, a soft chuckle escaped him. "I just hope the pants are short enough."

"You got the same size as my other pants, right?"

He slapped Necalli's knee. "You are something, you know that? I wonder if everyone is short where you came from."

Confusion washed over Necalli's face. "I don't know, I don't remember."

Chuckling, he shook his head. "Oh, God, I can't take anymore. It was a joke."

"A joke? Oh." A slow smile widened Necalli's lips.

"You did take a shower while I was gone, right?" He took Necalli in again, this time inspecting for perceived cleanliness.

"Yes."

He gestured to the shopping bags. "Well, get changed and let's head down to Frank's."

"Okay." Necalli rose from the couch and padded to the bags. He took each item of clothing out and examined it. There were a few dress shirts, a sweater, a wool jacket, a package of boxers, socks, and a few pairs of trousers, all of the latest fashion.

"Do you like them?" He sat cross legged on the couch, anticipating the sight of Necalli naked in the daylight.

"Yes, I do." Necalli took off his shirt and unfastened his trousers, dropping them to the floor. He glanced back at Adam as he kicked off his trousers and rested his hand on the band of his boxers.

He licked his lips. His heart beat a little faster. Heat rushed his groin.

Necalli grinned back at him. "It excites you to see me naked."

"Yes, I guess it does." He uncrossed his legs, making room for his burgeoning erection.

Necalli pulled his boxers down and kicked them off. His cock stood tall and hard. He glanced at him again as if shy.

"You little devil, you." He stood and walked to Necalli. Coming up behind him, he wrapped his arms around him, burying his face in black hair. Finding the soft skin of Necalli's neck, he gave it a lingering kiss.

Necalli moaned, leaning into Adam's chest and tilting his head. "Touch me."

He swayed their bodies together. "Damn. Although I'd love to give you what you want, we don't have time right now. I stopped by Frank's and told Peter we'd be there by one. He's

expecting us. Aren't you hungry?"

"I suppose." Necalli straightened and pulled out of Adam's grasp. He leaned over, opened the bag of white boxers, and pulled one out. He stepped into it.

He laid a hand on Necalli's back. "You're not mad at me, are you?"

Necalli shook his head, pulling up the boxers and bending over for a pair of brown slacks.

He's lying, but I did reject him. When Necalli stood to fasten the slacks, he leaned forward and whispered in his ear. "When we get back from Frank's, I promise, I'll touch you, I'll take you, as much as you want, Okay?"

A wide grin spread over Necalli's face.

The pair strolled down the road through early afternoon fog, almost to the speakeasy. Necalli had a thin sweater on, the color of cream, and wore Adam's black, leather driving gloves over his hands.

Adam admired the young man. "You look handsome, Necalli."

Necalli lowered his head and blushed. "Thank you."

"Uh, I forgot to tell you something though."

Necalli gazed at him. "Yes?"

"Well, it's not all that normal in our culture for guys to be with guys, so I'm going to have to ask you to, uh, keep your hands to yourself." He smiled.

Obvious confusion knitted Necalli's brows, but his head nodded.

After rounding the building from the side, he hopped up the cement stairs and opened the door to Frank's, letting Necalli enter first.

Necalli stepped inside and waited for Adam, scanning the contents of the speakeasy.

"Come on." He led Necalli to the bar and promptly took a seat.

Necalli sat next to him. Unease etched across his face and

he gazed down at his gloves.

Looking around the room, he saw a few full tables with mostly male customers and another man sat at the end of the bar, smoking and drinking beer. Another man played a jazz tune on a piano in the corner. It was then he noticed the man at the bar give Necalli a condescending glare. He nodded to the man, getting his attention, and the man looked in the other direction. He glanced at Necalli. Thankfully, he didn't seem to notice the exchange.

"Adam." A woman's voice called out from behind him.

He flinched and twisted on his barstool. "Oh, Suzie."

Suzie came prancing toward him in her beige uniform, all giddy and smiles. "Where have you been? I didn't see you in here yesterday?" As she stopped in front of him, the long hem on her dress brushed against his legs.

"I was busy. I have to prepare for my trip." He leaned back. She seemed too close.

She pointed at Necalli. "Are you with him?"

He glanced at Necalli, who'd turned to face them.

"Yes, this is Necalli, a very close friend from, um, the city."

Frowning, Suzie looked Necalli up and down.

He gestured to Suzie. "This is Suzie."

Smiling, Necalli held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Suzie."

Suzie hesitated before taking his hand. They shook briefly. "So, you're from the city, huh?"

"Yes," Necalli said.

"Is that the style now, long hair like that?" She placed her hands on her hips.

Reaching up, Necalli fingered the ends of his long hair. "I-I don't know."

Suzie continued her inspection of him. "Why are you wearing gloves, it's not that cold in—"

"That's enough, Suzie. Don't you have some work to do?" Irritation threaded through Adam.

Shifting her gaze to Adam, she smiled. "Sure, but I'll be

done soon. You'll wait for me, won't you?"

"Uh, don't know. We'll see," Adam said.

"Hey, buddy," a familiar voice said, from behind the bar.

He turned around to see Peter smiling at him.

Suzie trotted off into the dining area.

"Drink?" Peter's fingers were already wrapped around a frosty mug.

"Yes. And one for my friend here." He gestured to Necalli.

Peter glanced up while he poured Adam's beer. "Hello, I'm Peter."

Necalli grinned and held out his gloved hand over the bar. "I'm Necalli, pleased to meet you."

Straightening, Peter set the filled mug in front of Adam and extended a hand out to Necalli. He gave him a firm shake. Leaning down, he pulled another mug out and poured beer into it. "So you're a friend of Adam's, huh?"

Adam swallowed a gulp of beer. "Yeah, an old friend from the city." He lowered his mug back to the bar.

"So you said when you were in here earlier." Peter set the beer in front of Necalli. "Didn't know you had any Indian friends, or is he Chinese?"

"I'm Indian." Necalli placed his fingers around the mug's handle.

"What tribe? You don't look like the ones we get around here." Peter wiped the bar with a white rag.

"H-he's from back East. Moved out here, uh, about five years ago, right, Necalli?" Adam gazed at Necalli. This was proving a little more difficult than he anticipated.

"Yes, I'm from the Chippewa Nation." Necalli's eyes met Adam's as if looking for approval.

"Uh, Peter, can we each get a bowl of clam chowder?" He placed a hand on Necalli's forearm. "You like that, don't you?"

"Yes, I do." Necalli raised the beer to his lips and took a large gulp.

"Is it really that cold in here?" Peter pointed at Necalli's gloved hand, still grasping the mug.

“Uh...” Necalli set his beer down and brought his hands into his lap.

“Naw, it’s his idea of fashion. Right, Necalli?”

Necalli nodded, keeping his gaze on his beer.

Peter shook his head. “Well, it’s not the most unusual thing I’ve seen around here. Anything else to go with the soup?” He glanced between them.

“Just bring the soup and we’ll think of what else we want.” As Peter left for the kitchen, Adam leaned into Necalli. His voice was soft. “That was pretty good, saying you were Chippewa.”

Necalli nodded and furrowed his brows. “The gloves are my idea of fashion? What does that mean?”

He chuckled and brought his beer back up to his lips, taking a quick gulp. “Don’t worry about it. It worked. So, what else would you like to eat? They have just about everything, fish, chicken, pasta, you name it.”

Necalli took a sip of beer and set it down in front of him. “I’ll just have whatever you’re having, I’m sure it’ll be good.”

“Damn, you are so much easier than dealing with a woman, you know that?” Grinning, he gave Necalli’s arm a playful slap.

A puzzled expression washed over Necalli’s face. “Are you talking about Suzie?”

He thought for a moment. “Yeah, maybe I am.”

“So you have something with her, even though your body doesn’t respond to her?” Necalli twisted his stool to face him.

He leaned forward. “No, I don’t have a damned thing with that girl. She might think there’s something, but there’s not.” He gulped the remainder of his beer down.

Necalli gazed down into gloved hands. “She responds to you.”

Peter strode back behind the bar with two large bowls of soup and stopped in front of Necalli. After setting the bowls and spoons on the bar, he bent forward, propping himself on his elbows and placing his chin on his hands. “So since you’re Indian, what do you think of that demon curse?”

Necalli blew over the white soup in his spoon. "What demon curse?"

Adam scoffed at Peter. "Come on, he's not from here." He pushed a spoonful of soup into his mouth.

"So, you've never heard of demon's living out on those islands off the shore?"

Necalli shook his head, keeping his focus on his soup.

"Well, I heard there are demons out there and they're the ones killing the rumrunners. They drain them of all their blood, like vampires or something." Peter straightened and made clawing motions with his hands. "And they use their claws to cut them all up. They only come out on the full moon."

Choking on his soup, Necalli gasped and coughed.

Adam reached over and patted Necalli's back. "You okay?"

Necalli regained his composure and gave Adam an anxious glance. "I, uh, think I need to use the restroom." He hurried off the stool and through the bar, toward the restroom sign.

He watched Necalli leave. Did Peter's story upset him or was the choking a pure coincidence? Could something Peter said have returned some of his memories of that night on the beach?

Peter set his hands on the bar and grinned. "Do you think I scared him?"

He glanced at his friend. "No, the story is too stupid to be scary. Maybe the soup just didn't sit well with him. In any case, let's not bring that nonsense up again, okay?"

Peter picked up his rag and ran it over the dark surface of the bar. "Sure, fine."

Suzie scurried into the bar, stopped at Adam's side and placed her hand on his shoulder. She leaned in to his ear. "Adam, that friend of yours is just plain creepy. Do you know what he just said to me?"

"No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me." He rolled his eyes at Peter.

"He told me I don't excite you. What the hell is that supposed to mean?" She pouted.

A deep laugh erupted from Peter.

Adam chuckled. "Oh my God, he is brave. I have to give him that."

"But why would he say something like that?" Her gaze searched Adam's face.

"I don't know. He's Indian, they say all kinds of weird stuff." Adam scooped the last of his soup into his spoon and lifted it to his mouth.

"Well, I don't like him." She shifted her stance and dropped her hand off his shoulder. "His eyes looked sort of funny, too, like they'd changed. They were yellow."

Adam looked her over. "How much whiskey have you had to drink today?"

She slapped him on the shoulder. "None. I've been working, you ass."

Necalli ambled back to the bar from the restroom, head lowered. He glanced up at her and returned his gaze to the floor.

Adam watched, worried, while Necalli took a seat next to him. Putting a hand on his shoulder, Adam leaned toward him. "You okay? You don't look so good."

"I'm fine." Without looking up, Necalli picked up his spoon and ate his soup.

She shifted her weight on her high heels and placed a hand on her hip, glaring at Necalli.

Peter watched the exchange. "Oh, leave him alone,"

"I saw her." Necalli set his spoon on the bar.

"Who, Suzie? We sort of know." Adam squeezed Necalli's shoulder and released it.

Necalli gazed up at Adam. "The woman who haunts this place."

"See?" Peter flung his towel out and slapped it on the counter. "I told you she's real."

"Stop it, Peter." Adam turned his attentions to Necalli again. "What are you talking about?"

Suzie took a seat next to Adam.

“She’s here, right behind you.” Necalli peered at something behind Adam.

A chill rushed Adam’s spine.

“Where, I don’t see her.” Suzie’s gaze darted around the room.

Adam smirked. “Come on, there’s no such thing as ghosts.”

“How come I can’t see her?” Peter asked.

“She doesn’t always want everyone to see her. She’s sad, so very sad. She can’t find her way, even though she’s released herself from this realm.” Necalli continued to gaze behind Adam.

Adam placed his hand on Necalli’s thigh. “That’s enough.”

Shifting his attention to Adam, Necalli’s gaze roamed his face.

“See, I told you he was creepy. Now I’m not going to want to go into the pantry by myself.” She rose with a huff, leered at Necalli and trotted back toward the dining room.

Adam frowned, irritated by the whole conversation. Why would Necalli say such things?

“Why does death scare you so?” Necalli asked.

“It doesn’t. Just quit talking like that.” He glanced at Peter.

Peter leaned over the bar, between him and Necalli. “It scares everyone, doesn’t it? I mean, no one wants to die.”

Necalli lifted his beer and took a gulp. “But it’s a part of living.”

He shifted in his seat, taking his hand off Necalli’s thigh. “Oh, brother. Let’s stop all this talk and have a shot okay? How about we toast to death, dying, and ghosts. Will that shut you both up?” All he wanted, at this point, was to lighten the mood.

Peter went into action, pulling out three shot glasses and filling them with whiskey. When he finished, he pushed one toward Necalli and the other toward Adam.

They each raised their glass.

“To death, dying, and ghosts. Hear that, Blue Lady?” Adam reached forward with his glass, clanking it on Necalli’s first,

then Peter's.

All three downed their shots and all at once, smacked them down on the bar.

"Damn, that is good stuff they brought in last week." Peter gave a slow shake of his head.

"Sure is." Adam licked his lips.

"So, can I get you anything else to eat?" Peter asked.

He glanced at Necalli and noticed his empty soup bowl. "Yeah, how about bringing us each a plate of that pasta with the sausage in it?"

"Okay, be right back." Peter strode off in the direction of the double doors.

He set his elbows on the bar and leaned toward Necalli. "What is that nonsense about a ghost?"

"It's exactly what I said." Necalli lifted his mug and gulped down the rest of his beer.

He saw small holes at the fingertips of the gloves covering Necalli's hands. *Were they there before? No.* "Hey."

Necalli set his beer back down.

He grabbed Necalli's hand and examined the holes. They were right above the end of Necalli's nails, some still pointed through. "What the hell—"

Yanking his hand away, Necalli hid it under his thigh. He lowered his head, making his hair fall over his face.

"How did my gloves get holes in them? What happened?" Bewilderment threaded through him. The gloves were leather and after what happened last night, he'd know if Necalli's nails were sharp enough to puncture them.

Necalli tilted his head away from Adam.

"I asked you what happened. Tell me." He placed a hand on Necalli's arm. The arm trembled beneath his touch. "Hey, I'm not angry. I just want to know how something like that could happen."

"I-I don't remember." Necalli's voice wavered.

"How can you not remember?"

"I just don't. Please, I don't know what happened."

The answer confused Adam. Necalli looked upset, he shouldn't push him too hard. He patted Necalli's arm. "Okay, it's okay. I won't ask you about the gloves and you won't talk about ghosts. Is that a deal?"

Necalli looked up at Adam. "Yes, it's a deal."

Peter emerged from the two-way doors with plates filled high with pasta and sausage cut into slices. He strode to where Adam and Necalli sat and set the plates down in front of them. "What's eating you two?"

"Nothing, just get us some silverware and another beer, okay?" Adam forced a smile.

Peter glanced at Necalli before turning around and grabbing two napkin rolls of silverware. He gave them to Adam and Necalli and grabbed two more mugs. "So, how long you in town for?"

Necalli glanced up as if not knowing he was being spoken to. "Uh, I don't know."

"As long as he wants." Smiling, Adam nudged Necalli with his elbow.

Necalli turned his focus to Adam. He studied him for a moment before smiling back.

"Where you staying?" Peter poured the new beers, set them in front of Adam and Necalli, and took the old mugs.

"He's staying with me." Adam shoved a forkful of pasta into his mouth.

"But, I thought you were going to the city tomorrow?" Peter washed the mugs.

Adam chewed and gulped. "He's going to the city with me and then we'll come back down here together. Maybe he'll move down here permanently." He shoved more pasta in his mouth.

Necalli grinned while chewing his food. He brought his beer up and took a quick gulp, washing everything down. "I'd like that."

A warm feeling bathed Adam. Necalli could stay with him indefinitely. Fear rushed to the surface. He shouldn't get too

close, people in his life tended to disappear, one way or another. He took the last bite of his pasta.

Suzie came strolling back into the bar, wearing a black dress, shorter than yesterday's, with beads that dangled around her slim neck.

"Oh, no," Adam said under his breath.

She came directly to Adam's side, opposite Necalli, and propped her elbow on his shoulder. "You waited for me, I see." She glanced at Necalli.

"No, I just had to eat some lunch and that takes a while." He looked up at Peter, pleading for help with his expression.

Peter gave him a slow shake of his head and turned his attentions to Suzie. "So do you want a whiskey?"

She swayed in a slow, seductive dance against Adam. "No, not today. I think I'll stick with beer."

After getting her a mug, Peter poured her a beer.

Adam pushed his empty plate forward and noticed Necalli was finished, too.

"So you gonna buy my beer today?" She twisted Adam toward her.

Her face closed in on Adam's, making him feel uncomfortable. "Uh, sure."

She bent over him, putting herself over his lap, and glared at Necalli. "See, I do so excite him, why else would he buy me a beer?"

Peter set Suzie's beer down and watched the exchange, obviously amused.

Necalli faced her directly, eyes flaring with anger. "His body doesn't respond to you. It responds to—"

"That's enough." Adam held up his hand, shocked. What the hell almost came out of Necalli's mouth?

Suzie straightened. "Humph." She grabbed her beer and took a long gulp.

Peter tapped Necalli's arm, chuckling. "Responds to what? Tell me, please, I have yet to see what type of gal this guy is interested in."

Adam glared at Necalli.

Necalli took a quick glance at Adam. "Uh, well, uh." He stole another glance at Adam. "I don't know." His gaze fell to his lap.

Suzie walked around Adam until she was between Adam and Necalli. "We'll just see if his body responds to me." She whirled Adam's body around on the stool so his knees brushed against her backside and she plopped down on his lap.

"Hey." He lifted his arms up.

Necalli lurched to standing, staring her down.

She looked directly at Necalli and ground her behind into Adam's lap. "Let's just see if I excite him now."

"Holy shit." Peter let out a loud laugh.

"Damn it, get off me." He shoved her off him, throwing her against Necalli's chest.

Reaching out, Necalli snatched her by the shoulders. "You shouldn't do such stupid things."

Her head rose. Her befuddled gaze met his and widened. "Look, his eyes, they're yellow again." She took a few steps back.

Necalli turned his head and let his black hair fall over his face.

"Shut up, Suzie. Leave him alone." Adam stood up and stepped toward Necalli. He placed his hand on his cheek and turned Necalli's face toward him. Their gaze met. "They are not yellow. They're perfectly normal." *Shit, he looks pretty upset.* In a soft voice, he asked, "You want to go home?"

Necalli nodded and tilted his head forward again.

He turned to the bar and gulped down the remainder of his beer. "We're leaving, Peter. I think Necalli's had enough abuse by Miss Indian Hater over here."

"I don't hate Indians." She crossed her arms over her chest and pouted.

"Okay. Have a good rest of the day. Hope you have a good time on your trip." Peter focused on Necalli. "Don't let her bother you." He held out his hand.

Reaching over the bar, Necalli took Peter's hand.

"It was good to meet you." Peter shook their hands.

"It was good to meet you, too." Necalli released Peter's hand and took his beer. He finished it, following Adam's lead.

"Ready?" Adam asked.

Necalli gave him a quick nod.

Adam started toward the door, but hesitated in front of Suzie and gave her a brief glare.

Necalli followed with his head lowered.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEARS

“I’m sorry, Adam.” Necalli grabbed hold of Adam’s hand. Adam looked ahead of them, through the fog, at the cypress branches above his cabin. “You have nothing to be sorry for. That damned Suzie is nothing but a pest.”

“But why do you buy her beer?” Necalli squeezed Adam’s hand.

He stopped and faced Necalli, a few feet from the door of the cabin, and shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess I feel sorry for her sometimes.” As he gazed into Necalli’s lovely eyes, his heart raced and warmth filled his groin.

Necalli smiled. “You said you would take me now.” Leaning in, he gave Adam a sensual kiss. He placed Adam’s palm over the solid flesh in his trousers, moaning softly.

“Damn, you’re hard already?” He spoke against the velvet skin of Necalli’s lips. The kiss turned heated as his tongue entered Necalli’s mouth. Giving Necalli’s erection a gentle squeeze with one hand, he slid the other up underneath his sweater, caressing the toned flesh of his chest.

Necalli gasped and thrust into Adam’s hand. “Take me, now.” Need filled his voice.

He pulled away and turned to the door. It wouldn’t open fast enough. This young man brought things out in him he never even knew existed. After stepping inside, the soft click of the door closing sounded behind him. He turned around. Necalli’s sweater lay rumpled on the floor next to his gloves.

Necalli dropped his slacks to his ankles and stepped out of them.

He joined him, unbuttoning his shirt and quickly discarding it.

When Necalli stood completely naked, he stepped toward Adam, stopping directly in front of him. He reached a tentative hand out and placed a light stroke over Adam's erection as his mouth claimed Adam's once again.

A rush of pleasure washed through Adam's body with Necalli's soft touch. He rocked his hips forward in time with it.

Necalli kissed and licked down Adam's jaw to his neck. He moaned as he bit softly into its nape.

He quickly lost himself in the sensations pouring through him from his neck and groin. His hands came up to roam Necalli's back and chest. Placing his fingers over Necalli's nipple, he pinched.

Necalli gasped, stopping his motions on Adam's erection. "Take me." Lifting his head, he gazed into Adam's eyes.

He saw Necalli's face raw with need. "I'm not sure what you mean by that exactly. You'll have to show me."

Necalli's brows furrowed, as if in sudden agony. "You said you would, you promised." His hands rested on Adam's hips.

"I will, just tell me or show me what you mean." His eyes chased Necalli's face as he looked down between them. "What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure how."

He caressed Necalli's arm with his hand. "Why not? Surely you can tell me exactly what you want?"

Necalli shook his head. "I don't know the words." He drew Adam close. Their naked bodies meshed, making him visibly shiver.

His cock brushed against Necalli's, sending a wave of desire through him. He kissed the side of Necalli's head. "I wish I knew what you wanted."

Necalli held him tighter. He rocked his hips, rubbing himself over Adam's thigh. A low moan came out of him. "I

want you to take me, so badly.” He rocked a little faster and pressed harder against him. “Please.” Urgency laced his voice.

Watching Necalli behave this way heightened his desire. He drew Necalli in close and placed a passionate kiss over his mouth, moaning.

Necalli broke free from Adam’s grasp. Looking up into his eyes, he jumped up, wrapped his arms and legs around Adam, and ground his hips into his stomach. His mouth devoured Adam’s neck.

Stunned, he almost dropped Necalli, but was able to get a good hold on his buttocks, holding him as a mother would a child. He stepped toward the bed, relishing in the shivers rushing down his spine from Necalli’s mouth. Necalli plunged in his grasp, making his cock push into the crevice of Necalli’s behind.

Tilting his head back, Necalli moaned and tried to push himself lower.

He gasped. “What are you doing?”

“Take me, this is what I want.” Frantic with need, Necalli writhed in his arms, making Adam almost drop him again.

He stumbled to the bed and fell forward, onto Necalli.

Still, Necalli’s arms and legs wrapped tight around Adam. His moans changed to urgent cries, on the verge of distress.

“Oh, God, are you okay?” What the hell was happening? What should he do? As Necalli moved over his erection, his desire flared. But was he hurting him somehow?

“Take me, please, take me.” Necalli continued shoving himself down onto Adam, panting and wriggling himself over Adam’s swollen cock. “Take me, I beg you.”

He felt the head of his erection thrust into Necalli’s entrance. Shutting his eyes, he hissed with pleasure as the delicious heat jolted through him.

“More, please, more.” Necalli bobbed up and down as if trying to drive him in further. His claws scratched over Adam’s skin, insistent with need.

“Are you sure this is what you want? This is what you were

asking for?” He’d heard of this, but had no idea how it was really done. He thrust upward, pushing down on Necalli’s shoulders at the same time.

Necalli filled the room with a painful cry. “Take me, Adam, take me.”

He looked down into Necalli’s face, not sure what he heard.

Necalli’s eyes closed and a tear raced down his cheek.

“No, this is hurting you, I won’t hurt you.” He pulled out and broke free from Necalli’s grasp, but was unable to escape his legs. He sat upright and looked down on Necalli.

Panting and stilled, pain and need showed on Necalli’s face.

He fell forward, supporting himself on straight arms. “It was hurting you. I had to stop.”

Necalli twisted his head to the side, looking out into the room. “I don’t care. The pain doesn’t last.”

He wouldn’t be deterred. “I won’t hurt you. Can’t we do something that doesn’t hurt?”

Reaching up, Necalli seized Adam, forcing him back down on top of him. At the same time, he tugged upward on Adam’s hips with his legs, driving Adam partially back inside him. “Take me, Adam, please.” His voice whined his plea. Pushing his face into Adam’s shoulder, Necalli whimpered as if in pain.

Necalli’s body shuddered under him. “Necalli,” he whispered. He held him tight while he kept himself inside him. It felt exquisite, but he didn’t want to move for fear of hurting him further. He placed a tender kiss on the side of Necalli’s neck. “It shouldn’t hurt so much, something’s not right.”

Necalli squirmed under Adam, letting out a low and sensual moan. “Please, go deeper. It doesn’t hurt.” He attempted to pull Adam’s hips up again, but Adam held himself rigid.

He grit his teeth. His cock pulsed inside Necalli. Oh, how he wanted to do as he asked. In a few moments, his need would drive his hips against his will. Why this was so difficult when it seemed so smooth with a woman? “It doesn’t have to hurt.” Quickly, he pulled out. He had an idea.

“No.” Necalli struggled to force him back inside.

Raising his head, he gazed into Necalli's eyes. "Let me go. I promise I'll be right back. I think there's something we need."

As his brows tensed with confusion, Necalli's eyes darted between Adam's. "You'll take me?"

"Yes." He smiled. "Oh, yes, I'll take you." Necalli's grip relaxed and he climbed off the bed.

Closing his eyes, Necalli shivered. "Hurry."

He glanced back at Necalli while he padded into his bathroom. His whole body tingled with the anticipation of what he was about to do. Reaching up, he opened his medicine cabinet and pulled out a glass jar of petroleum jelly.

As he made his way back to the bed, he unscrewed the metal lid and peered inside. There were already deep grooves in it from his fingers. A remnant from the last time he used it, alone, for his own pleasure.

Grinning, he looked down at the beautiful young man in his bed and his solid cock, seeping at the tip for only him.

Necalli pushed up on his elbows as Adam sat on the bed. "What's that?"

He held the jar out to Necalli. "Don't tell me you don't remember petroleum jelly?"

Looking puzzled, Necalli shook his head.

He chuckled, dipping his fingers in the jar and coating them. He leaned over Necalli's hips, putting his weight on a straightened arm, and gazed into Necalli's eyes while he spread it over his hard cock.

Tilting his head back, Necalli jerked his hips upward, gasping. "Take me now, I can't wait."

He quickly slicked his own erection with jelly, sending a burst of pleasure through him, set the jar on the floor, and climbed over Necalli.

Necalli's arms and legs immediately wrapped around Adam's waist again, luring him with insistence, downward. His back arched as Adam's cock fell under his sac and rested at his entrance. "Please, now."

He grabbed hold of Necalli's shoulders and buried his face

in his long locks and neck. He drove upward, entering Necalli easily. Immediate pleasure washed over him. A sweet hot pressure surrounded him, making him moan.

Necalli's back arched high, his mouth opened and a sound, like a feral growl, came out of him. Panting, he gripped tight with his legs and forced Adam's erection further into him.

The slick friction on his cock rushed pleasure all through his body. His hips drove in and out, over and over, building his sensitivity.

Necalli writhed below Adam, moaning and panting, pawing urgently at his back. "Harder, go harder." He seemed frantic.

He tried to match Necalli's frenzied pace. Their hips slapped against each other with each thrust. His tension mounted quickly, making his body shake with the promise of release. "Necalli, I-I'm going to—" He drove in hard and held it while his climax erupted out of him.

Necalli squirmed under him, clutching at his sides.

As his seed poured out of him, he gasped, sending waves of pleasure pulsing through his body. He pulled out quickly and drove in again equally hard, letting the delicious spasms consume him. When he finished, Necalli's body trembled below him.

"Adam, please keep going. I need you to keep going, just a little more." Necalli jerked his legs, attempting to force Adam to do as he requested.

He lifted and tilted slightly to reach between them. He stroked hard and fast on Necalli's erection, while driving inside him. Captivated, he watched Necalli's reaction.

As his cock grew harder in Adam's grip, Necalli's body shuddered in pleasure. His brows tensed and his eyes clenched shut. "Keep going, don't stop." His legs wound tight to Adam's hips, forcing Adam to stay deep inside him. Bucking hard, he cried out as his climax forced his seed to surge, in short spurts, over Adam's hand and onto his own stomach and chest. It went on and on in a relentless release of lust and desire.

As Necalli's climax came to a stop, he relaxed his grip and dropped down to lie over Necalli, not caring about the mess between them. He yearned for closeness after what they'd shared. Necalli's body shivered once more underneath him while he twirled a lock of black hair in his fingers.

Necalli relaxed his legs, but kept them wrapped around Adam. His arms embraced Adam in a tight hold. "Thank you." The remnants of desire laced through his voice. Although his breathing had slowed, it was still ragged.

"You don't have to thank me. I enjoyed it just as much as you did." He chuckled. "Maybe even a little more." He buried his face in Necalli's neck.

"Do you like me?" Necalli squeezed Adam.

Lifting his head, he gazed into Necalli's face. *Is that sadness in his eyes?* "Of course I do. Why do you ask me that?" Confusion riddled his mind. He discussed having Necalli stay with him indefinitely. Didn't it mean something?

Necalli looked at the wall. "I just need to know."

Pressing his fingers to Necalli's chin, he brought him back. "I like you, a lot." His feelings went deeper, but how could he say any more so soon? He'd never told anyone he loved them, never allowed himself to get that close. His heart filled with terror. How could he even think about things like that already? "Uh, we better get cleaned up." He rushed out of Necalli's embrace and off the bed.

He strode into the bathroom, wet a washcloth and quickly wiped himself off. He ran it under the water again before going back out to the main room. When he stood next to the bed, he looked down at Necalli.

On his back with his arms raised, Necalli's forearms crossed and rested over his eyes. He bit his lower lip.

Adam sat on the bed and wiped the lean muscles of Necalli's torso.

"Why do you run in fear from me?"

His motions stopped. How should he answer? Could he tell him the truth? "I didn't run from you."

Necalli put his arms down. Pain showed on his face. "Are you afraid of me?"

Frowning, he leaned down and wrapped his arms around Necalli's shoulders. "No, I'm not afraid of you. It's, well..." He gulped hard. It was obvious he owed Necalli a reasonable explanation. "I think I'm afraid of my feelings for you." He tightened his hold, waiting for some sort of backlash.

Necalli returned Adam's embrace. "Because you've lost so much, you've built walls around your heart."

Tears filled his eyes. What Necalli said was true and it was an unbearable and frightening thing to face.

"You are everything to me. I'll tell you this, even though I know how much it scares you." Kissing Adam's cheek, Necalli caressed slow circles on Adam's back.

Fear paralyzed him. If he spoke, everything might pour out of him and the walls Necalli spoke of would crumble. He wasn't ready. "Let's talk about something else, okay?"

He shoved himself up, out of Necalli's embrace, and rose to put the washcloth away and dress. After hanging the washcloth in the bathroom and putting his boxers and slacks back on, he brought Necalli's clothes to him. "Here." He handed them to Necalli.

Necalli sat up and dressed.

He climbed up on the bed and crept over the quilt to the wall. He sat with his back against it and drew his legs up. His mind shifted gears. What were those strange things Necalli did and said at the bar? He wanted explanations. "Did you remember something when we were at Frank's?"

Necalli sat on the edge of the bed, buttoning his shirt. He turned to Adam with his eyes widening in surprise. "N-no, I didn't. Not a thing."

Something in Necalli's voice didn't ring true. "Yes, you did." If Necalli could make him face his fears, then he could make Necalli do the same.

Necalli looked away and let his hair cover his face.

Reaching forward, he grabbed hold of Necalli's arm and

tugged him backward.

“Don’t.” Necalli jerked his arm.

“I just want you to come back here and sit with me.” He kept a firm grip on Necalli’s arm, tugging him backward.

Grunting, Necalli crept back to sit beside Adam, keeping his face lowered.

He sighed, putting an arm around Necalli. “Listen, this thing works both ways. If you want me to open up to you, then you have to trust me enough to tell me the truth.”

Trembling, Necalli turned into Adam’s shoulder, placing his hand on Adam’s chest. “I did remember something. But, it was terrible, so terrible.” His voice shook.

He rubbed Necalli’s shoulder and gave him a tender kiss on his forehead. “It’s okay. I’m sure there is someone out there who’s looking for you, who misses you. We need to find—”

“But I won’t go back. Don’t make me go back. I want to stay with you. Remember? You said I could.” Necalli’s breath hitched.

“Shh, Settle down. I won’t make you go back.” He kissed his head. “Tell me what you remember, please.”

Necalli’s fists clenched and unclenched. “I was on a boat and there were these things, monsters. They were all around me. I saw them tear those men apart. I saw them drink their blood. I saw...” Burying his face deeper into Adam’s shirt, he let out a soft sob.

“Oh, God. Shh.” He drew Necalli into his lap and held him tight, running his hand over the back of Necalli’s head, hoping to ease his pain. “I’m sure they looked like monsters. It was dark after all. But wasn’t it really a group of rabid animals? Mountain lions, maybe?”

Necalli thrust his head up and gazed at Adam with wet eyes. “It wasn’t mountain lions or any other sort of rabid animal.” Sniffing, he swiped his face with the back of his hand. Fresh tears filled his eyes. “They had arms and legs, like humans.”

A chill ran down his spine as he remembered the Indian

curse Peter spoke of. Not possible, Necalli must have been scared and confused and it was dark. "Okay, well, you did remember something at least. That's a good sign, isn't it?"

Necalli gave Adam a slow nod, keeping his eyes fixed on Adam's as if drawing strength from them.

A smile spread on his lips. "Maybe soon, you'll remember more and this whole mystery will be solved." He pulled Necalli back into his chest and held him for a few moments. He found himself rubbing his cheek over the top of Necalli's head, losing himself in the spicy scent of the young man curled in his lap. He could get used to this, addicted to it.

"Adam?"

"Yes?"

"Do you have any books that aren't on boats?" Necalli traced a soft circle on Adam's arm.

He let his eyes roam the inside of his cabin and chuckled. "No, not really."

"Oh."

"You like to read, huh?" He gently pushed Necalli away so he could look at his face, holding him by the shoulders.

"I do. I love to read." Necalli looked directly into Adam's eyes.

"We'll have to get you some of the books you like." He gave Necalli's shoulders a soft squeeze.

"When?"

He shrugged. "Well, I think the bookstore is still open, if we hurry."

Necalli smiled, baring long eyeteeth. "Get dressed."

Adam parked his old Chevy sedan in front of the bookstore and killed the engine. It was early evening and the light from the sign was on, making the fog glow in swirls over it. Adam peered through the glass of his windshield and the bookstore front to see a balding man behind a wooden counter, bent over the cash register. "Looks like it's still open." He turned his head to gaze at Necalli, shifting with obvious unease on the

seat next to him.

Necalli gave Adam an anxious grin.

“What’s the matter?” He rested his hands on the wood steering wheel.

Necalli shifted in his seat again, making the black leather groan against his slacks. “I don’t think I’ve ever ridden in a car before.”

Chuckling, he slapped Necalli’s knee. “Why didn’t you say so when we got in? Wasn’t it fun? Or do you get carsick?”

“It was...different.”

“I hope you don’t get carsick, because we’ll be in this car for a good hour and a half tomorrow.” His attention focused on the door handle. After tugging on it, it clunked and the door swung open. “Come on.” He stepped out of the car and slammed the door shut.

Necalli pulled the handle on his side and soon joined Adam at the glass doors of the entrance.

He opened the door and stood aside for Necalli to enter. Immediately, the scent of fresh paper mixed with leather and the glue of bindings floated all around him.

After a glance at Adam, Necalli brushed by and stood as if in awe of all the books, lined up in neat rows on shelves in a myriad of isles.

Smiling, he walked to Necalli’s side and gestured to the books. “Well? Have at it.”

The man behind the register glanced up at them and returned his attention to the ledger on the counter.

Necalli stepped, tentative at first, to a shelf and picked up a book. After looking it over, he replaced it and scanned his surroundings a little faster. He paced from one shelf to the next, examining book after book before setting it back where it originated.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he watched. With each book Necalli inspected, his step quickened until he practically darted around the store.

After a few minutes, Necalli stood still for a moment,

glancing at Adam. A wide smile played on his face before he dashed off to yet another isle.

He chuckled. "You can pick more than one. You don't have to be that choosy."

"Really?" Necalli's voice sounded from behind a shelf where Adam couldn't see him.

"Yes, really." He shifted his weight and sighed.

After a few thuds and some rustling, Necalli came around the end of a shelf with five books, all hardbound and wrapped in his arms. He beamed as he glanced at Adam and headed for the clerk, waiting behind the register.

He joined Necalli at the counter.

The clerk looked down at Necalli through reading glasses. "Find everything you wanted?"

Necalli set the books on the counter. "Yes, for now."

A smirk spread on Adam's lips. "For now, huh?"

The clerk rang them up. "That'll be seven dollars, fifty-three cents, please."

Leaning forward and whistling, he pulled his wallet out of his back pocket. "Wow, that's some dough."

Necalli set the books down and tugged on Adam's shirt. "Do you want me to put some back?"

He smiled at Necalli. "No, it's fine." He gave the clerk some cash and waited for his change.

"Thank you," the clerk said as he handed the change back.

He nodded and went to the door with Necalli close behind. He opened it, letting Necalli pass, and strode to the car. After opening the car door and climbing inside, Necalli's arms surrounded his neck.

"Thank you, Adam." Necalli placed a lingering kiss on Adam's cheek.

Turning his head, he deepened the kiss, opening his mouth, probing with his tongue.

Necalli moaned against Adam's lips and scooted closer to him, gently rocking his hips.

He glanced down at Necalli's lap, clearly seeing his arousal

under his slacks. “Damn, you ready to go again?”

Necalli lowered his face and sat back. “You excite me.”

“It’s mutual.” Chuckling, he pushed the starter button in the dashboard and the engine roared to life.

CHAPTER SIX CONFESSIONS

Adam drove the old sedan up through town. Two-story buildings with dark, planked sides came into view as his headlights cut through the fog. One of the buildings caught his attention. “Hey, you hungry yet?” He glanced at Necalli, sitting beside him, peering out the window.

“Yes.”

He pulled in to the front of a restaurant. Red checkered curtains covered the lower-half of the windows. The glow from the lights inside the restaurant spilled out above them. “How about pizza for dinner?” As he put the vehicle into neutral and set the brake, he grinned at the beautiful young man sitting beside him.

A quizzical expression washed over Necalli’s face. “What’s pizza?”

Putting his hand on the seat back, he shifted to face Necalli, chuckling. “Do you mean you’ve never heard of it or you just don’t remember it?”

Necalli looked down into his lap. “I don’t know, I suppose I just don’t remember it.”

“Well, then, we’ll have to jog your memory. This is one of the best pizza joints I know of.” He gave Necalli’s thigh a playful slap. “You wait here and I’ll go in and get us some. It’ll only be few minutes.”

Necalli nodded and picked up one of the books from the floor of the car.

Leaning toward Necalli, he put his hand on the book. "So what is it about?"

Necalli smiled. "It's about Indians."

After purchasing the pizza and driving back to Adam's cabin, the pair walked through the fog and the ocean air, heavy with mist, into his home. Necalli held his books to his chest while Adam carried the pizza in a cardboard box.

Once inside, Adam flicked on the light, set the pizza box on the counter and pulled white plates out of a top cupboard. He placed a few slices on each plate and brought them to the table, where Necalli sat. "So I've got milk or orange juice to drink."

"I'll take the juice." Necalli eyed the pizza on his plate as if curious.

He glanced back at Necalli while he grabbed the orange juice from the refrigerator. "You just eat it with your hands."

"Oh." Picking up the pizza slice, Necalli put it to his lips. He grimaced while he sniffed at it.

He returned to the table with two tall glasses of orange juice and set them down. "Don't tell me you still don't remember pizza?"

Necalli took a large bite and began to chew. Looking up at Adam, he nodded his head and gulped. "It's good."

His chair groaned across the wood floor as he pulled it out and sat down. He dug into his food. "So, tomorrow I want to leave early, maybe around nine or ten."

"Okay." Necalli took a sip of juice. "What will these people be like?"

He gulped down a mouthful of pizza. "Well, they're nice enough, but sort of snobby. I don't think they'll give you any problems. They're too concerned about outward appearances to behave the way Suzie did today."

Necalli nodded, continuing to eat. "Tell me more about Maxwell."

The familiar quickening of his heartbeat fluttered at the

mention of his cousin's name. "I think you'll like him. He's a pretty easy going kid."

Necalli frowned and set the last slice of pizza back on his plate. "What does he look like?"

Confusion weaved through his mind. Why would Necalli care about that? "Uh, he's a good looking kid, I guess." He took a sip of juice.

Necalli gazed down at his hands, letting his hair fall in his face. "Is he better to look at than me?"

Sputtering and coughing, he choked on his juice. "What?"

Necalli looked back up at Adam. Pain riddled his face. "Your body responds to him. He excites you."

He glared at Necalli. "Stop it. He's my cousin, for Christ sakes. He does not excite me."

Rising from the table, Necalli grabbed his plate and trudged to the sink. He cleaned it in silence, stomped back to the couch and picked up a book from the pile sitting on the floor in front of it.

He let out a soft snicker. "Damn, you've got one hell of a jealous streak in you."

Necalli glared at Adam. "No, I don't." He curled up his legs underneath him and opened the book, pouting.

He finished eating and cleaned his plate. Afterward, he walked to the couch, took a seat beside Necalli and placed an arm around his shoulders.

Necalli leaned away from Adam and kept his eyes on the open book in his lap.

Leaning forward, he placed a light kiss Necalli's cheek.

Necalli swiped his cheek and pushed Adam's chest.

His brows raised in surprise. "Oh, come on. You're totally acting like a woman now."

Necalli glared at Adam. "I am not. You won't admit what you know is true. You like Maxwell. He excites you."

Sighing, he sat back and shifted his gaze to his lap. "Listen, I don't know what kind of strange ideas are going through your head, but Maxwell is my cousin and there is no way there

could ever be anything between us. You'll see." He placed his hand over Necalli's forearm.

Necalli slowly let his gaze rise up to meet Adam's. His voice was soft. "I only want you and I expect you would only want me."

Wow, Necalli's possessive, isn't he? Was it too much, too fast? He let his gaze roam Necalli's beautiful face. Maybe Necalli was just what he needed if he was ever going to break down the walls around his heart and finally find love. Someone who bulldozes right through.

Necalli tilted his head forward. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Because I like to look at you."

Dropping his book, Necalli lunged at him, throwing his arms around Adam's shoulders, burying his face in his neck. "Tell me you only want me."

He returned the desperate embrace, breathing in Necalli's spicy scent. "I only want you." He plunged his face into Necalli's black locks and kissed him hard.

Releasing his hold for a moment, Necalli scrambled into Adam's lap, straddling him. He put his arms on Adam's shoulders and pressed his forehead to Adam's. "Take me." He rocked his hips forward, letting out a soft moan.

His breath became labored as Necalli rocked into him, putting sweet pressure on his groin. "You want to do that again already?" He tried to smile, but the quick intensity of his arousal wouldn't let him. "Damn..." He leaned forward and placed a deep, penetrating kiss on Necalli's lips.

Necalli opened his mouth and pushed his tongue into Adam with insistence. His hips rocked faster, more persistent, on Adam's lap.

Necalli's erection pressed into Adam's stomach. His hands and fingers kneaded Adam's chest through his shirt. His tongue flicked inside Adam's mouth. Adam groaned and thrust upward. The wave of pleasure was delicious. He let his hands explore Necalli's back and down around his hips, finally to his

thighs and between his legs, running his palm over the tip of Necalli's cock.

Necalli tilted his head back and gasped. "Adam, please take me."

"Right now?"

"Yes." Leaning fully back, Necalli's hands shook as he fumbled to unfasten his pants. He climbed off the couch and stood, lowering his pants and boxers. Kicking off his shoes, he pulled out of his clothing.

Entranced by Necalli's sudden arousal, Adam unbuckled his belt and opened his trousers, quickly freeing his cock. He stroked slowly over it, letting out a soft moan as pleasure rushed through him.

Raw desire burned in Necalli's eyes when he stepped toward Adam.

Opening his arms, Adam beckoned him back.

Placing his hands on Adam's shoulders, Necalli straddled him again, letting himself down and forward, rubbing his erection against Adam's. "Take me." His voice strained with need.

He thrust his hips, sliding his cock along Necalli's. "God, I want to." Placing his hand on the back of Necalli's head, he pushed him forward so their lips met. He quickly grew sensitive as he crushed Necalli's lips, probing his tongue with his own.

Necalli let out a low moan as his hips moved with heightened urgency over Adam. Lifting Adam's shirt, he pressed his erection hard into Adam's stomach, smearing it with pre-seed. "Please, I can't wait." His words came out between ragged breaths.

Rising up, Necalli positioned his entrance over his firm cock and came down quickly over him, his passage still slick from the earlier encounter.

Gasping, moist heat enveloped him. He drove down and up, sliding easily, pleasure filling every part of his body. "Oh, God, you feel good." His words were soft and strained. His

heart beat so fast...might it burst? Drawing Necalli in close, a sudden ache to have him as close as possible coursed through him, to feel every inch of him. He teetered on the brink, feeling his peak tease him.

Panting, Necalli tightened his hold on Adam. His body tensed while Adam continued to drive in and out of him, his shaft sliding up and down Adam's stomach. "Adam, I'm so close, I'm—" Crying out, Necalli's seed spurted between them as his body pulsed with the force of his climax.

Necalli's passage contracted around him, making his own release rush over the edge. He surrendered, erupting into Necalli, filling him. Short gasps escaped his lips as each wave of pleasure jolted through him, draining him.

Necalli held tight to Adam, burying his face into Adam's neck as their movements slowed and came to a stop. "Adam, don't ever leave me. Don't ever make me go back."

He searched his heart. It was a serious promise to make, but at this very moment, there was no way he'd ever want to leave him. Even despite the terror threatening to creep back into his heart, he was falling hopelessly and completely in love with this exotic young man. He tightened his embrace. "Oh God, Necalli, I'll never leave you."

"I love you, Adam."

He gasped. No one had ever said that to him, besides his own mother and father when they were alive. How he yearned to be loved by someone. How incredible it felt to have someone say that to him after all these years. Tears stung his eyes. He sniffed them back. Could he return the confession? Not yet. The silence was maddening. "Necalli, I—"

"It's okay. You don't have to say anything. I just wanted you to know how I felt. How much you mean to me." Releasing his hold on Adam, Necalli lifted himself up and off him. He padded to the bathroom and hesitated, taking a quick glance back at Adam, then entered and closed the door.

He raked his fingers through his hair, tilted his head back to rest on the couch and looked up at the ceiling. How had things

progressed so quickly between them? Was this how it happened when it was right? Is this how love found a person like him? It just burrowed right through any defenses, cut a hole right into his heart and filled it with the promise of everything he ever hoped for?

Necalli opened the door to the bathroom and walked to Adam with a wet washcloth in his hand. After bending over, he cleaned him with a gentle and tender touch. When he finished, he stood and turned.

He seized his arm. "Necalli."

Necalli gazed at Adam. His brows furrowed in confusion.

Now that he had his attention, he was speechless. He wanted to tell him something to let him know how he felt, but fear kidnapped his voice.

"You don't have to say anything. Maybe someday you'll love me back."

"No, that's not it." Guilt seized him.

"When you're ready, you'll tell me."

Sighing, he released the beautiful young man.

Necalli went into the bathroom and put the washcloth back before coming back out to dress.

Frowning, he tucked himself back into his slacks and fastened them. He'd never met someone so unassuming, so willing to expose them self without any requirement for reciprocation. Maybe this was why Necalli was so perfect.

"Adam, I'd like to read for awhile." Necalli picked his book back up and sat at the end of the couch, where he'd been before their tryst.

He smiled at him. "I'll read with you." He rose and walked to the oak bookshelf he kept in the corner. After picking out one of his books on ships, he came back to sit beside Necalli. As soon as he sat down, Necalli rested his hand on his thigh.

He glanced at Necalli, grinning. It felt so right.

"Adam? Adam..."

He lay on his back in his bed and opened his eyes,

attempting to focus on the beautiful face hovering above his own in the morning sunlight. "Necalli." A raggedness edged his voice. Warmth pressed against his lips and a body slid over him. Hips rocked gently into him and something solid rubbed against his stomach.

"I need you," Necalli said, breathless. He dropped his cheek against Adam's shoulder. "Touch me." The rocking became persistent. "Adam, please."

"Damn, you never quit, do you?" He chuckled. "Good for me." He pressed himself, already hard, into his persistent bedmate. Sweet friction and pressure hummed in his groin.

"But we won't have time later, will we?" Necalli lifted his head to gaze down into Adam's eyes.

He gave Necalli a lazy smile. "No, probably not."

"I can't be with you all day and not have you." Necalli ran his hands up Adam's chest to tease a nipple into a hard nub.

Moaning, he drew Necalli down. He craved the sweet taste of him in his mouth. He kissed Necalli hard, prodding his mouth open with his tongue. The release of a low, sensual moan quivered against his lips. Placing his hands on Necalli's lower back, he drew him in tighter, increasing the pressure between them.

Gasping, Necalli's breath became ragged. He ground down, taking pleasure in the friction Adam's stomach provided.

Remembering the first time they were together, he roamed his hands all over Necalli's skin, tracing light patterns over his back, cupping his behind, caressing up and down his arms. Could he bring him to climax with only his touch?

Shaking and trembling took over Necalli's body. His thrusts turned frantic and he pulled away from Adam's mouth to rest his forehead on Adam's chest. It was as if he'd lost all control, unable to do anything but thrust and moan.

"Are you close?" He whispered. His own climax built quickly with Necalli's reaction. Delicious pulses raced through him with every movement of the beautiful young man's hips.

"Ah, y-yes." Pleasure laced his voice. "D-don't—" Necalli

shuddered, letting out sharp gasps.

Hot wetness covered Adam's stomach. Seizing Necalli, he drew him into a tight embrace. His peak rushed to the surface, sending his seed surging out of him. His hands fisted, teeth clenched, and toes curled as he thrust hard against Necalli, releasing sumptuous pulses from his spurting cock to every nerve ending in his body.

When it slowed, Necalli lifted his head, propping himself on his elbows. He placed his hands on Adam's cheeks and put soft kisses on his lips, his cheeks, his forehead, and the tip of his nose.

He let out a faint chuckle.

"What?" Necalli continued the soft assault of kisses.

He tilted his head to the side, feeling the kisses continue down his jaw line and under his ear. "You're being silly."

"So?"

"I've never seen you be silly before."

"I think there may be a lot of things you've never seen me be."

Placing his hands on Necalli's shoulders, he gently pushed him up to look directly into his eyes. "I want to see all of it. I want to know everything about you."

Necalli's gaze flicked between Adam's, transfixed. "I want to show you." Uncertainty played upon his face for a moment and he dropped down to Adam's chest, drawing an arm up to rest bent beside him. He traced a small circle around Adam's breast.

"Something wrong?"

"You won't push me away, no matter what I remember, will you?" Necalli pressed his face into Adam's chest as if hiding from his answer.

He tightened his hold. "No, of course not." Turning his head, he glanced at the clock above his stove. "Hey, it's almost eight. Let's get cleaned up so we can leave."

Adam showered and dressed in a green, v-neck shirt and

tan slacks before placing a change of clothes and toiletries for himself and Necalli into a brown suitcase. He closed it, hearing it click shut. When he looked up, Necalli strolled out of the bathroom, drying his long hair with a towel. He watched his naked, lithe body as it walked gracefully across the floor. An ache filled his heart while he let his eyes roam the exquisite muscled curves and toned flesh of his body.

Necalli stopped and looked at Adam. "What?"

Grinning, he stepped over to Necalli and wrapped his arms around his waist. He leaned in and placed a tender kiss on his lips. "You are lovely, you know that?"

Necalli blushed, redirecting his gaze at the floor beside them.

He kissed his cheek. "Nothing to say?"

"You flatter me." Gold-flecked, brown eyes gazed up at Adam. "I'm not used to such things."

He released him. "Well, get used to it." He patted him on the ass. "Get dressed, it's time to go."

Surprise lifted Necalli's brows.

Chuckling, he went back to the suitcase, picked it up by the handle and strode across the floor to the door. After stepping outside, he squinted. The sun shined down all around him.

He walked to the car, opened the back door and placed the suitcase on the back seat. The calming rhythm of the ocean sounded in his ears. As he turned around, he saw Necalli standing in the cabin doorway.

Necalli was fully dressed in a white, button-down shirt and brown slacks. He held all five books snug to his chest and the driving gloves covered his hands.

"You ready?"

"Yes." Necalli strode out to the passenger side of the car. After opening the door, he placed his books on the floor and climbed into the seat.

He opened his door and leaned into the car. "I'll be right back, just have to check and make sure the stove is off."

Necalli frowned. "It's off."

He glanced down for a moment. "I'll be right back." He trotted to the door of the cabin and walked inside. His anxiousness about the trip caught up to him. It always made him think about his home catching fire. He knew the stove was off, but something drove him to check it again anyway. Peering at the knobs on the stove, he made sure they were in the off position.

He made his way out of the cabin and to the car. It was necessary, not just a foolish phobia making him do it.

He opened the door of his car and climbed into the driver's seat. With a push of a button, the engine rumbled to life. The warmth of Necalli's hand permeated his thigh, making Adam look up at him.

"You seem troubled."

Sighing, he gazed out the windshield at the beams of light making patches in the weeds and grass surrounding his cabin. "Truthfully? I suppose I am."

Necalli shifted in his seat and squeezed Adam's thigh. "Tell me why?"

Sitting back, he rested his hands in his lap. "My aunt and uncle weren't always nice to me. I went to live with them when I was twelve, right after the fire. I always felt like an outsider and a burden to them. I was ignored and I'm not sure why."

"They didn't provide you with comfort after losing your family?"

His head gave a slow shake. Pain he normally stuffed deep inside him rushed to the surface with Necalli's question. He'd told Peter about this before, but he was never able to tell the most difficult part of it to anyone. The fact that the traumatized boy inside him was left to his own sheer will in order to cope and survive.

Necalli repositioned himself right beside Adam, laying an arm around his shoulders. "That must have been hard."

He shook his head again. "It's okay. It was a long time ago."

Necalli drew Adam close. "But it still hurts you. The fact

that you lost your closest family only to be neglected by the ones who should have provided comfort and safety.”

The pain came at him from nowhere and pinpointed in his heart. The tickle of a tear rolled down his cheek, surprising him. He swiped it away. “Why are you so good at bringing emotions out of me?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it just needed to come out.”

He rested his head on Necalli’s shoulder. “You are what I need. I feel so safe with you. Like I could tell you anything and you’d understand.”

Necalli kissed the side of Adam’s head. “You have no idea how happy that makes me.”

His heart was so full it hurt. Words worked their way to his lips, but were caught somewhere along the way in a net of fear. “Just hold me for a little bit and we’ll go.”

“Gladly.” Bringing his other arm around Adam, Necalli tightened his hold. He held him for a few moments.

Adam lifted his head. “I’m okay.” He leaned in and gave Necalli a quick kiss. “Thank you.”

They separated and Adam put the car in gear. Necalli remained close.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MEMORIES AND RELATIVES

Adam looked out his window over the sand dunes and tall grasses just off Highway 1. A fog bank hovered above the swirling ocean waves. “Looks like maybe the fog will stay out at sea today.”

Necalli turned to look out Adam’s window. A book sat open in his lap. “Yes, maybe.”

“Well, that ought to make Aunt Betty happy. She planned to hold the party outside at the yacht club greens.”

“When will we be there?”

“Soon, now, I’m almost at the turn. They live in Nob Hill.” He focused back on the road, looking for his exit. “Have you ever been to the city?”

“Yes, but it was a very long time ago.” Necalli fingered the pages of the book in his lap.

He chuckled. “Yeah, sure. Like how long ago, two or three years?” He saw his turn and slowed the vehicle to make it.

“No, it was right before that earthquake. The one with the fire.” A pained expression washed over Necalli’s face.

“Quit pulling my leg. You weren’t even born when that happened.” He looked out over the rows of brightly colored houses all lined up right next to each other on either side of the street. The street went up a hillside, making the car tilt. He glanced at Necalli.

“I was.”

“But that would mean you’re older than me. Hey, are you

remembering something?” His gaze darted between Necalli and the road. Maybe he should pull over. Maybe it’d help Necalli talk to him.

“I remember just images. A huge fire down by the piers, people running, houses collapsing, shouts for help, and cries for the dead.” Necalli looked out his window.

“Jesus. How old were you? Did you live there?” He turned onto another street and drove up another hill. A small trench carved its way down the middle of the road for cable cars. People wearing fashionable clothes strolled on the sidewalks under the canopies of the occasional tree.

“I don’t remember.”

“So if you remember anything from that time, you were probably around four years old, because that’s when memories start. That would make you about twenty-eight?” Adam was stunned. Necalli certainly didn’t look a day over eighteen. “You must have lived there.”

Necalli slowly shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“Do you remember the World Fair?”

Necalli shifted in his seat and gazed at Adam. “I don’t want to talk about it anymore.” His attention drifted back to his book.

“Okay.” Bigger houses lined the street, turning into Victorian and Spanish Revival mansions, signaling their proximity to his aunt and uncle. He turned down another street and saw their destination. “There it is.”

Necalli looked up. “It’s huge.”

“Yeah.” He drove up to a three-story, Queen Anne mansion on a street corner and pulled into the drive. He looked over the familiar house. Fancy shingles lined the outside walls, painted in dark gray. Victorian Eastlake accents in white littered the corners of the gables and round turret. Spanning the length of the front and side of the house was a wraparound porch. Windows with wood mullions lined up in rows on each floor, showcasing the heavy curtains inside. An arched arbor with trumpet vine lacing through it stood at the

opening to the front walk, bordered by a perfectly green lawn.

He turned off his car and opened the door. "Bring your books."

Necalli picked up his books and opened the door. He stood outside the car, waiting for Adam to get the suitcase out of the back seat, and looked up in awe at the house. "It's beautiful."

He came around to stand next to him. "Yeah, some famous architect built it, but I don't remember his name." He strode up a few cement steps and through the arbor with Necalli close behind.

They climbed wooden steps to the front porch and Adam stood at an elegant front door with a brass lion knocker. He hesitated, looking over the white wicker furniture on the porch, not sure if he should knock or just walk in. He decided on the latter.

After turning the brass knob and opening the door, he stepped inside. "Hello?" The familiar smell of his Uncle's cigars wafted over him. He walked further into the hallway. A wide stairway rose up to the left. White crown molding accented the ceilings while chair railing cut across burgundy walls in squares. Art deco fixtures and furniture in elegant designs adorned the walls and floors. A thin man wearing a black suit and white gloves came down the hallway. "Oh, good afternoon, Adam. We've been expecting you."

"Hi, David." Smiling, he looked over the short brown hair and brown eyes of his aunt and uncle's butler. He turned to Necalli. "Ah, I brought a friend with me from Moss Beach. His name is Necalli."

Necalli extended a gloved hand to David. "Pleased to meet you."

David shook Necalli's hand. "Likewise." His attention focused on Adam. "Your aunt and uncle are lunching in the garden. Will Necalli be spending the night?"

"Yes, he will. I hope that won't be a problem. If there's no room, we can share one." He smirked. Hopefully the guest room will be taken.

“Oh, no, that won’t be necessary. The guest room is available.” David reached for the suitcase.

A frown ran across Adam’s face. “Uh, that’s okay. I can handle it. I’ll take him up.” He gestured to Necalli to follow him as he turned for the stairs.

“Will you be joining your aunt and uncle for lunch?” David called out.

Adam climbed a few stairs. “Sure.” He continued up the stairway to another long hallway, painted in amber. Numerous doorways opened to various bedrooms on either side of them as they walked over an oriental runner in swirling patterns of gold and mauve. A table sat against one wall with fresh cut roses in a crystal vase in its center. An oil painting of a still life hung above it. When they reached the end of the hallway, he pointed to a room. “This will be your room.”

Necalli walked to it and stopped in the doorway. “We won’t be together tonight?”

He frowned again. “Guess not. It wouldn’t be proper, since you have your own room.”

“Where will you be?”

“Right across from you, here.” He pointed to the room across the hall. “It was the room I grew up in.”

“I’d like to see it.” Necalli stepped toward Adam and leaned in. He placed a gentle kiss on his lips.

He closed his eyes for a moment, relishing in the brief contact. “Maybe we can work something out after everyone’s asleep.”

“I’d like that.” Necalli’s gaze roamed Adam’s face.

A smirk spread over his lips. “I bet you would. Get in your room and put your books away.” He turned and strode into his old room. A mission-style double bed with nightstands on either side centered the room. It stood in contrast to the rest of the house’s decor, simple instead of elegant and the walls were still painted white, like when he’d left. Adam set his suitcase down on a brown duvet. He looked at his old writing desk sitting in a gable. The window in front of it overlooked the

garden. How many nights had he spent alone, studying at that very desk? The built-in shelves on the opposite wall still held a few of the model ships he built as a teenager.

Sighing, he opened the suitcase and unpacked their things, hanging clothes up in the closet. As he hung the last of them, a warm body pressed against his back and arms surrounded his waist.

“You okay?” Necalli asked in a soft voice.

“Yeah. It always brings back memories to be here.”

“Like what sort of memories?” Necalli swayed their bodies, resting his head on the back of Adam’s shoulder.

“Mostly of being alone.” He turned in Necalli’s embrace. “I want you to stay with me tonight. I don’t want to be alone.” He drew Necalli close and placed a lingering kiss on his lips.

“I’ll do whatever you ask.”

Necalli’s erection pressed solidly against Adam’s thigh, making him smile. “We can’t do that now.” He gave Necalli’s lips a soft kiss, teasing him.

Necalli moaned and deepened the kiss, opening his mouth. “Why not?”

“Because they’re waiting for us to *lunch*.” He chuckled as he released Necalli.

Necalli took a step back. His gaze roamed Adam from head to toe.

He took his hand and started toward the door. “Come on, let’s get some lunch and see what they have planned for the day.”

Necalli allowed himself to be led back into the hallway. “Where is Maxwell’s room?”

He stopped. “Uh, right next to mine.” Turning to Necalli, he drew him in close. “You have nothing to worry about. He’s my *cousin*.”

Necalli glanced into Maxwell’s room and shifted his attention to Adam.

“Let’s go.” He released Necalli and went to the stairs.

They came to the downstairs hallway and passed arched

entrances into a parlor, a study, and the dining room, before reaching a large kitchen, all in white with the latest appliances. French doors led out to a tamed garden of hydrangea, lilies, and vines running over trellises. A walnut tree spread its canopy high above it. The garden bordered a brick patio with a long iron table and chairs. A white tablecloth draped over top of it and fresh cut, red roses sat in a ceramic vase in its center.

Adam saw his Aunt Betty sitting on one end of the table and his Uncle Richard sitting at the other end. He walked to the table with Necalli and nodded his head at them both. "Good afternoon Aunt Betty, Uncle Richard."

They each looked up at him. Tea sandwiches sat on white china and crystal glasses held what appeared to be lemonade.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in." Uncle Richard set his cloth napkin on the table and stood. He came toward Adam, throwing a curious glance at Necalli.

He looked over his uncle's thinning brown hair and blue eyes. He was a rather short, squat man, but always impeccably dressed. Today he wore a brown blazer with a cream, open-collared shirt and brown slacks. "Uh, Uncle Richard? This is my friend, Necalli. I hope you don't mind I brought a friend."

His Uncle smiled at Necalli and held out a hand. "No, not at all. Pleased to meet you, Necalli."

Necalli shook his hand. "Pleased to meet you."

His aunt wiped her made-up face with a cloth napkin "Necalli, what origin is that? Spanish?"

"It's Indian." Adam turned and glanced at his aunt, a pudgy woman with curly blond hair in a short style typical for an older woman. Her white dress didn't do much for her figure. The lace collar made her look frumpy.

Necalli walked toward her with his hand outstretched. "You are Adam's Aunt Betty?"

"Yes." She held out her hand, palm down.

To Adam's surprise, Necalli leaned forward and took her hand to his lips. He gave it a soft kiss and released it. "I'm honored to meet you."

Blushing, his aunt chuckled and brought her hand back to cover her heart, blue eyes twinkling. "Oh my, You have such nice manners. Please, take off your gloves and make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I prefer to wear the gloves." Necalli said.

"He thinks it makes him look more like a gentleman." Giving Necalli a knowing look, Adam gestured for him to take a seat beside him.

His uncle took his position at the head of the table. "So, what type of Indian are you, Necalli?"

"Chippewa," Necalli said, taking a seat.

"Oh, from back east." His uncle gestured to David as he set plates with tea sandwiches and lemonade in front of Adam and Necalli from a silver-serving tray.

"Yes." Necalli picked up a sandwich and examined it before taking a bite.

"What brings you out here?" His uncle sat back, looking Necalli over.

"Uh, he works at the pier with me on the fishing boats." Anxiousness swarmed Adam's insides. His uncle was starting one of his interrogations.

"Well, you must be educated to be so well-mannered." His aunt took a sip of lemonade and sat forward, smiling at Necalli.

"I am." Necalli bit into another sandwich.

"Did you attend college? I heard Indians get free tuition, I assume you took advantage of it," His uncle said.

"Uh..."

"Yes, he did." Adam knocked his knee into Necalli's under the table.

"Adam, you're here!" A young man's voice called out from behind them.

Adam recognized Maxwell's voice. His heart pounded. Quickly standing and stepping from his chair, Maxwell's warm embrace engulfed him.

"I missed you." Maxwell let his face drop into Adam's

neck, brushing his dark hair over Adam's cheek.

Adam held him briefly while his face flushed. When they parted, he patted Maxwell's shoulders, gazing at his cousin's beautiful light-blue eyes and boyish smile. His gaze dropped down to Maxwell's white oxford, covering wide shoulders, and gray slacks over narrow hips. "I uh, missed you, too." The coldness of Necalli's glare bore into him.

Maxwell's eyes met Adam's. "So, how long are you staying?"

"Only tonight," he said.

A frown formed on his cousin's plump lips. "I was hoping you'd stay a few days this time."

He shifted the weight on his feet. "Well, I have to get back to work. The boats will be in soon."

Maxwell gestured to Necalli. "Oh, I'm sorry. Who's this?"

"This is a very close friend of mine from Moss Beach. His name is Necalli." He twisted to let his cousin view him better.

Maxwell stepped to Necalli with his hand out.

Remaining seated, Necalli took Maxwell's hand. "Pleased to meet you." His voice was low.

"Pleased to meet you as well." His cousin let out a smug chuckle. "My such a strong handshake." When he pulled his hand back, he rubbed his palm with his other hand. "What's with the gloves?"

"I like them." Necalli looked Maxwell up and down.

Adam glared at Necalli. He probably held Maxwell's hand too tight on purpose. What was his problem anyway?

"I see, how very...endearing." Maxwell took a long appreciative look at Necalli.

"Are you hungry, dear?" His aunt patted the corners of her mouth with a napkin.

"Starved." His cousin trotted over to the other side of the table and pulled out a chair. The iron scraped over the bricks as it moved. He sat and focused on Adam, grinning. "I'm so happy you could make it."

Adam glanced at Necalli. "Me, too." Sensing Necalli's

insecurity with the situation, he placed his hand on Necalli's thigh under the tablecloth, hoping no one would notice. The cool leather of Necalli's gloved hand covered his own.

David appeared with the silver tray and set a plate of sandwiches and a glass of lemonade down for Maxwell.

"Thank you, David," his cousin said.

David nodded and strode off.

Uncle Richard stood. "I'm finished, how about you, dear?" His attention focused on Aunt Betty.

"Oh, yes. I suppose we should leave these young people to their own discussion." She stood. After walking around the table and taking his uncle's arm, they strolled off toward the house.

"So, Necalli, where are you from? That's an interesting name." Maxwell took a bite of his sandwich.

"I'm from back east. The name means battle." Necalli ate his last sandwich.

Adam looked at Necalli with confusion. Did this mean he remembered more about himself? "Really?"

Necalli glanced at Adam before continuing to look Maxwell over. "Yes."

"He's Indian, Max," Adam said.

"So, how did you two meet? I want to hear the whole story." Maxwell gulped his lemonade.

Adam grinned. "Oh, you don't want to be bored with that." He took a bite of sandwich, tasting a mix of creamy mayonnaise and cucumber.

"I do. I want to know all about the man who gets to spend so much time with my cousin. He must be pretty important to you if you brought him all the way up here." Maxwell smirked at Necalli.

Looking down at his plate, Necalli was unusually quiet.

"Well, we met at the pier, uh, one day. And—"

"How long ago?" Maxwell asked.

Adam glanced at Necalli. "I don't know, I suppose a few months ago."

“Necalli, do you like girls?” Maxwell asked.

“What?” Necalli’s gaze rushed up to Maxwell’s.

“There’ll be lots of girls at the party tonight. I think they’ll find you quite interesting.”

Necalli’s hand squeezed Adam’s under the table. “Why do you say that?” Uncertainty flashed in his eyes.

“Well, look at you. You’re incredibly handsome and exotic.” Maxwell chuckled and leaned forward. “I bet they’ll be jumping all over you for a dance.”

“I don’t dance,” Necalli said.

“You don’t? What a shame. Adam likes to dance, don’t you, Adam?” Maxwell bit into another sandwich.

“Yes. But, maybe not tonight.” Adam looked over Necalli. Worry flooded over him. *Something’s wrong....*

“Why not? I know Julie will be there. She still has a crush on you, you know.” Maxwell gave Adam a mischievous smile.

The warmth and pressure of Necalli’s hand left Adam’s. He glanced at Maxwell and shifted his attention to Necalli. Did Maxwell sense something between them? Was he trying to get a rise out of Necalli? If he did, he was doing a good job of it.

Necalli stood from the table with his head lowered. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to go to my room and read for a bit.”

Maxwell sat back in his chair. “Sure. I’d like to spend some time alone with Adam anyway.”

Adam opened his mouth and raised his hand to protest, but Necalli strode across the patio and back into the house. He faced his cousin.

“Wow, he’s not just handsome, he’s stunning. Tell me the truth, where’d you find a guy like that?” All Maxwell’s attention focused on Adam.

“Maxwell, what’s gotten into you?”

Maxwell’s expression turned coy. “I’m not a stupid kid anymore, you know. I’ve been to the Tenderloin. I know about beautiful men like him. Let’s just say I’ve experimented.”

He couldn’t believe his ears. He sat forward and studied Maxwell’s face. “Are you telling me you’ve been with guys?”

Maxwell watched his finger run over the edge of his glass. "Maybe."

The thought sent a prick of arousal through him. "Jesus, Max. Your mom and dad don't know, do they?"

Maxwell's brow tensed. "Of course not. They'd disown me." Leaning forward, he looked at Adam directly. His voice was soft, as if making sure no one could hear him. "What's he like? In bed, I mean."

His mouth hung open in shock. Should he really answer the question? This was a hell of a change from the cousin he saw nine months ago, since he was home for the holidays.

"Don't act so surprised. I saw how you two looked at each other. I noticed your arm angling off under the table. You were holding his hand, weren't you?" Maxwell shifted in his seat and took a gulp of lemonade. He spoke under his breath. "Makes me sort of jealous actually. Here I thought I was finally going to have you all to myself."

His heart skipped a beat. "What the hell are you saying?"

Sighing, Maxwell ran a hand through his dark locks. "What do you think I'm saying?" He gazed back up at Adam.

His mind went blank. How should he respond to the insinuations Maxwell made? If this conversation had happened before he met Necalli, he'd surely be taking advantage of the situation. But this was his cousin.

"Well?"

He focused on Maxwell. "Max, we're cousins. I don't think it's at all appropriate."

"You mean you've never liked me?" Hurt spread across his cousin's face. "I know you wanted to kiss me that time, in the hallway when you were drunk, right before you moved out. Is that why you left?" Sudden sorrow threaded through his voice.

He looked behind him, making sure no one was around. What if the windows were open in Necalli's room? Would he be able to hear them? "Maybe we should go someplace else and have this discussion."

"Just answer me." Maxwell's eyes shimmered with unshed

tears.

“Max...” His chest tightened up. He hated seeing his cousin in pain.

Maxell bit his lip and looked down into his lap.

He stood and walked around to the other side of the table. After snatching his cousin’s hand, he heaved him up out of his chair and hauled him to the side of the house, between oleander bushes, opposite to where Necalli’s window was. A sudden shove thrust him up against the wall of the house.

Maxwell lunged against him, claiming his mouth.

Placing his hands on his cousin’s chest, he intended to push Maxwell back, but quickly lost himself in an intoxicating kiss he’d only fantasized about, allowing it to penetrate him, feed his growing arousal. Coming to his senses, he thrust Maxwell away, making him fall backwards into the bushes. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “I’m with Necalli and this isn’t right. I love him.” He gasped, astonished by the word’s that poured out of his mouth.

“I knew it. I should have gone to Moss Beach. I should have told you how I felt as soon as you left.” As he fought with leafy twigs and white flower clusters to free himself from the bushes, a tear raced down Maxwell’s cheek. “God damned it!”

Reaching out, he snatched Maxwell’s arm and hauled him to his feet. “I’m sorry. This has gotten out of hand.”

Maxwell glared at Adam. “It’s not out of hand. It’s the truth. I’ve always liked you. I know you liked me, I saw it in your eyes.” Fresh tears filled Maxwell’s eyes.

He reached out, surrounding his cousin, and drew him in close. He heard him snifle and felt the warmth of his face bury in his neck. Hot tears dripped onto his collarbone. He placed his hand on the back of Maxwell’s head. “I’m sorry, Max. It just isn’t right.”

“But you liked me, didn’t you?” Maxwell’s voice wavered as silent tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Damn... Yes, I did.” Unease washed over him. “This is

some birthday, huh?"

"Can't you just be with me tonight? Just stay by my side, stay close to me." Maxwell lifted his face and gazed at Adam with wet eyes.

"I can stay close, but nothing can happen. I'm with Necalli now." How did things get so messed up so quickly? He was home, that's how. "You're my cousin, Max. It's not right."

Sniffling, Maxwell stepped back. He gazed at the ground between them. "Okay, so tell me. Did you leave because of that night in the hallway?" His gaze roamed upward from Adam's shoes to his face.

Sighing, he shifted his stance. He'd tried his best to forget that night ever happened. "Yes."

"You were going to kiss me. You almost told me how you felt about me, didn't you?" Obvious pain took hold of Maxwell again. "I had you and then I lost you." As his brows tensed with sorrow, he bit his lip.

His heart ached for his cousin. "Listen, Max. It's true. I had feelings for you. I never wanted to admit it and when I got drunk that night and found you in the hallway naked, well, I almost lost it." The old, familiar rush of guilt at feeling the way he had for his sixteen-year-old cousin and accosting him in the hallway stung him. It was a miracle he stopped himself before anything really happened.

Stepping closer to Adam, Maxwell traced his fingers lightly up and down his arm. "You know I've fantasized about that night, about how it could have been different, about how you could have kissed me and brought me back into my room and done things to me. You know, sexual things. But I never said or did anything about it, because I knew you'd think I was too young. But I'm not now. I'm eighteen and I've done some things. I have experience now."

Feeling his arousal swell, Adam closed his eyes as if it would help shut off all these confusing emotions. Warm pressure from Maxwell's chest pushed up against him. His cousin's erection pressed hot against his thigh.

Maxwell let out a sensual moan. "When I lay in my bed at night, I touch myself and pretend it's you." His hips rocked gently against Adam's thigh.

"M-Maxwell, you have to stop." Weakness permeated Adam's voice. His cousin's seductive persuading overwhelmed him.

Twisting his hips and reaching down, Maxwell palmed his solid cock through his slacks and looked up at Adam with raw desire in his eyes. "I want you to do this to me. I've been waiting all this time."

"N-no, I-I can't." He willed his hands to remain at his sides.

Maxwell rubbed harder on himself. "Please. I'm so close already, just having you next to me."

He tried to look away, to not watch and not crave his cousin. He clenched his fists.

Maxwell's hip movements became urgent thrusts. His moans became sharp and ragged. He stroked hard and fast on himself. "Just once, touch me, just once." He pushed his forehead into Adam's chest. Seizing Adam's hand, he slapped it hard over his erection. He thrust into Adam's palm, letting out sharp gasps.

He clearly felt his cousin's body shudder and his cock pulse beneath his slacks. He was horrified, but incredibly aroused and completely unable to take his hand away while his cousin climaxed.

Maxwell slid the base of Adam's palm down and up his cock, shutting his eyes tight. When they opened, he looked at Adam in a daze.

He yanked his hand away. "Damn it, what you just did was totally wrong."

Maxwell ran his fingers over Adam's trousers, up his erection.

He gasped.

"You didn't exactly hate it."

"It still doesn't make it any better." He stepped to the side,

trying to get some distance between himself and his cousin.

“Let me ask you something. How much can you love Necalli when you get so hard for me?” Maxwell’s expression saddened again.

“Love is complicated. It’s emotional, not just physical.” He wanted to leave, right this instant. An overwhelming fear washed over him, that Necalli was searching for him and if he found him here, with Maxwell, he’d be heartbroken.

“Adam, I—”

“I have to go. I’m sorry.” He turned and strode off toward the garden.

“You’ll stay close to me tonight?” Maxwell called out.

He kept walking. *I have to find Necalli.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

SENSES

Adam raced through the garden into the house and up the stairs, startling David along the way. His emotions waged a battle inside his head. How could he let things progress the way they did with his cousin? But it wasn't really his fault, was it? He didn't really do anything wrong. The memory of what Maxwell did almost sent him over the edge. A tangible frustration lodged in his stomach and ached to be released.

He trotted down the upstairs hallway to find Necalli's door closed. His heart thumped against his breastbone while he turned the crystal knob to open Necalli's door. It creaked. He winced.

Peering inside the cream walls of the guest room, he saw Necalli lying on his back, propped up on a beige pillow, black hair splayed all around him, eyes closed, and an open book in his lap. His dark hair made a stark contrast to the cream headboard and beige bedspread he lay on.

He crept into the room and closed the door as quietly as he could. Although he yearned to lock it and wake Necalli to help him release the tension coiled in his groin, what if Maxwell sought him out? Instead, he stepped carefully over geometric designs in the rug to the double bed and climbed up next to Necalli. He peeked down at the book in his lap. It was on San Francisco history, opened to a section on the 1916 World Fair.

Confusion plagued him. Could the book be supplying him with false memories? Maybe he wasn't actually around for the

earthquake like he alleged? Maybe he only read about it and confused what he read with memories? He lay on his back and looked up at the ceiling. It seemed the mystery behind who Necalli was could be getting bigger instead of smaller.

Rolling over, he laid an arm across Necalli's chest. As he snuggled into him, he lifted a leg over Necalli's and let his erection press against his thigh, sending a delicious surge of pleasure rushing through him and making soft gasp escape him. He didn't realize exactly how aroused Maxwell made him until now. Oh, how he wanted to increase the contact and bring himself to climax. But, he had to wait until later, until everyone was asleep and the chance of being discovered was less.

He closed his eyes, involuntarily pressing his hips harder against Necalli, and waited in sweet agony for sleep to take him.

"Adam?"

A gentle pressure nudged his shoulder.

"Adam?" Necalli whispered.

He opened his eyes and gazed at Necalli. Confusion raced through him for a moment and he raised himself on an elbow. "Oh, I guess I finally fell asleep." He tried to smile.

"When did you come in here?" Necalli leaned over as if to kiss Adam, but retreated with his nose crinkled. "You smell like Maxwell."

"What?" His heart fluttered with fear. Lifting his shirt to his nose, he sniffed. He didn't smell anything unusual.

"What happened? I sense you're afraid of something."

"Uh, nothing." He scooted to the edge of the bed, climbed off and stood. Before turning to face Necalli again, he fought to get his heartbeat under control.

Necalli sat up, propped on straight arms behind him. He gave Adam a quizzical look as if trying to decipher a great mystery.

"What?" Irritation laced his voice.

Necalli shifted his focus to his lap. "Why is Maxwell's scent so strong on you?"

"He hugged me, remember? You were right there." He glanced at the alarm clock, sitting next to the black gloves, on a cream-colored nightstand. "Holy shit, it's almost time for the party." He returned his attention to Necalli. "Come on, I'm surprised someone hasn't come in here looking for us."

Necalli set his book on the end of the bed and climbed off it. Raking a hand through his long hair, he stood and ambled over to Adam.

"He just hugged me, that's all." Restating what he already said sounded guilty as hell.

Necalli looked up at Adam with pain tensing his face.

Regret threaded through him. "I'm sorry." He took Necalli in his arms and gave him a brief squeeze.

"It's so strong."

"Uh, he must wear some strong cologne." He forced himself to chuckle.

"It doesn't smell like cologne. His body responds to you." Necalli's arms tightened around Adam and he pushed his face into Adam's neck. "Tell me you only want me."

"Necalli, I only want you. Really. I promise." He kissed the side of Necalli's head and let him go. "Come on, we have to go downstairs."

Necalli went to the nightstand, grabbed his gloves and slid slender fingers inside them before following Adam out the door and into the hallway.

They made their way down the stairs with excited voices filling the air below them. Adam walked with Necalli into the parlor where everyone gathered. As he entered, his eyes scanned over beige and gold striped couches and chairs with curved mahogany backs and arms, sitting against hunter-green walls and in corners with accompanying mahogany tables. Heavy, gold, velvet drapes tied back with decorative ropes and tassels hung over the windows.

His gaze met Maxwell's and he immediately looked at his

aunt, flushing instantly. It was hard to see him after what happened. "So, Aunt Betty, I guess we'll just meet you all over there?"

His aunt talked over details of the party with David and his uncle. Pausing, her gaze darted around the room until it found Adam. "Why yes, that sounds perfect."

He turned to leave.

"Adam," Maxwell called out.

He stopped. His heart pounded against his sternum.

Necalli stopped beside him, eyeing Maxwell.

"Will you drive me over?" Maxwell stepped toward them.

"Oh yes, would you, dear? I'm afraid we might have too many things packed in our car," his aunt said.

Adam took a deep breath and did his best to sound normal. "Of course." Glancing at his cousin, he waved his hand. "Come on." He strode out the burgundy hallway with Maxwell and Necalli in tow. His teeth clenched as anxiety made a home in his chest. Maxwell better control himself the rest of the night.

The three made their way outside and through the arbor to Adam's sedan.

Maxwell trotted to the passenger door.

Necalli stopped close behind Maxwell and frowned.

"Max." Adam glared at his cousin.

"What?" Pulling the handle, Maxwell opened the door and waited before getting in.

"Let Necalli sit up front with me." Sighing, Adam shifted his stance.

"But you said you'd stay close to me." Maxwell's voice whined while he rested his forearm on the open door.

"It's okay, Adam. I'll ride in back." Necalli opened the back door and slipped inside.

Glaring at his cousin, Adam climbed in.

"What?" Maxwell ducked to get in his side.

Adam pressed a button, starting the car's engine. He twisted in his seat to see behind him while he backed out of

the drive. Necalli's eyes seemed different for a second, making him blink, but soon took on the familiar light brown tint Adam knew. He drove the car onto the street, between Victorian and Spanish revival mansions. After turning around to face the front, he shifted the gears and the car drove down the road toward the waterfront and the St. Francis Yacht Club.

Maxwell shifted in his seat to face Adam. "So you ready for a big party, Necalli?"

Necalli gazed out his window. "Sure."

"You and Adam aren't going to slip away somewhere on me, are you?" Maxwell chuckled.

"Max," Adam said, in a threatening tone.

"Why would we do that?" Necalli's focus shifted to Maxwell.

"I don't know. Maybe Adam here's a little frustrated." Maxwell slapped Adam's arm.

Gasping, Adam stepped hard on the breaks. The car lurched to a stop, throwing Maxwell and Necalli forward. He turned slowly, glaring at his cousin. "Get out of the car, now."

Rustling filtered up from the back seat as Necalli righted himself.

Sudden hurt swept over Maxwell's face. "B-but, Ad—"

"I said get out!" Fury lit up Adam's insides. He didn't care if it was the little brat's birthday. He wasn't about to let him destroy the only good thing to happen to him his whole life.

"Adam, why are you so angry with Maxwell?" Necalli rested his forearms across the back of the front seat.

"Stay out of this." Adam continued to glare at his cousin.

Maxwell lowered his head. "I'm sorry. I won't bother you anymore." He twisted in his seat, making himself sit forward again. His fingers wrangled with each other in his lap.

Sighing, Adam placed a hand on his cousin's shoulder. "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at you. Just please, behave yourself, okay?"

Maxwell nodded.

Necalli sat back in his seat with confusion furrowing his

brows.

He owed Necalli an explanation for his behavior, but he had to get him alone first. Thankfully, everyone was quiet for the time being. He drove down Broadway and turned onto Fillmore Street, heading toward the bay.

Three and four-story stone buildings, some with columns and all with intricately carved accents, rose up on either side of the car with the occasional high rise in the background. On Fillmore, they traveled down a hillside. The bay came into view between the buildings ahead of them. Specks of whitecaps on the ocean waves twinkled like stars against the blue-green backdrop.

The sun hung low in the early evening sky, making the road draped in shadow. Adam glanced as a red streetcar passed him by to the left. People in dark clothing stood as if in a daze between the tall open windows. The car came to a stop. He grumbled. They'd found traffic.

Mostly black automobiles with elegantly curved fenders and thin, white-walled tires boxed them in to the front and back. Occasionally, a long, cream-colored car came into view. These were the expensive cars and probably housed wealthier folks like his aunt and uncle.

"Adam?"

Adam glanced over at his cousin. "What?"

Maxwell's finger traced the handle on his door. "You're not still mad at me, are you?"

Adam sighed. The traffic began to move and he eased the car forward. "No, I'm not."

"I mean, it *is* my birthday. You can't be mad at me on my birthday, right?" Maxwell chuckled and grinned at Adam.

"No, I can't." He glanced in the rearview mirror at Necalli, completely preoccupied with looking out his window. "We're almost there."

Necalli shifted his gaze to Adam. "I know."

Better not ask how he knows in front of Maxwell. He didn't want Maxwell suspecting anything.

They reached Marina Boulevard and Adam turned the car to the left. He looked out over the numerous boats whisking along the water of the bay and docked at the pier. Most of the boats had sails, but some were cruisers, similar to the ones he worked on in Mission Beach, but on a smaller scale. He came to the drive for the yacht club and turned again. They passed a short expanse of lawn until a parking lot greeted them in front of a white, stucco building. Cypress trees towered over the roof's red curved tiles from all sides. He parked the car and shut the engine off. "Well, we're here."

Maxwell quickly opened his door and let himself out. "I wonder if mom is here yet?"

Adam looked out to the left of the building, at the greens, and saw his Aunt Betty waving her arms at men in club uniforms. "She's here." Upon closer inspection, his gaze roamed the evening's set up. White, rice-paper lanterns hung on a spider web of wires over what could have been fifty small tables. The white tablecloths rustled in the breeze and colorful flowers in clear bowls sat atop each one.

Hearing the back door open and slam shut, Adam focused on exiting the car. He grunted as he opened the car door and climbed out. The cool ocean breeze ruffled his hair. After he shut the door, he saw Maxwell heading for his aunt and felt Necalli's presence close beside him.

"Why did you get so mad at Maxwell?" Necalli's voice was soft.

He turned to Necalli. "He just, it's just, well, sometimes when you know someone really well, they know how to get to you." It wasn't a total lie.

"And he got to you?" Necalli took Adam's hand.

"Yeah, you could say that. It's nothing you should be concerned about." He winced a little. Okay, that was a lie.

Necalli's gaze searched Adam's face. "I don't think I like him."

He looked down at the pavement. "I don't blame you. He can be a little conniving at times." He brought his gaze up to

Necalli's face. "Let's just get this party over with so we can get to bed and head home in the morning, okay?"

Necalli nodded and released Adam's hand.

As they walked to the party area, he noticed a few cars parking and more making their way up the drive. When he reached the tables, he saw a jazz band grabbing their instruments on a stage. Soon, the melodies of a snappy tune filled the air. He took a seat at a table and gestured for Necalli to sit beside him.

Uncle Richard walked up to Adam and sat down across from him as guests filtered in. "So, Adam, how's the business down in Moss Beach?" He took a glass of clear soda from a waiter's filled tray as it floated by.

Adam also grabbed a glass from the tray and one for Necalli. "Uh, it's good. It's sporadic, but it keeps me busy most days."

"I have a boat that needs a little work when you get a chance." His uncle tipped the soda to his lips.

A fleeting pain swept through his chest. His uncle would require his services free-of-charge, he was sure of it. "I do this for a living now, you know."

"Yes, but the boat is old Chelsea. You used to love working on her."

"Maybe Adam could bring the boat down to Moss Beach and we could work on it together." Necalli sipped his soda and set it down.

Uncle Richard frowned.

A waiter set a plate of hors d'oeuvres before them.

His uncle picked up a delicate cracker with cheese blanketed over it. "I don't know, I'd really prefer to have him work on it here."

He shook his head. "I don't have time to be driving back and forth working on a boat for free." He took two crackers from the tray and shoved one in his mouth.

"Come now, Adam. Don't look at it that way. It's Chelsea we're talking about."

He sat forward. "I can't do it."

Necalli's gaze darted between Adam and his uncle.

"Adam!" A young woman's voice rang out behind him.

He turned around to see his cousin's friend, Julie, approaching with another young woman on her arm. Their cocktail dresses billowed as the wind kicked up for a moment.

Adam turned back around to his uncle.

"Just think about it, will you?" Uncle Richard stood with his drink and walked toward some older men in suits.

"Adam, I'm so glad you came." Julie's chest heaved in and out as if she was out of breath.

Adam stood and gave her a quick hug. "My, you've grown up." He looked over her brown, shoulder-length hair.

"Well I'm not that much younger than you." Blushing, her blue eyes sparkled. She gestured to her friend, who eyed Necalli with curiosity. "Oh, this is Sandy."

"Uh, Hello." Waving quickly at Adam, Sandy returned to studying Necalli.

Adam pointed to Necalli. "This is a friend of mine from Moss Beach, his name is Necalli."

"Pleased to meet you." Reaching out, Necalli took each of the young women's hands, in turn, and placed a kiss on the back of them.

The young women both giggled.

"My, Necalli's a strange name." Sandy brushed a lock of dark hair out of her hazel eyes.

"It's Indian," Adam said.

"Well, I guess that explains the long hair," Julie said. "Can we sit with you?"

"Um, well, Maxwell wanted me to sit with him." Adam looked past the young women for his cousin. He saw Maxwell walking between guests toward them.

Julie gazed down at her high heels and frowned, clasping a beaded purse in front of her.

"Uh, Maxwell, over here." Adam waved to his cousin.

Smiling, his cousin trotted over to them. "So, you found

Adam, I see.” He placed a hand on the small of Julie’s back.

Julie blushed. “Yes.”

“Adam, seems you’re a popular guy today.” Maxwell winked at him.

Heat flushed Adam’s face. “Are you going to sit with us or not.” His anger flared.

“Yes. I told you I wanted you close.” Maxwell glanced at Necalli.

Necalli shifted in his seat.

“I’m sorry, would you ladies like to sit with us? I’ll just pull up another seat.” Maxwell went to another table and grabbed a chair. After he returned, he placed it at their table and sat down.

Julie took a seat beside Adam and Sandy sat between Maxwell and Necalli.

Immediately, Maxwell pulled a flask out from under his pant leg. “Hey, want some liquor?”

Julie’s face lit up. “Sure.”

Maxwell handed the flask to Julie.

Adam frowned. This would be nothing but trouble. “Max, where’d you get that?”

Ducking low, Julie took a swig from the flask before handing it to Adam.

“I have my stash.” A slow grin spread over Maxwell’s lips.

Adam turned the flask in his hand, looking it over.

“Come on, don’t be such a goody two-shoes,” Julie said, smiling.

Maybe this was just what he needed to get through this situation? “Oh, all right.” Ducking down below the table, Adam took a sip. The liquor burned inside him, making him cough. “Damn, what the hell is this, moonshine?”

“I don’t know, maybe...” Maxwell said with wry sarcasm.

“This stuff will rot your guts out.” Adam let out a soft chuckle. The liquor warmed his insides and sent a rush to his head. “Here.” He passed it to Necalli.

Necalli grabbed the flask, put it to his lips and took two

long gulps.

“Damn, Indians can drink.” Maxwell sat back in his seat, crossing his arms.

Handing the flask to Sandy, Necalli glared at Maxwell. “There are a lot of things we can do.”

Maxwell looked Necalli up and down, chuckling. “I bet there are.”

Sandy took a sip from the flask and handed it back to Maxwell. Her attentions drew back to Necalli. “Have any girlfriends?”

Necalli kept his eyes on Maxwell. “No.”

“Adam, will you dance with me tonight? I’d really like that.” Julie placed light fingers on Adam’s forearm.

Glancing at Necalli, Adam frowned. “Uh...”

“Sure, he’ll dance with you, won’t you, Adam.” Maxwell snatched a shrimp skewer off a waiter’s tray.

Adam slumped in his chair. “Sure.” Why did these situations always happen to him? How did he always end up getting stuck with a woman who didn’t interest him?

Necalli bumped Adam’s leg under the table.

He looked up at Necalli. Hurt threaded through his lover’s face. Great, this was all he needed. “Hey, let’s get some food at the buffet.” He rose and waited for Necalli to join his side before strolling off through meandering guests. “I’m sorry, you know I don’t want to dance with her,” he said, anticipating Necalli’s jealousy.

“I don’t care about that. You don’t respond to her. It’s Maxwell I’m concerned about. His body responds to both of us now.”

He stopped and pulled on Necalli’s arm to make him face him. “What do you mean? How can you tell if people are *responding*, as you call it, to each other?”

Necalli shrugged. “I sense it.”

“How?”

Frowning, Necalli looked at the ground. “I don’t know.”

He tugged on his arm. “Tell me how. I don’t believe for a

second you don't know."

Necalli's gaze rushed back up to Adam. His face tense with distress. "You don't trust me?"

Adam's mouth hung open in surprise as he took a step back. A waiter brushed behind him. "Well, I—"

"You don't, do you?" Necalli's gaze searched Adam's face. "You don't."

He shifted his stance and glanced away for a moment, watching couples swaying with the music of the jazz band, looking for time to come up with a response that wouldn't get him into more trouble. "I just think sometimes you don't feel comfortable telling me things and so you just say you don't know. That's all. It's not like I think you're flat out lying to me."

Necalli peered down at his black shoe as it kicked at the grass. "I'm afraid you won't want to be with me if I tell you everything, about how different I am. I'm afraid you'll think I'm some sort of freak, like you thought when you first saw my hands and my teeth."

He was stunned. He didn't ever say Necalli was a freak... *Oh, but I did make a comment about coming from another planet and what were they feeding him on the reservation anyway.* He mentally kicked himself. "Damn it, I'm sorry. I don't think you're a freak, no matter how different you are, okay?" He wanted to take him in his arms, but he couldn't with all these people wandering around. Instead, he watched Necalli's reaction to what he said.

Necalli shrugged but kept his gaze on the ground. "Okay."

"Are you going to answer my question now?"

As Necalli looked up, anxiety knitted his brows. "I can hear heartbeats and breath."

He let out a nervous chuckle. "You don't mean you can hear them all the time, from far away, do you?"

Necalli's anxiousness heightened on his face. "Yes, but not too far away."

He straightened and leaned toward Necalli to hear him

better over the music and laughter of the guests. “How far away?”

Necalli wrung his glove-covered hands. “Uh, a few feet, maybe?”

He took a deep inhale and glanced around the party for a moment, trying to digest what Necalli told him. Was one of Necalli’s books on some sort of sensory abilities on bats, or something of that nature? Maybe he’d read something in a book to make him think he had this ability.

“When someone is attracted to someone else, they respond a certain way. When someone is afraid, they respond another way.”

He took in Necalli’s words. If he could really hear those things, then a lot of things made sense. Nervousness washed over him with the thought. “What other emotions can you hear?”

“Distress. You’re distressed right now. What I just told you bothers you. Doesn’t it?” Necalli placed a hand on Adam’s arm. Fear danced in his eyes. “Do you still want to be with me?”

Rolling his eyes, he groaned in frustration. He wanted so badly to take Necalli in his arms and soothe his fears. “Yes, I still want to be with you. It doesn’t matter if you’re different. I like the fact that you’re different. I think if you weren’t different, you and I might not be here, together, right now. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

A shy smile played on Necalli’s face. He leaned forward as if to place a kiss on Adam’s cheek and caught himself, feigning a cough. “Yes, I understand.” He grinned.

Adam smiled back at him. “Okay, then, let’s get some food.”

CHAPTER NINE

CLOSER

Adam swirled Julie on the dance floor and brought her into his arms. She stumbled, making him tighten his hold on her. *God, was she drunk.* After all, they'd all imbibed in two more flasks after finishing off the first.

Swinging her head back, laughing, she moved to the beat of the music. "Oh, Adam, I love dancing with you."

He winced. He couldn't say the same. As he held her against him, swaying, he looked out between other dancing couples into the sea of tables and people under the glow of lanterns and tried to pick out Necalli. Darkness swam overhead. *It's got to be late.* Anxiety gnawed at his insides with the situation brewing between Necalli and Maxwell, ever since Necalli's words sunk in. Maxwell responded to Necalli, which also meant in Necalli's terms—Necalli excited Maxwell.

Julie's head bobbed in his vision as he scanned through the tables. After a few passes, he picked out Maxwell and Necalli.

Maxwell sat with his chair pushed up right next to Necalli, much to Adam's dismay. They were focused on each other, each leaning toward the other, nodding and chatting. Maxwell bent close into Necalli, pawing at him.

When is this damned song going to end? He had to see where Maxwell's hands were landing. Besides, she had already kept him out here for at least a half-hour, enough was enough.

"—don't you, Adam?"

He shifted his attention to his dance partner. "What?"

"I said I love jazz, don't you?" She pressed her chest against him and gazed up into his eyes.

He tried to hold her a little farther away. "Sure, I like jazz."

He saw it.

Maxwell's arms wrapped around Necalli's neck. Leaning in, Maxwell's head covered Necalli's face as if he were kissing him.

Jealousy and pain stabbed at Adam's heart. He stopped dancing and stood motionless, releasing Julie.

Necalli smiled at Maxwell as he pulled away.

"Hey." Julie's movement stopped and she turned to see what Adam stared at.

His mind raced. *But Necalli said he didn't like Maxwell? Necalli loves me, doesn't he? He said so.* Then Maxwell's words flooded into his head. *How much can you love Necalli when you get so hard for me?* Images flickered in his mind, of Necalli straddling Maxwell, of Maxwell stroking himself, of Necalli pleading with Maxwell to take him.

"You okay? You look sick." Julie's gaze roamed his face.

He glanced at the ground before meeting her gaze. "I think I am. Excuse me." He pushed her aside and trudged through people back to their table. When he reached it, he stopped and glared at Maxwell.

Necalli smiled up at Adam.

"Oh, hey, Adam." His cousin's hand rested on Necalli's thigh.

"You two seem to have taken quite a liking to each other." Fury blurred Adam's thinking and made his hands clench into fists.

"You didn't think I was going to let you keep him all to yourself, did you?" A smirk of satisfaction curled one side of Maxwell's lips.

With concern and worry on his face, Necalli sat forward and reached out for Adam's arm. "Adam?"

He jerked his arm away. "Don't touch me." Turning, he fled, twisting through people, racing toward the piers, heart pounding, lungs burning. Questions flooded his mind. How

could Maxwell do that to him? How could Necalli let him? How could he let Necalli into his heart so fast? He knew better than to let people get close. He knew, somehow, people always disappeared, disappointed, died. They hurt him. They always hurt him.

Out of breath, he slowed to a stop. Where the hell was he? Leaning over and laying his hands on his thighs, he scanned his surroundings while trying to catch his breath. He recognized the waterfront and the docks. The rhythm of the waves made the boats creak and sway and sent the sounds of lapping water to his ears. The scent of seawater floated all around him.

He straightened himself and looked back up toward land. The lights of the city made halos in the moist air. A patch of clouds covered the moon, darkening his immediate surroundings. He decided to stroll up the waterfront walkway. Maybe it would help clear his head. He needed to really think about what he saw and how he felt about both Necalli and Maxwell.

As he walked, the waterfront gave way to an industrial neighborhood. Warehouses stood squat against the skyline, making the path darker still. He looked up in time to see the orange glow of a cigarette fall and bounce on the cement. His gait halted. The hairs stood up on his neck.

Two figures stepped out from between the buildings.

He only saw their silhouettes. By their size, they must be men. It looked like one put his hands in his pockets, shoving aside a suit jacket.

“What you up to?” A man’s voice said, taunting.

“Uh, just taking a walk.” His hands shook.

“Did you come from that fancy party down there?” A finger pointed in the direction of the yacht club.

“Uh, no.” He lied. These men must be interested in money, asking a question like that.

“I think you did.”

The slap of a fist hitting a palm registered in Adam’s head.

“My friend here thinks you did, too. And I happen to know

he doesn't like liars."

Adam took a step back.

The men lunged forward. "Give us your money, punk."

Shaking with fear, he twisted to run. His foot caught hold of something. Down he went, to his knees. His teeth clenched. His body went rigid, preparing for a blow.

The drum of quick claps on steel from above rang out. A thud hit the cement behind him. Shouts turned to shrill screams and inhuman growls. Ripping cloth and splattering liquid filled the air around him.

He gasped and turned his body, sitting on the cement, paralyzed. He sensed movement in the air, quick and sharp. The shadows thrashed. Two orbs glowed yellow, darting back and forth, up and down, in a whirl of motion.

Everything stopped. The gentle sound of water lapping at the dock and faint sucking noises filled the still air around him. He let out a long exhale, just realizing the held breath.

Something crunched on the cement. The glowing yellow orbs found him, focused on him, studied him. A crack like a skull smacking the hard ground rang out through the night.

"Adam?"

He gasped. *That's Necalli's voice, clear as day.* He watched in awe as the pair of yellow orbs faded to darkness.

"Adam?" Necalli's voice broke.

Creeping forward, he willed his body to move. The bitter taste of fear remained in his mouth and tried to cripple his limbs. "N-Necalli?" His voice had a ragged edge.

The heavy breathing and hitched gasps of crying threaded through the air. "Oh, no." He feared the worst. Had Necalli been injured during the scuttle? He scrambled to a huddled shadow and ran his fingers over a trembling body, curled up, knees to chest, arms wrapped around its knees. The spicy scent of the young man who'd invaded his heart filled his nose. Seizing his lover, he draped his arms around him and held him close. "Necalli, are you hurt? What happened? How did you get here?"

Necalli unwrapped himself and clamored into Adam's lap, pushing him down to sitting in the process. He clutched at Adam's shirt and let out long, sorrowful sobs.

"Shh..." He held him tighter, rocked him, and soothed him as best he could. "It's okay. Whatever happened to them, they can't hurt you now." A light breeze rustled his hair. Looking to the sky, the clouds gently uncovered a sliver of moon. Gradually, the scene around him illuminated.

His gaze drew to the ground. Two humps lay haphazard and motionless. As the light became brighter and his eyes adjusted, the humps morphed into contorted bodies in slashed suits. Dark pools seeped out from under them. He let out a soft gasp. They were dead.

Necalli lifted his head and peered at the lifeless forms. "No." He scrambled closer into Adam as if trying to get inside him.

"Hey, shh." Necalli's shoulders shook against his chest and sobs softened to quiet weeping. He tried to fit the pieces of the puzzle together in his mind. But it wouldn't fit in a neat, acceptable way. There was just no way the young man huddled and crying in his arms could be responsible for such carnage. But the scene before him looked too familiar.

Placing his hands on Necalli's shoulders, he pushed him out so he could see into his face.

Necalli let his hair veil over his face and groped at Adam as if trying to pull himself back inside his arms. "Hold me, Adam, please."

"Just a minute. I need you to tell me what happened." He slouched forward, attempting to peer through Necalli's long hair.

"I don't know. I don't remember." Anguish filled Necalli's voice.

"Come on, you need to talk to me." It was time for answers. And *I don't remember* was not an answer.

Necalli squirmed, trying again to press himself into Adam's chest.

“No, this is serious. You have to tell me what happened this time. I swear it won’t change anything between us. I’ll still want to be with you.”

“No, you won’t.” Necalli sniffed unshed tears back.

“So, you do remember?”

Necalli’s eyes flashed at Adam. His words came out slow and deliberate. “Some of it.”

He sighed. “Did you kill those men?” The shimmer of a teardrop fell between them. His hands tightened over Necalli’s shoulders. “What are you?”

“I don’t know.”

“What, are, you?”

“I don’t know.”

“What—”

“I don’t know!”

Adam’s head jerked back. Necalli’s voice rang in his ears. The outburst left him stunned. Necalli’s angry eyes bore into him. He let out a breath of held air. “Okay. So what do you know?”

Necalli’s glare softened. “I-I know I’m d-different than you, than most people.”

“You killed those men, didn’t you.”

With brows contracting, the corners of Necalli’s lips turned down, as if he would cry again. “I don’t know. Didn’t they come after you? Weren’t they going to hurt you?” Tilting his head and maintaining eye contact, he rubbed his cheek on Adam’s forearm.

He whispered, “Oh, Necalli...” His head fell forward. Necalli must have killed them somehow. He just didn’t want to admit it.

“Adam? Do you hate me?”

He shook his head. “God, no, I don’t hate you.” Lifting his head back up, he gazed into tortured eyes. Numbness permeated his whole body. It was too much to deal with—Maxwell coming on to him, Maxwell coming on to Necalli, Necalli killing two thugs. What the hell was he supposed to

feel? And what were those yellow orbs he saw? Had Necalli turned into some sort of monster? No, not acceptable.

Necalli's frantic gaze darted between Adam's eyes. "No, no, you do hate me, you do. I can see it. I can feel it." Fresh tears glistened in his eyes.

An iceberg tipped in his mind, exposing the larger part and drowning the smaller. His mind slipped, just like that. In a sudden fit of pure frustration, he shook Necalli's shoulders, jerking his head forward and back. "God damn it, I don't hate you. Not a God damned thing you do will ever make me hate you. Do you understand? Huh? Do you hear me? Not even kissing Maxwell. Not even killing those two pathetic thugs. I don't give a damn if you hear heartbeats and have fucking claws for hands and fangs or even if you are some kind of God damned demon! I don't care if you see and talk to fucking ghosts. Because I love you and I've never loved anyone before in my whole fucked-up life. Do you hear me? Never! No one has ever done to me what you've done. No one has ever, so God damned quickly, set up fucking shop in my heart the way you did. I will not have you saying that I fucking hate you. I don't." He stared at Necalli in shock. *What the hell was that?*

Wide-eyed, Necalli held himself still. "You, you love me?"

He glanced away for a moment and collected himself before looking Necalli straight in the eyes again. "Yes, I love you." The words held every ounce of his soul. "Can't you sense it, like everything else?"

"I-I couldn't before. Your heart was shut away from me." As new tears filled his eyes, Necalli lunged forward, claiming Adam's lips.

The hard and penetrating kiss threw him into a tailspin. He hungrily kissed back, surrendering fully to the love in his heart. Necalli was delicious and perfect, in every sense, in every way. He drew him close and heard him moan softly into the kiss.

Necalli pulled away, his breath heavy, and gazed into Adam's eyes. "I love you, so much, Adam."

No one had ever looked at him the way Necalli did in that

moment, so filled with admiration, desire, hope, and devotion. Exhilaration and fear hit him at the same time. He ran his hands up and down Necalli's arms and placed his forehead on Necalli's. Closing his eyes, he lost himself in it for a moment. His eyes opened with new determination. "Let's get out of here and never speak of these dead men again."

Necalli nodded against Adam's forehead and climbed off his lap.

He stood, reached his hand out and helped Necalli up. As they strolled in the direction of the party, he placed his arm around Necalli's waist and drew him in close.

After draping his arm around Adam, Necalli tilted his head against Adam's shoulder. "I didn't kiss Maxwell." Calmness filled his soft voice.

"Okay."

"I'm not a demon, am I?"

"No, don't be silly. There are no such things as demons."

Adam glanced at Necalli, sitting in the seat beside him, as he set the parking brake on his car. The party had been over when they finally made it back and Necalli had gazed silently out his window the whole drive home. Thank God it was over.

"Come on." He opened his door and heard Necalli doing the same. After walking around the car, he met with Necalli on the other side and took his hand. They strolled up the steps, over the front walk, onto the porch and Adam led Necalli into the house.

A quiet darkness enveloped the home. *Surprising*. He glanced at his watch, after one in the morning. He had no idea it was so late already. Leading Necalli up the stairs, he towed him to his room. He stopped in the doorway.

Maxwell lay sleeping on top of his bed, naked except for underwear.

"Damn," Adam muttered under his breath. "Stay here," he whispered. After stepping to the bed, he gazed down at Maxwell. The scent of alcohol rushed his nose. He nudged

him.

“Mmm...” Maxwell turned onto his side, but his eyes stayed closed.

He must be passed out drunk. Adam went back to Necalli. “Let’s sleep in your room,” he whispered.

Necalli smiled. “Okay.”

He followed his lover into the guest room. After they both entered, he closed the door and locked it, hearing the gentle click of the tumbler. Anticipation made his slacks grow tight. He couldn’t wait to feel Necalli’s soft, naked skin against his. When he turned around, he saw Necalli standing next to the bed, completely undressed. Necalli’s erection stood tall and thick, beckoning him. His need flared as he stepped across the room to Necalli.

Their lips meshed, gently brushing, exploring, tasting. Adam wrapped his arms around Necalli’s back, trailing over lean muscles, cupping his behind.

Necalli let out a low, soft moan. He pressed his hips forward into Adam’s and drew him in closer. “Let me undress you,” he said, brushing his cheek against Adam’s and taking in a deep breath.

He nodded.

Necalli took a small step back and focused his attentions on Adam’s shirt. He unfastened the buttons, slowly, deliberately, and slid his hand under the fabric to caress Adam’s chest with each one.

Moaning, he tilted his head back, lost in Necalli’s exquisite touch, in the gentle tickle of pointed nails over his skin.

Coming forward, Necalli licked and sucked on Adam’s neck, flicking his tongue and letting his fangs trace over the surface, teasing. His hands roamed down to the top of Adam’s pants, unfastening and gently lowering them down.

Necalli’s timid fingers probed under the band of Adam’s boxers and reached lower, all the way down, under his sac.

Pleasure rushed through him as the fingers traced circles under him, over him, on top of him. His hips moved as he

groaned, low and deep, yearning for more. As his head came forward, he let out a puff of air before reaching the soft skin of Necalli's neck. He bit softly on it and sucked hard.

Necalli gasped and circled his hips into Adam's thigh, making his erection rub against him, spreading pre-seed, up and down, side-to-side. "Adam, do it all to me." He pulled his hand out of Adam's boxers and stepped back. Giving Adam a seductive look, he lowered the bedcovers and slipped gracefully between them.

After pulling himself out of his shirtsleeves, Adam stepped out of his slacks and threw his shirt to the floor. As he dropped his boxers and stepped out of them, he kept his gaze on Necalli's eyes, filled with desire for only him. "You look so good, lying there, waiting for me." Letting a small grin curl his mouth, he leaned down over the bed and crushed Necalli's lips beneath his own.

Wrapping his arms around Adam's neck, Necalli guided him down and over him.

Warmth surrounded his whole body, the silky flesh taunting him, the spicy scent drawing him in. He rocked his hips into his lover, hearing him gasp and moan, feeling his hands run up and down his back. Delicious pressure ground down over his erection, sending pulses through him. "Do you want me to take you?"

Necalli opened his mouth and hissed with pleasure. "Do what you want. I want to know what you like."

What exactly did he want? He'd never had a male besides Necalli. Oh, but he could think of things. His mouth met Necalli's again, kissing him hard before lowering down, slow and sensual, and licking a trail down his neck, over his chest, onto his stomach. First, he wanted to taste all of him.

Necalli arched his back and moaned, keeping his hands on Adam's head as Adam licked and sucked down his pelvis, over a thigh and back across. He spread his legs for Adam, opening up to him, showing him all he had to offer.

He licked low, under Necalli's sac and watched him buck

with pleasure. He'd explore every part of his lover's strange and captivating body. He kissed his sac and took it into his mouth, running his tongue over it, taking in the musty scent.

"Ah, Adam..." Necalli panted and writhed.

He glanced up at Necalli before moving his mouth up to his seeping erection.

With his eyes shut, Necalli's head tilted back and twisted slowly back and forth as if fighting to hold off climax.

He grinned for a second and came down on Necalli's solid cock, taking it fully in his mouth in one swift move. It surprised him, how much the act made his own erection hum, fed his own need. He pumped Necalli's solid shaft, down and up, running his tongue along the thick vein on the underside of it, feeling it pulse in his mouth.

Necalli arched again and cried out, clutching the sheets.

Stopping, he removed his mouth. "Shh, you don't want to wake the whole house up." He let out a soft chuckle.

Necalli gazed down at Adam with a lazy smile. "I can't help it. That felt so good."

He frowned for a second, wondering if he should stop. "Well, what should I do?"

"Keep going, please."

He grinned. "You have to be quiet."

A pout crossed Necalli's lips. "Or you'll stop?"

"Maybe." He placed his hand at the base of Necalli's erection and stroked him slowly while licking the head, swirling and flicking. Necalli's body shivered below him.

Necalli let out a long, muffled moan.

As he licked and sucked Necalli's cock, he glanced up.

Necalli had his fist stuffed in his mouth, stifling himself.

He put his mouth over Necalli's erection again and pumped, pushing his tongue against the underside of the shaft.

Necalli's brows tensed while short whimpers escaped him. He thrust hard and fast into Adam's mouth.

Necalli's reaction made him ache. Reaching down, he stroked himself in time with the movement of his mouth over

Necalli. Waves of pleasure seared through him. He let out a long moan over Necalli's erection and it swelled harder between his lips.

Necalli shook and jerked his hips up. "Adam, I'm close. I swear if you moan on me again, I'll—"

He moaned.

Bucking hard, Necalli covered his mouth with both hands. His body shuddered and sent his seed erupting into Adam's mouth.

He stayed on Necalli, lapping and swallowing every drop, giving him pleasure until the end. His sensitivity rose, dangerously close to the edge. He stopped stroking himself and pulled off Necalli. "Oh, God." He craved Necalli's mouth on him. Sitting up on his legs, heavy breaths heaved his chest as he gazed down at Necalli.

Necalli laid spread out on the bed in apparent bliss after what Adam did to him.

"Necalli."

Tilting his head, Necalli looked down at him with a sleepy but quizzical expression.

"Aren't you going to take care of me?"

Necalli smiled. "Should I?" Reaching down, he ran a finger up Adam's erection.

He shut his eyes, feeling his body shudder. He was still so close. "What do you think?"

Moving slowly, Necalli rose from the bed and guided Adam to lie on his back, maintaining eye contact the whole way. He positioned himself between Adam's legs, with his head over Adam's erection, and glanced up at him. "Shall we play?" He placed a finger in his mouth, licked it, and ran it over Adam's cock, up and down, swirling the tip, making small circles just under the head.

He thrust his hips and gasped.

"Shh, you need to be quiet, remember?" Pulling his finger away, Necalli gave him a mischievous grin.

"Oh, you bastard," he said, chuckling.

Necalli's lips curled down in a frown. "I'm not a bastard. I'm very well bred, thank you."

Necalli's comment sparked curiosity in him, but this was not the time to be asking questions about memories. "Please, Necalli, just do something." He ached for release. Every part of his body craved it.

Dropping his head, Necalli took Adam's cock in his mouth. He pumped hard on him, driving his tongue against the shaft, plunging down and pulling up, over the tip. He reached a hand up and pinched at Adam's nipple.

He arched and clenched his teeth to prevent himself from crying out. His hands found long hair and clutched it tight. Necalli's fingers ran small circles around his entrance. No one had ever touched him there. Jolts of pleasure rocketed into his system, heaving him over the edge without mercy. "Oh, God." Need filled his voice. His peak came on strong and insistent. His sac tightened. He bucked and curled his toes as delicious contractions overtook his body, making sharp gasps escape from him against his will. Necalli's mouth continued to pump over him, while his seed poured out. When it slowed, he lay spent, trying to catch his breath.

Necalli climbed up to lie beside Adam, wrapped his arms and legs around him and placed his head over Adam's chest.

He held Necalli close.

"Did you like that?"

He smiled, tracing a slow circle on Necalli's arm. "Yeah, I liked that." Gazing up at the ceiling, he recalled the whole crazy day for a moment. "Hey, what do you mean you're well bred? Do remember who you are?"

Necalli turned his face into Adam's chest and held him tighter. "A little."

He tried to move him so he could see his face.

"Don't." Necalli held his position.

He let out a soft sigh. "Okay, well, tell me what you remembered. It's all right, you don't have to be afraid." He waited patiently for a response.

“Uh, there was a city with gleaming, white walls. I had servants. I think. I was important.” Necalli raised his head and looked at Adam as if needing encouragement.

He chuckled. “Well, that’s different. Sounds like maybe you’re remembering a dream.”

Confusion washed over Necalli’s face and he lowered his head. “Yeah, maybe.”

He squeezed him. “I’m sure you’re well bred. You seem to have convinced my aunt and uncle of that.” While drawing the covers up over them, he placed a light kiss on Necalli’s head.

“Let’s get some sleep.”

“Okay.” Necalli snuggled in closer to Adam’s side.

He inhaled his lover’s scent. It comforted him. He thought back over what Necalli said. He’d have to look over all Necalli’s books to see exactly what sort of things could be real memories and what could be imaginary.

CHAPTER TEN

CHOICE

Adam rolled to his side and felt Necalli shift next to him, keeping their bodies close. After opening his eyes, he focused on the room's contents, illuminated by morning sun. The faint sound of movement floated up from the floor below him, banging and talking. Light steps sounded in the hallway. Everyone must be up.

He rolled in Necalli's embrace, wrapped his arms around him and kissed his forehead. His heart flooded with emotion when he looked down on Necalli's beautiful and peaceful face. "I love you," he whispered, tightening his hold while the words left his lips. It was overpowering, saying something like that to someone. He felt exposed and vulnerable. But at the moment, he wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

"I love you, too." Necalli's voice was barely a whisper. His head snuggled into Adam's chest.

He shut his eyes, forcing fear away. He'd love this young man and he wouldn't let his past interfere.

Necalli pulled away and raised his head to gaze at Adam. "Are you all right?"

With a wide grin, he nodded. "Never been better."

Necalli's expression turned serious. "When do we have to get up and leave?"

"Uh, now would probably be the time." Leaning down, he placed a lingering kiss on Necalli's lips.

Necalli deepened the kiss, parting his lips, engaging his tongue with Adam's. Moaning softly, he pressed his erection against Adam's thigh.

The heat of Necalli's solid cock rubbed against him, sparking his desire. But he held it back. "We'll have to wait until we get home. People are up."

Necalli frowned, exhaling in clear frustration. "I don't know if I can." He rolled onto his back.

Lifting up, he propped himself on an elbow on his side. He brushed his fingers over Necalli's cheek. "You're going to have to. Unless you're going to take care of yourself in the shower." He chuckled.

A mischievous grin spread on Necalli's face. "Maybe I will. Would you be upset if I didn't save it for you?" His gaze swept over Adam's face.

He reached between the sheets and stroked lightly over Necalli's hard cock. "Maybe."

Necalli's eyes closed while he moaned and rocked his hips. "Don't tease me."

Oh, how he wanted him, that second. Leaning his head down, he pressed his forehead to Necalli's chest, still stroking him. "Save it for me. Please."

Reaching down between them, Necalli covered Adam's hand with his own and squeezed, forcing Adam to stroke with a tighter grip. "Don't stop."

He rocked his erection against Necalli's hip, feeling a wave of pleasure rush through him. He let out a low moan. "Oh, God, we can't do this now."

Necalli laid a gentle finger on Adam's chin and raised his head up. "We can." He pushed forward and claimed Adam's mouth, parting his lips, flicking his tongue against Adam's. Necalli's hips thrust faster, with heightened urgency. He held Adam's hand tighter over him, letting out sharp gasps against his mouth.

His hips thrust hard into Necalli, sending delicious friction rippling through him. His climax coiled inside him, readying

itself for release.

Hard rapping sounded on the door. “Yoo-hoo, what are you two doing in there?”

Horried, he recognized his aunt’s voice. He ceased all movement with Necalli.

Necalli let out a soft groan and attempted to keep Adam’s hand moving.

“Stop it,” he whispered, yanking his hand away.

“Adam, honey? Are you in there with your friend?” The doorknob jiggled.

“Uh, yeah, Aunt Betty. Be right out. We were, ah, just, getting our things together.”

“Why is the door locked?” Maxwell asked, with sarcasm filling his voice.

“God damn it,” he said, under his breath, glancing at Necalli. “Max, we’ll be right out.” He scrambled to the edge of the bed and climbed off. After picking up his discarded clothes, he shoved them on while throwing Necalli’s clothing to him. “Hurry and get dressed.” He glared at Necalli.

Reluctantly, Necalli took his jumbled clothes and dressed.

When he determined they were both decent, he walked to the door and opened it.

Maxell beamed at him, fully dressed and showered, hands clasped behind his back.

Aunt Betty stared wide-eyed at him. “Adam?”

“Uh, we were reading. I guess the door must have locked itself somehow.”

“Really,” Maxwell said with a wink

He glared at Maxwell. “Yes, really. See the books?” He pointed to Necalli’s pile of books on the floor.

Necalli sat on the edge of the bed, watching the exchange.

His aunt shifted her stance. “Well, won’t you both join us for breakfast?”

Adam raked his hand through his hair. “Of course. We’ll be right down. Just have to get cleaned up a bit. Okay?” He forced a grin.

After a quick turn, his aunt strolled down the hallway.

Maxwell leaned forward and looked around as if assessing the situation. "I don't believe for a second you were reading." He gazed down at Adam's groin. "Got some pinups in that book, maybe?"

Stunned, he covered the bulge in his slacks with his hand.

In an instant, Necalli appeared at Adam's side.

"Holy shit, how'd you do that?" Maxwell took a step back.

Necalli's eyes locked on Maxwell's while he stepped toward him. "What we were or were not doing is none of your business. I trust you'll respect our wishes and leave us alone." Necalli's voice was soft and deep.

Confusion muddled Maxwell's face. "Uh, uh, Adam? Did you know his eyes change color?" He took a shaky step backwards.

Necalli lowered his head, letting his hair veil over his face.

Reaching an arm out, Adam pulled Necalli back into the room.

Maxwell shifted his attention to Adam with fear and apprehension on his face.

"Just leave us alone. Okay? We'll be down for breakfast in a few minutes." Adam slammed the door shut and turned to Necalli, wrapping his arms around him and drawing him close. "I don't care. I love you." He brushed his fingers along the back of Necalli's head.

"What am I, Adam?" Necalli's voice held hints of sadness. He clutched Adam's shirt with his arms bent at his sides.

He peered down at Necalli's hand. His fingernails had lengthened considerably. He watched in fascination while the nail slid backwards into the cuticle, shortening to its normal length. "Uh, does that hurt?"

Lifting his head, Necalli gazed at Adam with tortured eyes. "What?"

He frowned. "Your fingernails, they were long and then they just sort of shrunk, like a cat's claw."

Necalli held up a hand between them and twisted it,

examining both sides. “No, it doesn’t hurt.” He let out a hitched breath. “Am I human?” Heavy emotion laced his voice.

Reaching up, he entwined his hand in Necalli’s. “Look at me.”

Necalli’s brows furrowed before he shifted his gaze to Adam.

“You know how I feel.” He placed Necalli’s hand over his heart. “What do you hear?”

“I hear your heart beating only for me.”

“That’s right. To me, whatever you are is perfect.”

Seizing Adam, Necalli pulled him into a fierce embrace.

He held his lover for few minutes. “We have to get cleaned up, they’re waiting for us.”

Necalli pressed his hips into Adam.

He let out a soft chuckle, feeling Necalli’s erection against him. “Whatever you are, you’re oversexed.”

“I’m going to go crazy until we get home. I was so close,” Necalli said, breathless.

He gazed into Necalli’s eyes while he leaned down and gave him a deep, penetrating kiss. This was going to be just as hard on himself. “Wait for me.”

Closing his eyes, Necalli pressed harder against Adam, letting a soft moan escape. “Okay.” As he released from Adam, he lowered his head.

He kept a hold on Necalli’s hand. “Let’s get cleaned up and downstairs.”

After a taking a quick shower and packing their belongings, Adam snapped the suitcase shut, picked it up, and smiled at Necalli while he took his hand to lead him out from his room and downstairs.

He dropped the suitcase on the floor in the front entryway and let go of Necalli’s hand while they strolled down to the dining room. They passed under an archway and entered a hunter-green room with an elaborate chandelier hanging in the

center of the ceiling. Adam saw his uncle sitting at the head of a long table, reading a newspaper, with his aunt sitting beside him. Maxwell sat opposite his mother.

“Oh, you finally decided to join us, huh?” Maxwell said with a smug grin. His gaze darted to Necalli.

“Adam and Necalli, please join us.” His aunt patted the seat beside her.

Uncle Richard lowered his paper for a moment and nodded to Adam and Necalli.

Adam took a seat beside his aunt while Necalli sat beside him. He looked over the table. A silver coffee pot and white bowls sat atop it with assorted fruits and pastries. Place settings in fine china waited at each position around the table. As soon as they sat down, David appeared in the archway.

David bowed and put his palms together in front of him. “What can I bring you from the kitchen for breakfast?”

“I’ll just have a couple scrambled eggs,” Adam said.

“Do you have sausage or bacon?” Necalli asked.

“Of course,” David said.

“He’ll have the sausage,” Maxwell said, snickering. “Make it a fat one.”

“Maxwell!” Adam glared at his cousin.

Confusion swept across Aunt Betty and Necalli’s faces.

Uncle Richard lowered his paper and frowned at his son. “Maxwell, though I’m not exactly sure what you’re driving at, I’m sure it’s not appropriate.”

Maxwell looked at his lap. “Sorry, Dad.”

Adam continued glaring at his cousin, staring him down.

“Uh, I’ll have bacon, please.” Necalli shifted between Adam and Maxwell.

“Yes, sir.” David left for the kitchen.

Adam poured coffee into his cup and gazed at Necalli. “Want some coffee?”

“Yes, please.”

Adam poured coffee into Necalli’s cup.

Necalli picked up a pastry and sniffed at it before taking a

bite.

"So, what happened to you boys last night?" His uncle asked, setting his paper down.

"Yes, dear, we missed you. I wasn't sure where you'd gone off to. You should have told someone." Aunt Betty took a bite from a delicate pastry.

Maxwell studied Adam.

"Uh, I'm sorry. We just went for a walk, down by the piers. I wanted to show Necalli here some of the yachts." Adam took a sip of coffee.

A sad frown quirked Maxwell's lips.

Adam glanced at his cousin. "Didn't you have a nice birthday, Max?"

Running his fork in circles over his empty plate, his cousin rested his cheek on his palm. "Yeah, could have been better though."

"Oh? How, dear?" His aunt asked.

Maxwell shifted in his seat. "Never mind."

"Answer your mother," Uncle Richard said.

Maxwell glanced up at Adam. "There was just this one thing I wanted. I've been wanting it for a long time, but I guess I can't have it."

Adam held his breath. He couldn't wait to get out of this house and in the car.

"What is that?" Aunt Betty asked.

David appeared from around the corner and laid a plate of eggs in front of Adam and a plate of bacon in front of Necalli.

Necalli immediately picked up a slice of bacon and put it in his mouth, oblivious to Maxwell's underhanded remarks.

Maxwell looked directly at Adam. "Something from Adam. He owed me something. It's a secret though, isn't it, Adam?"

He shifted in his seat and glanced at his aunt, gazing intently at him. His hands grew clammy with sweat. "Yeah, it's a secret." He focused his attention back on his cousin. "But, it's not something he can have."

Maxwell's brows furrowed. "If you won't give it to me,

maybe Necalli will.”

Adam leaned forward in his chair. “No, he won’t.”

Necalli finally looked up from his plate. “What?”

Smirking, his cousin shifted his gaze to his plate.

Aunt Betty slowly shook her head. “I don’t understand.”

“It’s just something between us.” Adam put a forkful of eggs in his mouth.

A slow smile crossed his aunt’s face. “Oh, you boys. You always have little secrets, don’t you?”

“Yeah, you could say that.” Catching Adam’s gaze, Maxwell placed his index finger in his mouth and sucked seductively.

Necalli did a double take of Maxwell and glared at him.

Sensing Necalli’s anger, Adam placed his hand on his thigh and caressed it softly to calm him while he ate.

Necalli squirmed in his seat and redirected his gaze to his plate before looking up into Adam’s eyes.

Adam’s gaze met Necalli’s. A raw desire burned in them. He yanked his hand away and feigned a cough.

Uncle Richard stood from the table and looked everyone over. “Well, I’m retiring to the library. Adam, I wish you a pleasant trip home and please visit us again soon. It was nice to meet you, Necalli.” Taking his newspaper in his hand, he nodded his head at Necalli and walked around the table and out of the room.

“Oh, I’m afraid I also have some business to attend to. Come see me to say goodbye, will you Adam and Necalli? I’m sure David will know where to find me.” She stood and walked from the room.

Maxwell sat back in his seat with a wide grin on his face. “So, Necalli, shall we go back up to the guest room so I can have what I’ve been waiting for?”

Necalli glanced at Adam with a confused expression. “What is he waiting for?”

Adam stared at his cousin. “He’s just messing with you, Necalli.”

“No, I’m not.” Maxwell said.

“What does he want?” Necalli sat forward.

Maxwell smirked at Adam. “I want you, Necalli, like we talked about last night. Don’t you remember? You were going to show me something. Of course, if Adam wants to join us—”

“Max, this has gone far enough.” Adam glared at his cousin and shifted his gaze to Necalli. He knew better than to believe Necalli promised anything to Maxwell last night. But jealousy still surfaced in his chest.

“I told you I only want him and he only wants me. Didn’t you listen to me last night?” Necalli grabbed Adam’s hand on the table and held it firm.

Adam’s jealousy dissipated.

Frowning, his cousin crossed his arms over his chest. “It’s not fair. You two have each other and I have no one.” He glared at Necalli. “You told me I was beautiful last night.”

Gasping, Adam stared at Necalli in shock. “What?” Jealousy tightened his chest again.

Necalli remained steadfast. “You are. I know Adam is attracted to you, too. But the fact remains, I only want him and he only wants me.”

“Wait, you’re attracted to Maxwell?” Adam’s head reeled. The conversation was definitely out of control.

Necalli gazed at Adam. “He’s a part of you. You have blood ties.”

“So that makes it all right?” Adam yanked his hand out of Necalli’s grasp.

Maxwell grinned.

“I can’t believe, all this time you were so concerned about me responding to Maxwell and here you’re attracted to him, too?” Adam glared at Necalli.

Necalli looked down at the table, obviously upset. “We can’t always help what we find beautiful, but we can choose whether or not the beauty will possess us. I chose you.”

Leaning over, Adam grabbed Necalli’s shoulders and kissed him hard on the lips, not caring whom was sitting at the table

or who could come around the corner and see them. The sound of clapping brought him to his senses and he released Necalli and sat back in his chair.

“Bravo.” His cousin smiled while he clapped.

Adam looked down and collected himself. “Max, this isn’t some show for your amusement.”

Maxwell stopped clapping and sat forward. “I never said it was. I just want you to let me in, just a little.”

Adam glanced at Necalli before his eyes rested on his cousin. “Maxwell, you know you’ll always be special to me.”

Pain washed over Maxwell’s face. “And that’s all, right?”

Adam nodded. “I’m sorry.” He stood and leaned down to take Necalli’s gloved hand. “Come on, let’s go home.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

QUESTIONS

Adam glanced at Necalli, sitting in the car seat beside him. How good he looked in his dark shirt and trousers. They matched his hair. He drove the car past beaches and tall grasses on Highway 1, not far from home. “What are you reading?”

Necalli squirmed in his seat before looking up at Adam. “I’m not, actually.” He shifted again and closed his book. As he continued to gaze at Adam, his breathing quickened and his eyes took on a glazed appearance.

Smiling, he glanced at the fog just offshore. “You’ve been staring at that book for at least a half-hour and you’re not reading it?”

“Uh, no. I was trying, but I can’t.” Necalli’s eyes clearly rested on Adam’s lips.

Desire ignited inside him. He took a quick glance at Necalli’s groin and confirmed his suspicion. An unmistakable erection pushed his trousers out. “So, what were you doing then?”

“Thinking about you.” Necalli shoved the book off his lap, forcing it to the floor of the car with a thud. His hand brushed over his groin and his eyes closed for a moment. “Adam...” He shimmied to the center of the seat, bringing his body close to Adam’s.

He chuckled. “What are you doing? I have to drive, you know.” He wrapped an arm around Necalli’s shoulders.

Necalli let his head fall into Adam’s neck. As his hips

rocked gently, he placed soft kisses just under Adam's ear and a hand between his own legs, palming the hard flesh below the thin cloth.

"Hey, I-I'm driving, I said." His gaze darted from the road down to Necalli's hand as he fondled himself. He hardened in an instant. "Damn, I thought you were going to wait for me?"

Necalli let out a soft moan against Adam's skin. "I was, but I can't."

He shifted in his seat, making room for the erection under tan pants. "We're almost home, if you'll just wait another half hour, I'll give you what you want."

"I can't wait, not after this morning. And it's been driving me crazy, knowing you chose me over Maxwell, knowing you're in love with me, hearing it in your heart, feeling it inside me." Necalli pressed faster on himself, filling the car with a sharp gasp. His hips rocked in time with his palm and his thighs opened and shut.

He took a deep breath. "S-stop, please, wait." He gunned the accelerator. Maybe if he hurried, he could get home in twenty minutes. Necalli's hand rubbed over his erection through his trousers, washing pleasure into him. He swerved with the force of it and corrected the car. "Damn, you're going to kill us both." Tingling ran from his neck and focused in his groin as Necalli adeptly licked and sucked on him while continuing to palm his swollen cock.

"Do you like that?" Necalli's palm stroked harder, faster, on himself and Adam. His movements quickly became frantic.

"Y-yes, b-but, I don't know if I can drive like this." Gulping hard, he relented and pulled over to the side of the road. Shutting the car off, he turned in his seat.

Necalli lunged on top of Adam, tearing his white shirt up out of his pants. He drove a hand underneath and up to tease Adam's nipple.

He groaned and kissed Necalli hard. He barely shut the car off before Necalli opened his pants and claimed his erection with his mouth. Pleasure seared through him, making him cry

out and grope at Necalli's head. "Oh, God." His sensitivity rose quickly.

Necalli licked and sucked on Adam's shaft, swirling and flicking the top every so often. He trailed a hand down to Adam's sac, running circles over and under it, teasing and coaxing Adam's climax out of him.

He shut his eyes tight and thrust hard. Release teased him, just under the surface. He clutched strands of Necalli's dark hair while his peak rushed forward. A sudden, intense pleasure washed over him, through him, out of him. Delicious contractions forced his seed to pulse in waves into Necalli's lapping mouth. Low, urgent moans filled the inside of the car.

When the last of Adam's seed spilled, Necalli rose up, shaking with desire, and gazed into Adam's eyes. "I need you."

Giving Necalli a passionate kiss, he pushed him backward onto the seat. He ran his hand down to Necalli's trousers, unfastened them and pushed his hand underneath to wrap around Necalli's seeping cock, stroking hard.

With his face tensing in pleasure, Necalli bucked and cried out. "Faster, Adam, please. I'm so close." He clutched the seat back with one hand and the dashboard with the other.

He lowered himself down to Necalli's lap, smiling for a moment, and took him in his mouth. Necalli's erection pulsed against his tongue as he ran it up hard and sucked.

Arching his back and panting, Necalli cried out. His body jerked and writhed below Adam. He thrust up hard and held himself rigid.

Necalli's erection swelled in his mouth before hot fluid spurted behind his teeth.

Bucking hard again, Necalli gasped and shuddered.

He took it all in, lapping, sucking, and pumping until it all slowed. Raising his head, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and grinned at his beautiful lover.

Necalli's chest heaved up and down with deep breathing. As his eyes slowly opened, he returned Adam's grin with a lazy one of his own.

He repositioned himself over Necalli's chest and leaned down for a lingering kiss. "You're crazy, you know that?"

Necalli looked down with a shy smile. His hand came up to toy with the sleeve of Adam's shirt. "I can't help it. I told you I wouldn't be able to wait."

"Well, we're lucky a policeman didn't happen to just drive by while you were attacking me." He chuckled and raised his hand to brush a lock of hair from Necalli's forehead.

Necalli frowned. "I don't like policemen."

"Why not? Were you jailed or something?" He arced a light thumb over Necalli's cheek, hoping the action would help him talk about whatever incident caused him to feel this way.

"I don't know." Necalli pulled at Adam's shoulders as if forcing an embrace.

He held his position. "Talk to me. You know I'll understand. There's nothing you could have done that'll make me feel any different."

"I don't remember why. I just know when I see them I feel afraid and my heart aches terribly for some reason." Necalli pulled harder on Adam, making him fall to his chest. "It hurts to think about it. Don't make me think about it anymore." Necalli's voice filled with emotion.

Adam held Necalli tight. "I won't. I'm sorry." His mind raced with possibilities. He needed to solve the mystery behind whom his stunning lover was, but that would have to wait. After a few minutes, he pushed up from Necalli's embrace. "Are you okay now?"

Necalli nodded.

"Well, let's get home." He pushed all the way up, tucked himself back inside his trousers and fastened his pants.

Straightening himself up, Necalli glanced at Adam and placed a hand on his forearm. "Thank you."

He looked at Necalli, perplexed. "For what?"

"Everything."

Smiling, he let out a short chuckle. "What do you mean, everything?"

Necalli glanced at the floor of the car. "You saved me. You took me in. You fell in love with me, all without knowing anything about me. You accepted me, even though I'm not normal."

He leaned over and gave Necalli a quick kiss on the cheek. "Of course. You're too irresistible to do anything else." A soft laugh escaped him.

Necalli smiled at him. "Well, thank you anyway."

"You're welcome. Uh, when we get home I'd like to drop by Frank's for lunch and get caught up with Peter, all right?" He returned his attentions to starting the car, pushing the starter button and making the engine rumble.

"Will Suzie be there?" Frowning, Necalli sat back in his seat.

He started the car down the road. "Probably. Don't let her bother you, okay? Just ignore her and she'll leave you alone."

After propping his elbow on the door handle, Necalli let his cheek rest on his palm. "Adam, you really shouldn't buy her drinks. In fact, you should tell her you don't have the same sort of feelings for her that she has for you."

He winced. "I know, but I don't want to hurt her feelings."

Lifting his head, Necalli glared at Adam as if stunned. "How much more hurtful is it to let her believe she has some part of you when she doesn't? How deceitful is that?"

Necalli's words stung him. "Just stay away from her and it will all work out, okay?" He gave Necalli a stern look. He wouldn't discuss this further.

Sighing, Necalli gazed out his window.

Adam skipped up to the door of Frank's Place and opened it for Necalli. He glanced up at the fog, just starting to cover the midday sun's rays.

Necalli brushed by Adam and stepped tentatively into the speakeasy.

He walked up behind Necalli and nudged him. "Let's go, maybe Suzie's not even working today." The slight tension

between them unsettled him. He continued to the bar and took his usual seat, scanning behind it for Peter. The place looked empty. Did the fishing boats come already? Maybe everyone was at the docks.

“Would you look at that, Adam and Necalli.” Peter came out from the metal doors to the kitchen with a wide grin.

He smiled. “Hi, buddy. Where is everyone?”

Peter picked up a rag to wipe the bar. “Boats came in a little early.”

“Ah, just as I thought. I wonder if I should go down there after lunch.” He glanced at Necalli. What should he do with him while he worked?

An uncertain expression crossed Necalli’s face. “You have to work today?”

Peter looked up from the bar. “I’m sure they could use some extra hands.”

Adam leaned toward Necalli. “Do you want to go to the pier after lunch and help me?”

Necalli glanced from Peter back to Adam and down to his lap. “I-I don’t know. Are any of these men rumrunners?”

Peter gave a short laugh. “God no, they’re fisherman. They lead an honest life.”

With wide, searching eyes, Necalli’s breath hitched. “Fishermen?”

“Necalli?” Adam placed his hand over Necalli’s shoulder. “What’s wrong? You know I work with the fishermen, on fishing boats, right?”

Necalli’s gaze darted around his lap. “Y-yes, b-but—”

“What’s wrong?” His chest tightened with worry. Did Necalli remember something?

Holding still, Peter watched the scene in front of him.

Necalli gulped hard and took deep breaths. “Nothing, nothing’s wrong.” He gave slight shake to his head as if trying to clear it.

He remembers. Adam was sure of it. “You don’t have to go with me if you’d rather, uh, read or something.”

Relief washed down Necalli's face. "Oh. Yeah, maybe I'd rather do that today." He looked up at Adam. "Maybe another day I could help you?"

He released his hold on Necalli's shoulder. "Sure, another day." He turned his attentions to Peter.

Peter continued looking at Necalli with confusion littering his face.

"Peter..." Adam said.

"Huh?" Peter's attention focused on Adam. "Oh, uh, you want some lunch, I guess."

"Yeah. Necalli, what do you want to eat?" Propping his elbows on the bar, Adam leaned forward.

Necalli smiled at Adam. "I'll have whatever you're having."

"You sure? Do you like grilled cheese? Because that's what I was going to get." Adam glanced at Peter. "Give me a soda too, since I have to work."

"Yeah, grilled cheese sounds good." Necalli's brows furrowed in confusion and he looked up at Peter with an uncertain grin. "How do you put cheese on your grill without having it stick all over it?"

Peter laughed, a loud belly laugh, and bent over with his hand on his stomach. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Adam forced a smile. "Necalli, uh, it's cheese between slices of bread that's grilled." His voice was soft, hoping Peter wouldn't quite hear him.

Necalli frowned. "Oh."

Adam turned to Peter. "Just get us both grilled cheese sandwiches and soda, please."

"Sure thing." Still chuckling, Peter pointed his finger at Necalli and shook his head. "You are a funny one sometimes. No wonder Adam likes you so much." He made his way to the kitchen doors and disappeared.

Dropping his head, Necalli let his long hair blanket his face.

Leaning toward Necalli, Adam placed his hand on Necalli's thigh. He whispered, "Listen, I know you remembered something. It's all right. We'll talk about it when I get home

from work tonight, okay?”

Necalli nodded his head.

“It’s okay. Don’t feel bad.” He sat upright again and looked out at the thick fog swirling outside the windows. He’d ask some of his buddies at the pier if they knew anything about Necalli. Maybe he’d finally get some answers.

Peter returned with plates of grilled cheese sandwiches and potato chips. He slapped the plates down in front of Adam and Necalli and set about pouring their sodas and getting their silverware. “So, did you two have fun in San Francisco?”

Adam took a bite of his sandwich while watching closely as Necalli examined and sniffed at his before taking a bite. “Yeah. It was a little unnerving, you know, being around family. But it all worked out.”

“How is Maxwell?” Placing his hands on the bar, Peter leaned forward.

Necalli looked up at Peter. “He’s just fine.”

Adam took a sip of soda from his straw and grinned. “He had moonshine at the party and got snookered.”

“Oh, God, moonshine? That’s nasty,” Peter said.

“It was,” Adam said.

“You drank it?” Peter looked at Adam in disbelief.

“Yeah, well, it was all there was. Not like around here. Ah, it wasn’t so bad.” Adam shoved more sandwich into his mouth and chewed.

“Bet it was a big soirée though, huh? Being at the yacht club like that.” Shifting, Peter picked the rag back up.

Necalli gulped down his soda. “Yes, it was very nice.”

Peter leaned forward. “Did you two meet any dolls?”

Adam almost choked. “What?”

Necalli shook his head.

“You mean to tell me you went to this big, fancy party at the yacht club, where there was bound to be lots of rich girls, and you didn’t meet anyone?”

“W-we met Julie and Sandy.” Necalli wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin. “Adam danced with Julie a lot.” He frowned

and looked at Adam.

Peter's eyebrows rose. "Oh, did you now? And I suppose there's something wrong with her, too."

"No, she was, she's just not my type." Adam's eyes met Necalli's and he grinned.

"Necalli, what are we going to do with him?" Peter slowly shook his head.

Necalli smirked. "I know what I'd like—"

"That's enough, Necalli." Adam glared at Necalli and Peter. Why couldn't Necalli keep his mouth shut? "I don't think we need to sit here and discuss my love life, all right?"

"What love life," Peter muttered.

"Where is Suzy today?" Necalli finished his last potato chip and sucked on a paper straw.

"Oh, she's off today." Leaning in to Adam, Peter gave him a coy smile. "But I know she's been pining away for Adam here."

"Stop it." A slow grin spread on Adam's face despite himself. Oh, how his friend loved to tease him about that.

Necalli pushed his empty plate forward. "I think Adam should stop buying her drinks and tell her the truth about how he feels about her."

Adam turned to Necalli. "Damn it, Necalli."

"He's got a point," Peter said. "She really does like you, Adam. And if you really don't feel the same about her, well, it's mean to lead her on like that."

Adam glared at Peter. "I don't lead her on."

"Oh, but you do." Peter's expression turned serious. "Listen, I'm your friend, right?"

Adam absolutely didn't want to discuss this now. "Yes."

"I won't beat around the bush. Be a man about it and tell her if you don't like her." Peter took a step back.

A smug grin played on Necalli's face.

"Fine. Next time I see her, I'll tell her. Now, will you two please leave me alone about it?" Sighing, Adam sat back on his stool and looked Necalli over. "Are you happy now?"

Hurt washed over Necalli's face. Reaching out, he placed a gloved hand over Adam's at the bar and gave it a tender squeeze. "Don't be mad at me, Adam."

Adam jerked his hand away and glanced anxiously at Peter.

A look of confusion raced across Peter's face.

Necalli rose up from his stool. "I have to use the restroom. Excuse me."

As Necalli walked off, Peter leaned over the bar, putting himself close to Adam. "Adam, uh, is there something going on between you and, uh, well, Necalli?"

He scoffed. "What the hell do you mean?"

"I think you know what I mean. Jesus, it all makes sense now." Staring at Adam, Peter stood upright.

"What makes sense?" How would his friend react if he knew what was really between him and Necalli?

"Why you never date anyone. Why you never seem to find girls you like. You don't like girls, do you." Peter's eyes narrowed.

His heart pounded in his chest. "Don't be ridiculous. Of course I like girls." He waved his hand at Peter. "Just give me the check, okay?"

Continuing to look at Adam with suspicion, Peter reached under the bar and produced the check. "Adam, you'd tell me if you were gay, wouldn't you?"

His gut wrenched with the term Peter used for him. Was he really gay? No, he was just in love with a beautiful, mysterious young man, but not really gay. He looked Peter straight in the eyes. "I'm not gay."

Adam pulled his car up to Pillar Point Harbor, just four miles from his home. He'd left Necalli back at the cabin to read and now his mind raced. Did Peter believe him when he said he wasn't gay? Was he actually gay? What the hell did Necalli remember at Frank's? He growled and shook his head. It was too much to think about.

He climbed out of his car and looked over the wharf. It

bustled with fishing boats and men shouting and working to get their haul to the scales.

After shutting the car door, he paced through the fog, down toward the pier. His shoes hit the deep, wooden planks with the calls of seagulls squawking in his ears. He looked up and counted three Monterey clippers with birds flapping all around them, eager to get a scrap.

A man in a dark, tattered jacket and cap stepped off a white boat with a baby-blue cabin and waved at him.

"Hey, Billy," he called out, waving. He picked up his step and hurried to Billy's side. "So what have you got?"

Billy's light blue eyes twinkled for a moment under his cap while a breeze ruffled his curly, white hair. "The usual. Salmon were good this time around."

"Ah, they'll love you down at the market." He smiled.

"Had a problem with the engine. Maybe you could have a look at it after we unload?" Billy glanced over at the boat tied up behind his. "I think Henry needs some help as well."

"Sure thing." He stepped into the boat to get a look at the haul. Two men cleaned a few fish and heaved guts and heads off the side to a frenzy of gulls.

Adam nodded at the men. "Taking some home to the missus?"

"Yep. She sure loves salmon."

He looked down into the hold of the boat to see it full with silver fish and seawater. When he looked back up, Billy's wife, Martha, stepped aboard the boat.

"Good afternoon, Adam." Her brown eyes wrinkled as she smiled at him.

"Good afternoon. Come to fix the lines?" He took a step back.

She tugged a green scarf a little tighter over graying hair and came to stand beside him. "Yeah."

"Looks like they did really well." He walked off toward Billy again.

"Hey, Billy, I got a question for you." Frowning, he glanced

at the deck of the boat for a moment.

Billy turned to face Adam while he stood on the dock. "What is it, son?"

"Uh, you ever seen any Indians working down here or heard of any Indians that might have lost a teenage boy?" He looked directly into Billy's eyes.

Reaching up, Billy fingered his chin for a moment. "You mean recently?"

His heart pounded and he wasn't sure why. He gulped. "At any time that you know of." He rested his hand on the side of the boat, attempting to steady himself.

"Well, this was a long time ago, maybe twenty years ago or so, mind you, when I was young." Billy looked off into the distance. "A friend of mine, Luke was his name, began hanging around with this young man who sure looked like an Indian, had the long, black hair anyway. I'd say he was around eighteen, maybe less." A slow smile crossed his face. "They sure were close, those two. But Luke died shortly after. Someone, I don't know who, found him tore up so bad the only way the police knew it was him was by this silver cross he liked to wear." He looked directly at Adam.

"Tore up how?" A shiver worked its way up his spine.

"Some rabid animal or maybe even a bear, we think. I know the police went looking for the young man, but they never found him." Billy smiled. "Why are you asking about Indians?"

He did his best to steady his heart. Necalli surely wasn't old enough to be the one Billy spoke of. "No reason, really, just curious. You know about them rumrunner's getting killed up at Moss Beach a few days ago, right?"

"Sure do." Billy shifted his stance and spit on the dock.

"Ah, Peter keeps talking about some Indian curse causing their deaths." He let out a nervous chuckle. "Keeps saying there's demons on those islands out there."

"The Farallons?"

"I suppose. You ever been out there?" Feeling an ache in his jaw, he unclenched his teeth. He didn't even know he'd

clenched them.

Smiling, Billy gave a slow shake of his head. "You know how us fisherman are. We're just superstitious enough to leave them islands alone. It's not good fishing anyway, the damned seals take care of that."

He slowly nodded.

"I'd stay away, if I were you." A serious expression crossed Billy's face.

He furrowed his brows, not sure what to make of Billy's comment.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LET IT BE

Adam opened the door to his cabin with a pizza box in one hand and salmon filets wrapped in newspaper in the other. He looked up and saw Necalli standing at the kitchen sink.

Necalli turned with a wide grin on his face and a dish in his hand. "You're home." He placed the dish he'd been cleaning in the sink and walked toward Adam.

He shut the door and went to the table to set his things down. When Necalli drew near, he wrapped his arms around him, holding him close and lowering his head to take in his scent. "Did you already eat?"

"Just a snack. I wanted to wait until you came home to eat dinner." Releasing Adam, Necalli placed a tender kiss on his cheek. "How did it go down at the harbor?"

"The usual. I brought some salmon home. Thought we could cook it up for dinner tomorrow. I brought pizza for tonight." He gazed into Necalli's eyes, wondering at what mystery lie behind them.

"So I see." Necalli picked up the salmon and brought it to the refrigerator.

He glanced at Necalli's pile of books, sitting on the floor by the couch. "Do much reading while I was gone?"

As he turned around, a wide smile spread on Necalli's face. "A little. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Ah, some orange juice would be fine." How relaxed Necalli appeared in his home. It was almost like having a wife.

The thought made him grin and shake his head while he sat at the table.

Necalli poured two drinks and took plates down from the cupboard before joining Adam at the table. "What's so funny?"

He opened the pizza box and put a slice on his plate. "You. It's just a little strange coming home to someone, I guess. Well, and having them wait on me like—"

"Like a wife?" Necalli furrowed his brows.

He let out a soft chuckle. "Yeah, like a wife." He took a bite of pizza.

"I'm not your wife. I'm nobody's wife. I'm your partner."

Reaching across the table, he placed his hand over Necalli's. "Yes, you're my partner. However this works out is fine with me. It's just a little strange is all." Adam finished his slice of pizza and took another from the box.

Necalli washed down his pizza with a gulp of juice. "Adam, I'm not sure about going down to help on the boats with you."

"Why not? Can you tell me what you remembered at Frank's?" He took another bite of pizza.

Frowning, Necalli shifted uneasily in his seat. "I don't think I want to talk about it."

"Necalli..." Adam sighed. "You're going to have to face who you were before all this at some point. And, you're going to have to tell me."

Necalli glared at Adam. "But why do I have to face it? Why do I have to tell you? Why can't everything that happened in my past be left there? Why must I be forced to drudge up old, painful memories and share them with you? You already love me, no matter what. It should be enough."

Stunned, he sat back and gulped hard. "I-I'm sorry. Don't you want to know? I don't think it's healthy to keep these things buried."

Necalli crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't want to know."

He rose from the table and walked to Necalli's side. Leaning over, he took Necalli's wrists and pulled him up to

standing.

Necalli gazed up with a mixture of fear and pain on his face.

He wrapped his arms around Necalli's waist. "I'm here for you. You don't have to go through the painful memories alone." He placed a tender kiss on Necalli's forehead, hoping to urge him to talk.

Necalli let his head rest on Adam's shoulder and fingered the folds of Adam's shirt. "Every time I remember something, it hurts. So why do I have to remember?"

Brushing his cheek over the top of Necalli's head, he brought a hand up to softly stroke the back of it. "Like I said, it's not healthy to live without knowing who you are. I'd love to forget the house fire, but it's a part of me, of who I am. I'm not sure I'd be the same without it. Besides, these things have a way of working their way out and when it does, I don't want you to be traumatized by it. I think it's better if you remember things slowly and we talk about them, work through them. It's what I would have wanted after I lost my family." He just realized this fact as he said it. Pain stabbed his chest at the memory of watching his house burn, knowing his family was inside. He shut his eyes tight against it.

"Adam?" Necalli lifted his head and gazed into Adam's face.

He held back the tears forcing their way to the surface. "Yes?"

"I knew some of them."

His heart skipped. "You knew who?" His eyes grew wide, waiting for Necalli's answer.

"The fishermen, I knew some of them. I'm sure of it." Necalli's eyes filled with tears and his face tensed. "But it hurts, Adam."

"It's okay. Just talk to me. Do you remember any names?" Holding his breath, his gaze darted between Necalli's eyes.

Necalli shook his head. "No." A tear raced down his cheek. He sniffled and stepped back from Adam, swiping at his face.

“No.”

“Yes, you do. Tell me.”

Necalli hung his head low, turned and stepped toward the couch.

Reaching out, he snatched Necalli’s arm. “Tell me.”

Necalli jerked his arm away, shaking his head. “No.” In a flash, Necalli appeared on the bed, back to the wall, arms hugging his knees.

Taking a second to steady his nerves from Necalli’s all-to-quick movement, he walked to the couch and looked down at the books. On top of the pile was one of his books on fishing boats. He knew the book contained a history of fishing and fishermen. Bending down, he rifled through the books, taking in the contents one by one – a book on Indian history, a book on San Francisco history, another on etiquette, one on castles, and finally, a religious history book about angels and demons. His heart pounded harder in his chest with each one. He picked up the fishing book and strode toward the bed, holding the book out in front of him. Frustration ran wild in his chest. “Is this what you remember?” He winced. He didn’t mean for his voice to raise the way it did.

Necalli looked up at Adam with confusion and pain still marking his face. “What?”

Attempting to calm himself, he took a deep inhale. *Why am I so angry?* Did he feel he was being betrayed somehow? He spoke slowly. “Is this what you remember?” He flung the book at Necalli’s feet and paced in front of the bed, keeping his focus on his lover.

Necalli gazed down at the book and back up at Adam. “What do you mean by that?”

He stood still. “Every *memory* you have seems to have a corresponding book associated with it, or have you not noticed that?” His anger boiled over into his voice. He couldn’t help it.

“What are you saying? Do you think I’m making this all up?” The pain on Necalli’s face sharpened.

“Well, maybe not on purpose, but, yes.” He placed his

hands on his hips, standing his ground.

Gasping, Necalli looked at the far wall. Unshed tears shimmered in his eyes. "I haven't made anything up. I can't believe you wouldn't trust me."

He stepped forward and glared at Necalli. "What do you expect me to think? You only tell me bits and pieces of who you are and where you came from and then you tell me these impossible memories, like remembering the damned quake of 1906 when it's obvious you weren't even born then."

Necalli glared at Adam. "You said you didn't care. You said you'd love me no matter what." His body shook.

He knelt on the bed, scooted up to sit on his legs in front of Necalli and reached a hand out.

Necalli batted Adam's hand away.

Gasping, he sat back. He didn't like being pushed away, not at all. "Necalli, please..."

"What did you expect? You don't trust me." Necalli turned away from Adam.

"It's not a question about trust or love. It's a question about what are really memories and what you might think are memories but are really things you read in those books."

"I'm not confusing the books with my memories." Necalli came back to Adam and the anger in his expression sharpened.

"How do you know that? Can you really say you're twenty-eight years old and not eighteen? Can you really say you have no parents who might be looking for you?" He searched Necalli's face.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I just do."

"How?"

Specks of yellow flashed in Necalli's eyes and for a split second, he saw the glowing orbs that gazed at him at the pier in San Francisco. Stunned, he threw himself back on outstretched arms. "Jesus."

Immediately, Necalli dropped his head.

He sat carefully forward again. "You wouldn't um, um, hurt me, would you?"

With wounded, tear-filled eyes, Necalli looked back up at Adam. "No, I could never hurt you. Why would you say such a thing?"

"I, I don't know. You, uh, your eyes got yellow for a second there and—"

"I would never hurt you." Necalli huffed and shifted his gaze to the far wall.

He reached his hand out and placed it on Necalli's knee. "I'm sorry."

"I remember things from a long time ago."

He inhaled and held his breath for a moment. "You do?" He took his hand back and waited patiently for Necalli to continue.

Necalli's eyes glazed over as if he were seeing something Adam couldn't see. "It's a blur, really. But there are images of a life very different from this one. There were men and women both at my feet as if worshipping me. There were buildings of blinding, white plaster and bright, feathered tapestries. There were monuments with stone stairs stained red with blood." Necalli shifted his gaze directly to Adam. "Yes, I remember the quake of 1906. I was there."

His heart beat so hard he thought it would burst from his chest. What could he say to that? What the hell was he dealing with here?

"You're afraid of me." With his face twisting in pain, Necalli dropped his forehead to his knees.

Shifting forward, he surrounded Necalli with his arms. He placed his cheek on the side of Necalli's head. "I love you. Some of these things you tell me scare me, yes. But I still love you."

Necalli lifted his head to gaze into Adam's eyes. "Tell me you won't leave me, no matter what." He blinked, sending a sudden tear racing down his cheek.

"I won't leave you, no matter what." He drew him close

and placed tender kisses on his head. “No matter what.”

Necalli’s breath quickened as he lifted his face again to return Adam’s kisses. He dropped his legs and leaned forward, parting his lips, probing Adam’s mouth with his tongue, deepening the kiss. “Take me, Adam. I need to feel you inside me.”

He guided Necalli sideways onto his back, feeling his arousal immediately take hold. He positioned himself over Necalli and rocked his hips downward, sending pleasure rushing through him and feeling the hard flesh of Necalli’s erection against his own through the fabric of their trousers.

Necalli’s hands ran down Adam’s back to cup his behind, pulling their hips closer, increasing the pressure to their solid cocks. Squirming below Adam, he let out a deep moan and nipped at the soft skin of Adam’s neck, teasing the flesh with long teeth. “Please, Adam.”

With a shiver, he smiled against Necalli’s mouth. He ran his hand down to pry up Necalli’s shirt and ran his fingers underneath and up his chest to tease his nipple. His groin hummed and his need heightened.

Necalli arched his back as Adam pinched and teased at his chest. “Oh, Adam, do it now.”

He tilted slightly to trail his fingers down Necalli’s taut stomach and under his belt, into his pants. He plunged down into soft curls and brushed over Necalli’s sac before taking hold of his erection, squeezing and stroking softly over it.

Necalli bucked and groaned. “Don’t tease me, please.”

“Why not? You sure seem to like it.” A quick grin covered his lips before he crushed them to Necalli’s mouth, stifling a cry of protest from his lover.

Necalli’s hips rocked in time with Adam’s while Adam supplied friction to his cock, stroking and swirling, playing and teasing.

His erection rubbed over Necalli’s thigh as their hips moved, sending sweet pulses through his body, making him ache for more. His breath grew ragged while he stayed on

Necalli, penetrating his mouth with his tongue, taunting his flesh with his palm and fingers.

Necalli shook and whimpered under Adam's control. Finally, he pulled his mouth away. "Please, Adam. Now." Thrusting his hips hard, he shuddered and gasped. "I can't take much more."

He licked at Necalli's ear and gently bit his earlobe. "Are you close?"

Necalli cried out with his brows furrowing in pleasure. "Y-yes, I'm c-close. I can't hold on."

He yanked his hand from Necalli's pants and propped himself up on an elbow to gaze down at his lover.

Panting, Necalli thrust his hips up and tugged on Adam's behind. "What are you doing?" His voice whined.

"I'm watching you. You're incredible, you know that?" He ran a light finger down Necalli's nose.

Necalli looked away as if embarrassed. "Why do you like doing this to me?"

"Doing what?"

"Make me wait for you." Necalli's eyes shifted back to Adam. Raw lust burned in them.

He dropped his head, placing a hard, urgent kiss on Necalli's mouth and rubbed his hand equally hard over Necalli's erection through his trousers. Necalli shuddered and groaned below him.

Necalli gave Adam a firm shove, making Adam roll onto his side next to him. He panted. "I almost lost it, Adam."

He grinned and let out a soft chuckle.

Necalli glared at Adam. "It's not funny." His expression softened. "I want you inside me this time."

"If that's what you want, then you'll get it." He placed a quick kiss on Necalli's cheek before crawling off the bed and going into the bathroom. He opened the medicine cabinet and took out the jar of Vaseline. His erection pulsed as he thought of the tight, sensuous feel of being inside his lover. He returned to the bed and stopped.

Necalli was sprawled out, naked, waiting for Adam, his cock dripping pre-seed onto his stomach.

"Well, would you look at that."

Necalli gave Adam a shy grin and began a seductive stroke over his length. "Hurry, Adam."

He threw the Vaseline down on the bed and unbuttoned his shirt, pulled his arms out of it and tossed it to the floor.

Necalli arched and moaned, increasing the speed of his palm over himself.

"Wait for me, damn it." He slid off his shoes while unfastening his pants and dropped them to the floor before kicking them off. He climbed onto the bed and over his lover, placing his hand over Necalli's and pulling it off his erection. "That's mine." A slow smile spread on his lips.

Returning the smile, Necalli ran his hands up Adam's back, letting his long nails brush over his skin. He rocked his hips into Adam and let out a slow moan. "Adam, take me. Don't make me wait anymore."

He tilted his body and reached for the Vaseline. After dipping his fingers into it, he brought them down between them and under Necalli's sac, over his passage. While running slick circles over Necalli's entrance, he gazed down into his face.

Biting his lip, Necalli's brows tensed and his eyes clenched shut. A sharp gasp escaped him as his hips thrust up.

He leaned down to place a hard, penetrating kiss over Necalli's lips while inserting a finger inside him.

Necalli's body shivered under Adam's and he let out a soft groan. "Now, Adam."

"You are so impatient." He almost grinned, but his arousal overtook him. Quickly, he placed his erection at Necalli's entrance.

Necalli's legs wrapped up over Adam's hips while he bucked, pushing Adam inside him. A loud moan escaped him and his arms and legs became impossibly tight around Adam.

"Necalli, I can't breathe." His chest felt crushed by the

strength of Necalli's embrace. "Necalli..."

Necalli's eyes fluttered open and a sheepish smile curled his lips. "Sorry." He loosened his hold and rocked his hips in time with Adam's.

His mouth returned to Necalli's. His tongue penetrated and danced along Necalli's while he held him tight, grinding and driving his erection into and out of his lover.

Necalli's body writhed and trembled. He pulled away from Adam's heated kisses as his face tensed in pleasure. He let out a loud cry and bucked upward, holding his body rigid against Adam. "Ah, Adam..." Hot fluid spurted between them as Necalli released.

He felt Necalli's body shudder, his entrance contract around him and his cock pulse with the force of his climax. He drove in hard, feeling his own peak overwhelm him. He surrendered and let pleasure wash over him as his climax hit, hard and insistent. He increased his hold on Necalli as delicious spasms filled his lover with his seed.

When it slowed, he lay panting over Necalli with his head resting in the nape of his neck. He loosened his hold on him and brought his fingers up to Necalli's lips, running them lightly over the thick flesh.

Necalli parted his mouth and brought his lips over Adam's fingers to playfully suck on them.

Smiling, he placed a tender kiss on Necalli's neck. He couldn't remember a time when he'd felt so calm, so altogether happy. "What'll we do about this memory situation?"

Necalli let Adam's fingers slip from his mouth. "Let it be."

He gave Necalli a tight embrace. Apprehension gripped him. Would his lover always be a mystery to him? Did it really matter?

"Can you do that, Adam? I sense fear in you." Necalli tilted his head and put a gentle kiss on Adam's hair.

"I suppose I might have to. But, would you tell me if you remember who you are?"

Necalli took a quick inhale. "I don't want to remember who

I am. All I want to know is that I'm your lover and that's enough." He squeezed Adam. "Is it enough for you?" Raw emotion filled his voice.

He lifted his head and gazed down at Necalli, seeing tears shimmering in his eyes. "It's enough." He brushed Necalli's cheek with the back of his hand. "I just want you with me." Leaning down, he kissed Necalli with all the love and passion he held in his heart. It would be enough. He would make it so. "Let's get cleaned up and go to bed. I have to work tomorrow, you know." He let his lips curl into a soft grin.

"And I'll be here, waiting for you."

The crackle of fire filled Adam's ears, making him look up. Flames jumped all around him, licking at the walls of the room, reaching as high as the ceiling. A familiar panic crushed his chest and he fought to breathe. "Aloise?" He twisted in the room in a frantic search for his sister, desperate to reach her before the flames did. Where was his mother? "Aloise?" His voice rang out over the flames.

"Adam?"

Adam spun around. "Oh, God, no."

Necalli stood among the flames with his arms outstretched.

"Necalli, I'm coming!" He raced toward his lover. A wall of ravenous fire stopped him in his tracks. "Necalli!" Terror and anguish seized him, bringing his tears forward in a torrent of sobs. "Necalli, where are you? Please, talk to me. Tell me you're okay." He spun and paced in a harried dance to find a way through the flames, to pull his lover to safety.

"Adam, help me!" The flames lowered and Necalli stretched his arms out once again with clawed fingers splayed.

"I'm coming." He reached forward to snatch Necalli's hand, but the fire reared up again, singeing his arm. He howled in pain and drew back for a moment. "Don't you leave me. Don't you dare leave me! I love you. You can't leave me!" he screeched into the flames, prancing around them.

With tears staining his cheeks and his heart filling with agony, he looked up into the darkness above the flames. "Don't you dare take him from me. Do you hear me, God? Don't you dare. I don't care what he is, he's mine. He's not yours to take. He's not yours, he's mine. You can't

have him, you can't." He broke, letting sobs consume him, making his chest shake.

"Adam, please wake up."

His eyes fluttered open. Necalli's face blurred in front of him. Hot tears ran down both cheeks. "Oh, God." He buried his face in Necalli's neck as his tight embrace surrounded him. He wept openly, not able to control the horrible feeling of loss ripping his insides open, making a hole right into his soul.

"Shh, Adam, I'm here. I'm not gone. No one is taking me. I'm yours, all yours. I'll never leave you, never." Necalli held Adam tighter as he lay next to him on the bed, placing soft kisses on his head and cheeks.

His weeping stopped, but he kept a tight hold on his lover. "So I must have said those things out loud?" His breath hitched.

"Yes. You were very upset."

"I thought I lost you, Necalli. I thought you burned in flames, just like my family did."

"And so you threatened your God? You love me so you would risk your life like that?"

He thought for a moment. He didn't think of what he'd said in those terms and it seemed strange. He pulled away from Necalli to look in his eyes. "I don't know if it's such a risk to threaten my God, as you call him. But of course I would risk my life to save you, yes."

Necalli's eyes widened. "My Gods would never allow such talk. I would be severely punished."

"Your Gods?" Necalli must remember something, but should he ask? No, not with the way they left things last night. "Necalli, the biggest fear I have is that you would die on me, like my family did." The sudden confession surprised him, but it was true.

"I won't die." A faint smile played across Necalli's lips.

"Yeah, well, my family didn't expect to die when they did either." He looked around the room, realizing it was light. It must be morning. He glanced at the clock. "I have to get up

and get to the pier. They'll be waiting for me." He gave Necalli a quick kiss and swiped at his eyes. "Thank you, for being here."

Necalli sighed and lay back down. "I'll always be here."

He sat up and smiled. Necalli did so much to soothe his fears. He was lucky to have him. "Thank God for that and thank God you're in my life." Leaning down, he gave Necalli a lingering kiss, climbed to the edge of the bed and rushed into the bathroom.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DECLARATIONS

Adam burst through the front door - back first, with groceries in both arms. A few splotches dirtied his dark work shirt and trousers. The door swung wide, slamming against the stopper. "Oops." Chuckling, he strode to the kitchen counter.

"You're home early." Necalli set his book down and rose up from the couch.

He glanced up and smiled at Necalli, admiring him in his button-down shirt and dark slacks. "Yeah, well, Billy's engine wasn't as bad off as I thought. Hey, we're having company for dinner."

Necalli walked to Adam's side. "We are?"

Leaning in, he placed a soft kiss on Necalli's lips. "Yes, we are. Peter's coming over. He's got the day off for once." He set about putting the groceries he'd brought home into cupboards and the refrigerator.

"Really?" Necalli turned and trotted back to the couch. Leaning down, he picked up a book, trotted back to Adam's side and held it out for Adam to see.

He glanced at the book. "Oh, you went back to the bookstore today, huh?" He looked harder at the book. "A cookbook?" He chuckled. "You really are turning into a wife."

Necalli frowned and placed his free hand on his hips. "I am not. Lots of men cook. Many of the best chefs are men, you know."

Smirking, he turned and wrapped his arms around Necalli's waist, drawing him near. "I know that. I'm just teasing you." He gave Necalli a passionate kiss, parting his lips and deepening the kiss with his tongue.

A soft moan escaped Necalli. "Adam..." He rocked his hips against Adam's thigh.

Necalli's burgeoning erection pressed against him. He pulled away and swayed, Necalli in his arms. "I should have known you'd want to do that as soon as I got home."

Necalli grinned. "So?"

He released Necalli and raked his hand through sun-bleached hair. "Ah, we don't have time. Peter will be here soon."

Necalli sighed. A pout formed on his face.

"Listen, I need to talk to you about something."

Necalli's brows furrowed. "What?"

He placed his arms around Necalli again. "Peter was a little suspicious about us the last time I talked to him. He even asked me out right if I was, uh, gay." He had a hard time even saying the word if it described him. "I thought a lot about it today and I think I want to tell him the truth about us, about what we have. He's my best friend and I don't want to hide it from him."

Necalli's eyes widened. "Are you sure?"

"Well, he's pretty open-minded. I think he'll understand." He let a soft smile cross his lips. "Maybe he'll quit bugging me about Suzie if I tell him."

Necalli nodded. "What are you going to say?"

"I'm not sure yet. Let's get these groceries put away and see what tasty thing you can make to go with the salmon I brought home yesterday, okay?" He placed a quick kiss in Necalli's cheek. "I mean, since you're learning how to cook and all."

Necalli beamed at Adam. "I'll let you pick. I'll make whatever you want."

A knock sounded on the door. "Hello?"

Adam rose from the couch and glanced at Necalli, stirring a pot on the stove, and went to the door. "Just a minute." He opened the door and smiled at his friend, minus his usual vest. "Hey, buddy."

"Hey." Peter stepped into the cabin. He took a quick sniff at the air and looked at Adam as if surprised. "That smells really good."

"Yeah, well, Necalli's cooking. Did you bring the beer?" He stepped aside to let his friend into the kitchen.

Peter smiled and held up a brown paper bag. "Think I didn't?"

Necalli glanced at Peter. "Hello, Peter."

Peter put his bag on the table and stepped to Necalli. His hand reached up to rest on Necalli's shoulder as he peered over it. "What're you making?"

"It's a rice dish to go with the salmon." Necalli continued stirring.

"I see. Well, it smells delicious."

"Thank you."

"You want a beer?" Peter left Necalli's side and came back to the table.

"Oh no, when you're here we serve you." Adam smiled at his friend and clicked the metal cap off a beer bottle with an opener. He held it out for Peter to take. "Here you go."

"My, such service. You'd think this was a special occasion or something. It's not your birthday, is it, Necalli?" Peter grabbed the beer and took a gulp.

"No, it isn't." Necalli rummaged around the kitchen, opening the oven and returning to the stovetop.

Adam took a seat at the table. "Sit." He gestured to the chair opposite him.

"Okay." Peter sat and took another swig of beer. "So, did you hear the latest?"

Adam's heart skipped a beat. "What?"

Peter sat forward. "The rumrunners are planning something. They're going to do something about them

demons.”

Adam glanced at Necalli.

Necalli's motions at the stove froze.

“What are they going to do?” Adam's eyes narrowed.

Peter sat back. “Not exactly sure yet. But they're actually working with the Indians, if you can believe it.”

Adam remembered his conversation with the police officer. It felt like a lifetime ago. “I thought rumrunners didn't get along so well with Indians?”

“Well, I think this is in both their interests.”

“Ah!” Swiftly bringing his hand up, Necalli ripped off his glove and put his index finger into his mouth.

Adam rose from the table. “You okay?”

Necalli kept his back to them. “Yes, just burned myself.”

Peter's chair groaned across the floor as he pushed it out to stand up. “Here, let me help you with that. We get a lot of burns in the kitchen at the restaurant.”

Turning, Necalli stuffed his exposed hand behind his back and glared at Adam. “No, it's okay.”

Reaching out, Adam grasped Peter's arm and pulled him back. “He's okay. He's still learning how to cook, that's all.”

Peter's eyes flicked between them. “Yeah? At least let me see how bad it is. Maybe you should put some butter on it.”

Necalli slowly shook his head. “N-no, it's fine.”

Peter looked Necalli up and down. “How the hell did you burn yourself with those gloves on?” He let out a soft chuckle.

Necalli looked down at his one gloved hand. “Uh, well, there are holes in them.” A pained grin spread on his lips.

“Adam, take your boy here to get new gloves, for Christ sakes.” Peter laughed and put the beer bottle to his lips.

Adam let out a soft chuckle. “Yeah, maybe tomorrow.”

Necalli turned and placed his discarded glove back over his hand before he resumed cooking.

Adam opened another beer and brought it to Necalli. “Here, maybe this will help.”

Smiling at Adam, Necalli leaned forward as if to kiss him,

but caught himself and pulled back.

Adam gave Necalli a slow shake of his head and returned to the table with Peter. "So you were saying something about the rumrunners working with the Indians?"

"Yeah, well, that's about all I know though."

Necalli took a baking dish out of the oven, slammed the door shut and set the dish on the stove. "It's ready."

"Oh." Adam rose and stepped to the counter. He gave Necalli a knowing smile before pulling plates down from the cupboard.

Giving Adam a shy grin, Necalli placed his hand briefly over Adam's forearm and shoveled rice pilaf and salmon onto the plates. "Thank you, Adam."

"You're welcome." He beamed while he brought the plates from the counter, set them on the table and took his seat.

As he watched their exchange, Peter's eyes narrowed.

Necalli grabbed his plate and placed it in front of him as he sat next to Adam.

Peter looked down at his plate of salmon and rice. "This looks delicious, Necalli. You must be an excellent cook." He put his fork in the salmon and lifted it to his mouth. "Mmm. Yeah, you are an excellent cook."

A wide smile spread on Necalli's face. "Thank you, Peter."

Adam chewed his food and gulped it down with some beer. "He's right, this is really good. You can cook from now on." He let out a quick chuckle.

Necalli gave Adam a coy grin. "I'd be more than happy to cook for you."

Peter's expression turned quizzical as his gaze shifted between Adam and Necalli. "You two look like newlyweds." He shook his head with a smirk and focused on his plate, putting more salmon on his fork.

Glancing at Necalli, Adam leaned toward his friend. "Yeah, well, we've grown close." He winced. How would Peter take his comment? Fear crept into his chest. Would his friend really understand or was he making a huge mistake?

Peter continued to look at his plate, slowly nodding his head. "Close is nice. At least you've grown close to someone." His gaze shifted to Adam's face.

Adam tried to read his friend, but couldn't. "Hey, when's the next shipment of whiskey coming in?"

"Huh? Oh, tomorrow, we're hoping." Peter pushed salmon into his mouth and chewed.

"Is Suzie still drinking that stuff?" Adam gulped his beer down, trying to calm his nerves.

"No, I think she's had her fill of the hard stuff," Peter said.

"Did that guy ever come back, the one who started her on it?" Raising his fork to his mouth, Adam took a bite of salmon and swallowed.

Peter gave a soft chuckle. "No, she's still waiting for you."

Shifting in his seat, Adam glanced at Necalli.

Necalli lifted his brows at Adam.

Adam poked his fork at Necalli for emphasis. "Don't say it."

Necalli smiled. "What? That you should tell her you don't have feelings for her?"

"I will, I just haven't had a chance." Adam returned his attention to his plate.

"Well, I'll believe it when I see it, as they say." Peter took a large gulp of beer.

With a shake of his head and a coy grin, Adam glanced at Peter. "Don't you start on me now."

"Ah, Adam, you're so easy to get going. If you tell her you don't like her anymore, what will I have to tease you about?" Chuckling, Peter pushed the last bit of rice onto his fork and stuffed it into his mouth.

Necalli set his fork down on his empty plate. "Are you finished, Peter? Can I take your plate to the sink?"

Peter nodded. "Yes, thank you. Such a gentleman, I have no idea what you're doing with this brute." He pointed his finger at Adam.

"I am not a brute," Adam said, with a quick laugh.

“Well, look at you. Still in your dirty work clothes when Necalli here has prepared this lovely meal and you have a guest over.” Peter sniffed at Adam. “And is that fish I smell? Not the delicious salmon, mind you, but the stench of fish guts from one of those boats you were working on today.”

Necalli turned from the sink and put his hand to his mouth, muffling a snicker.

Adam looked at Necalli. “Don’t you laugh at him, it’ll just egg him on.”

Necalli lowered his hand. “But you do sort of smell like fish.”

“What?” Smiling, Adam lifted his shirt to his nose and took a deep inhale. “No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.” Necalli forced himself to look serious.

“Well, why didn’t you tell me before?” Adam dropped his shirt back over his chest.

“Because he’s too polite to tell you something like that.” Chuckling, Peter stood from the table, took Adam’s plate and brought it to the sink where Necalli cleaned dishes. “Why don’t you let Adam do that? You cooked, he should clean up.”

Necalli glanced at Adam and smiled. “You know, you’re right.”

Adam stood and walked to the sink. “I was already going to offer.” He grinned at his friend. “Damn, you are cantankerous tonight.”

“I just don’t want you taking advantage of my boy here.” Peter took Necalli by the elbow. “Come on, I’ll get you another beer and we’ll have a chat on the couch while Adam does the dishes.”

Necalli’s gaze darted back to Adam, but he let Peter guide him to the couch and sat down on one end.

Peter sat in the middle, beside Necalli, with his hands in his lap and smiled at him. “Hey, Adam, get us a beer, will you?”

With a wide grin, Adam shook his head. “Yes, master.” He went to the beers on the table, opened two of them, and brought them to Peter and Necalli. “Don’t get too cozy now

with my *boy*.”

“Why, Adam, that would be your department. I only get cozy with girls.” With a sly grin, Peter raised his beer to Adam before lowering it to his lips.

Adam let out a soft gasp and froze. “So, you do know.”

“I’m not stupid, Adam. I don’t care, if you’re wondering. I like Necalli and quite frankly, I was getting worried about you being alone for so long.” Peter shifted in his seat. “You’ve changed. You’re not as wound up as you used to be. It’s like you’re calm now, settled in some way.” He looked directly at Necalli.

Necalli fidgeted with the beer in his lap and looked up to meet Peter’s gaze.

“And if Necalli is behind it, then I’m all for it.” Peter gave Necalli a warm smile and tapped the top of his beer bottle to Necalli’s before tipping it to his mouth.

“Thank you. I like you, too, Peter. You’re a good person.” Necalli smiled and took a sip of beer.

Sighing, Adam took a seat next to his friend. He reached over, grabbed Peter’s beer from him, and took a gulp. “So, it doesn’t bother you at all?”

“I was a little shocked when I realized it, but no, it doesn’t bother me.” Peter grabbed his beer from Adam and took another sip. “Just don’t get all lovey-dovey around me. I don’t think I could handle that.” He looked at Adam with a wide grin.

Adam gave Peter a sly look. “Oh, really.” Quickly reaching over Peter, he snatched Necalli’s wrist and tugged, making Necalli fall into Peter and bringing his arm to his lips to place playful kisses on the underside of his wrist.

Necalli yanked his hand away in surprise and straightened. “Adam...”

Peter chuckled. “You are such an ass sometimes.” He looked at Necalli. “I feel bad for you.”

Necalli looked down at the beer propped between his legs. “I love him.”

Peter raised his brows for a second and took a gulp of beer. "I see that. You don't hide a thing, do you?"

Necalli gazed at Peter with his brows furrowed in confusion. "What do you mean?"

Peter laid his hand on Necalli's thigh and glanced at Adam. "Hey, brute, go do your dishes so we can talk, will you?"

"I am not a brute." Adam slapped Peter's thigh as he rose from the couch. "Don't believe a word he says, Necalli." He chuckled as he strolled to the sink.

Peter shifted a little toward Necalli. "So how old are you, anyway?"

Necalli took a sip of beer. "Um, twenty, same as Adam?"

Peter's gaze took Necalli in. "Wow, you sure don't look it. Must be that Indian skin." He took another quick sip of beer. "So how did you two meet?"

Adam turned from the sink. "I told you. We met in San Francisco in school."

"You didn't tell me you met in school and besides, I didn't ask you." Peter continued to look Necalli over as if seeing him for the first time.

Necalli's bottle shook as he lifted it up to his lips.

"Am I making you nervous, asking all these questions?"

Necalli lowered the beer bottle without drinking any of it. "Maybe a little."

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to. But you really do love Adam, don't you?"

Necalli blushed. "Yes."

"I can see it in your eyes, how you look at him. I noticed it the first time you came into the bar." Peter took a gulp of beer.

Adam turned around at the sink with a dish and towel in his hands. "What did you say?"

Peter gave a nod to Adam. "Keep out of this." He set his beer between his legs and placed a hand over Necalli's forearm.

Necalli gazed down at the hand covering his arm.

"You're different. Maybe that's why it doesn't bother me to see Adam with another man. You're not like the stereotypes

I've heard about. You're, I don't know, gentle and quiet and somehow protective, aren't you?" Peter chuckled and took his hand away. "You're the opposite of Adam in many ways."

"Quit talking about me behind my back," Adam called out from the sink, without turning around.

Slowly, Necalli nodded and brought his gaze up to meet Peter's. "He means everything to me. I'd do anything for him, anything." His voice was soft and firm at the same time.

Peter took a long inhale, keeping his gaze on Necalli's eyes. "Then I'm really happy my buddy found someone like you."

Necalli lunged forward, grabbing Peter around the shoulders and giving him a strong embrace.

Peter chuckled in Necalli's arms. "My, you are an affectionate one. Now if I could only find a gal like you."

Releasing Peter, Necalli sat back in his seat and smiled. "What about Suzie?"

Adam placed the last cleaned plate in the cupboard and twisted to face them. "Yeah, Peter, what about Suzie?"

"Don't go pushing your problem on to me." Peter rose from the couch and stepped toward Adam. "Listen, it's been a pleasure, but I think it's time for me to get some beauty rest." He took a quick glance at Necalli. "Well, and maybe leave you two to be alone."

A pinkish blush and a sheepish grin spread over Necalli's face just before he shifted his gaze to his lap.

Peter shook his head and chuckled. "He's definitely different."

Adam strolled over to stand in front of Peter, taking a quick glance at Necalli. "Yes, he is." Reaching up, he placed his hand over Peter's shoulder and gave it a sharp squeeze. "So, we'll see you around?"

"Of course." Peter turned back toward Necalli. "Thanks again for a delicious meal."

"You're welcome." Necalli nodded and raised his beer to his lips.

Peter walked to the door and opened it.

“Peter?” Adam stood directly behind his friend.

Peter twisted his head. “Yeah?”

“Thanks. You know, for being understanding about everything.” He held out his hand for Peter to take.

“Why the hell wouldn’t I?” Peter scoffed and took Adam’s hand, giving it a firm shake. “Bye.”

“Goodbye.” He closed the door as Peter walked out.

In an instant, Necalli stood at Adam’s side, snaking his arms around Adam’s waist.

“Holy shit. Don’t do that. You scared the hell out of me.” With a contented grin, he twisted in Necalli’s hold to return the tender embrace.

“I can’t help it. I couldn’t wait another second to be with you.” Necalli stood on his tiptoes to place a passionate kiss over Adam’s mouth.

He let out a soft moan, parting his lips and thrusting his tongue into Necalli’s willing mouth.

“Oh, Adam...” Necalli held Adam tighter while rocking his hips into Adam’s, letting his arousal be known. He let out a soft moan and thrust his hips with more urgency into Adam while his hands tugged his shirt from his pants.

“Hey, don’t you want me to shower first?” He bit playfully on Necalli’s neck, enjoying the shudder running through his lover’s body. “I mean, I do smell like fish, right?”

Necalli’s body moved quicker, harder, against Adam and his kisses became frantic. “I don’t care. I want you now.”

He chuckled and moved his mouth down to the nape of Necalli’s neck, licking and teasing before sucking hard on the tender flesh.

Necalli let out a ragged gasp and seized Adam’s behind, tugging his hips against him while thrusting hard. “Adam, I need you now.”

While stepping forward, he pushed, groped, and kissed Necalli all the way to the bed.

Necalli jumped backward onto the mattress, leapt onto Adam and pulled his lover down to topple over him.

As he landed, he bounced over Necalli.

In a flash, Necalli's arms and legs wrapped around Adam while his body writhed in frenzied passion below. His fangs ghosted over Adam's skin, from his neck to his collarbone to his shoulder. "Adam, take me now."

Shuddering, it was all he could do to keep his wits about him enough to understand the request. "Slow down. Take it easy." Holding tight to Necalli, he did his best to trail gentle caresses on his sides and arms, hoping to calm the ravenous need in his lover for a few moments.

Letting out a ragged sigh, Necalli's actions slowed. He thrust his hips into Adam and tightened his legs, holding his erection firm against Adam's through their trousers.

He lifted his head enough to peer down into Necalli's face.

Necalli quivered and trembled below Adam. His lips were pulled into a faint grimace as if holding on hurt.

Brushing Necalli's cheek with the back of his hand, he attempted to further soothe his lover. "Shh, are you okay?"

"Y-yes. I just need you, now." Necalli's gaze flashed up at Adam with a predatory hunger. His hips thrust harder into him, his eyes glazed over and he bit his lip. "Please."

"I honestly don't know what the hurry is." He let a slow smile cross his lips and lowered himself, giving Necalli a lingering kiss. How he loved to see him this way.

"You made me wait all day for you, that's what. I had to sit around here thinking about you, wanting you all day. I waited. Now, I want what I waited for." Necalli blew a lock of hair off his forehead in frustration.

"Okay, I understand. I'm glad you waited. But, let's just make our time together last. Let's not rush it." Coming forward, he rubbed his nose to Necalli's.

A faint chuckle worked its way out of Necalli and a forced grin played on his lips. He relaxed his hold on Adam but kept his cock pressed solid against him. "It's because you love me, isn't it."

He placed a hard kiss on Necalli's mouth and tightened his

arms around him. "Yes, it is. I love you with all my heart."

"And I love you with all of mine."

His heart swelled as if it would burst. How could he possibly have gotten so lucky? How was it he was allowed to feel such joy? Tears rushed to the surface, but he blinked them back. Slowly, tenderly, he placed his lips over his lover's and kissed him with all the emotion welling up inside him.

Necalli relaxed and let his pointed nails roam over Adam's back through his shirt. His hips rocked against him, but with slow, sensuous rhythm. His breathing was heavy through the kisses and soft bites he gave Adam. A low moan escaped from him, as the kisses grew heated.

His cock ached with need as Necalli's pace quickened again. His erection pulsed with each rock of his hips, each nail skated over his skin, each flick of his tongue in his mouth. This was good, so good it did hurt.

Letting out a long moan, Necalli reached up under Adam's shirt and coaxed him to the side to pinch at his nipple.

A shiver rippled through his body and lodged in his cock, making it quiver. He gasped and pressed himself hard into his lover, heightening the sensation. "Ah, okay, I think we should, uh, get undressed now." He attempted to push himself up.

Necalli held tight to him. "No, I thought you wanted to go slow?" A playful grin quirked his lips.

"Ah, I see. Now you're trying to tease *me*." He placed a quick kiss on Necalli's mouth and shoved himself up to his knees. "Well, it won't work."

Necalli sprawled out on the bed as Adam rose and tilted his head while he watched him.

He unbuttoned his shirt and pulled his arms out of it before dropping it to the floor. He unfastened his belt and pants and climbed off the bed. His eyes roamed over his lover, still lying motionless on the bed. "Aren't you going to undress?"

"I'm waiting for you to undress me."

He smiled. "Oh, really." He dropped his trousers and boxers, stepped out of them and climbed back onto the bed.

Letting his gaze wander down his beautiful lover, he placed his hands over Necalli's belt.

Quickly reaching down, Necalli grasped his arms.

He stopped and looked at Necalli.

"Do it slow and make me wait, no matter how much I beg after this." Determination held fast to his face.

"You sure?"

"Yes."

A devious grin played on his face. He knew exactly what he wanted to do. He ran his finger lightly up Necalli's erection through his trousers, just enough to tickle.

Necalli shuddered and hissed.

Leaning down, he placed his mouth over Necalli's cock and sucked him through his trousers. His own need heightened as Necalli's erection pulsed under his lips.

Necalli bucked and let out a sharp gasp. "Uh, Adam, take me, now."

He continued to tease his lover with his mouth, ignoring his plea. His hand roamed down between his own legs and stroked hard, releasing some of the built up frustration in his own groin. He moaned as sweet pleasure washed over his body.

"That's not fair." Necalli tilted his head, watching Adam pleasure himself.

He rose up over Necalli to lie on top of him and pressed their cocks together, causing a delicious wave to surge through him. "What's not fair?" He set soft kisses over Necalli's cheeks and jaw while waiting for his answer.

Necalli groaned. "You get to touch yourself. It's not fair."

He chuckled softly. "You're the one who wanted to wait." Taking Necalli's hands, he raised them over their heads, flat against the mattress, and devoured Necalli's neck, nipping, biting, and sucking on the tender flesh.

Necalli arched up and let a long cry into the room. His whole body shivered and his chest heaved with the force of his breath.

"Keep your hands up there." He licked his way down his

lover's chest to a button on his shirt and used his mouth to open it. When it opened, he licked and sucked the newly exposed skin before moving on to the next.

Writhing and panting below Adam, Necalli kept his hands above him as requested. His brows furrowed and his eyes squeezed shut in ecstasy while low gasps escaped his mouth.

When he came to Necalli's waist and had his shirt fully opened, Adam unfastened the buckle of his belt. He let his fingers wander underneath the waistband of Necalli's slacks and boxers for a moment, feeling the slick head of his lover's cock.

Necalli sent a loud gasp into the room and bucked his hips. "Touch me, Adam, please."

He smirked. "I'll touch you soon enough." He palmed Necalli's erection through his pants, sliding hard up over the tip and down under his sac, over and over.

Necalli drew his hips back for a moment. "Adam!"

He stopped. "What?"

Necalli had a hard bite on his lower lip and looked pained. "Be careful."

"Did I hurt you?"

Necalli's head shook. "No, I can't hold on when you do that."

A wide grin spread over his lips. "I see." He ran his palm hard and quick over Necalli's cock again and watched.

Necalli tilted his hips back and clutched the bedcovers over his head, shaking his head back and forth. "S-stop!"

"Damn, you look good." As he sat on his legs, his desire swelled to an almost intolerable level. Quickly, he tugged Necalli's zipper down and removed his pants and boxers. It only took a second for him to reach under the bed and seize the Vaseline, now permanently kept there, and slathered it over his erection. After throwing the jar back down to the floor, he grabbed Necalli under the knees and shoved his legs up over his shoulders, immediately positioning his erection at Necalli's entrance.

Necalli purred his pleasure and gazed down at Adam with pure lust in his eyes. "Take me, Adam."

He let out a soft chuckle, despite the need in his groin. "Damn right I am." He drove in hard and held it for a moment, allowing Necalli's body to accept him and a delicious shudder to course through his body.

Necalli gasped and shut his eyes tight. "Do it again, now."

He drew out and thrust back in even harder, filling his lover with every inch of him, crying out in raw pleasure.

"More!" Necalli shoved his body downward with his hands clamped tight to the mattress.

His hips thrust out and in, over and over, with such force Necalli's whole body slid up and down the bedcovers and their bodies slapped against each other.

Tension coiled quickly in his groin and his cock became sensitive. Only a few more thrusts would send him over the edge. Gasping and moaning, he placed his slick fingers over Necalli's erection and stroked.

Necalli called out and arched his back before thrusting hard into Adam's palm.

"Oh, God..." His peak surged forward. He surrendered to it, allowed it to engulf him, ripple through him, and finally pour out of him in a fount of lust and need.

Necalli's erection swelled in Adam's palm. He gave one hard thrust and his seed spurted out over his chest with loud gasps and cries. He drew back and thrust again, making more contractions shudder through his body and fill Adam's fingers.

When it slowed, he released Necalli's cock, lowered his legs and flopped down over him.

Necalli wrapped his arms around Adam and held him close, kissing his forehead.

"Was that worth waiting for?" His voice had a lazy, dreamy quality to it.

"Of course, making love to you is always worth waiting for." Necalli gave him a gentle squeeze.

He snuggled his face into Necalli's neck. "Mmm." He let

his mind drift off for a moment. “I liked hearing you tell Peter all those things.”

“You did?”

He lifted his head to look into Necalli’s face. “Yes. It’s nice to hear you declare you’re complete love for me to someone else.”

Necalli blushed and his gaze shifted to the ceiling. “I’d declare it to the whole world if I could.”

He snuggled back into Necalli’s neck. “I know you would.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WOMAN SCORNE

Adam turned in the sheet and quilt of his bed and draped his arm over the smaller body cuddled up into his side. His eyes fluttered open and took in the sunlight spilling into the cabin, onto the rug. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled the familiar scent of his lover still sleeping soundly beside him.

Almost a month had passed since he'd found him on the beach. Almost a month of waking next to him, of knowing his presence beside him each and every night. He'd never get over it. Feeling so serene and content and totally secure in everything they had.

Sure they had their spats, but those were minuscule in the grand scheme of their life. He never did find out exactly who and what his lover was, but it didn't matter. He had Necalli and Necalli had him and it was all they'd ever need.

Tilting his head down, he placed a gentle kiss on Necalli's temple.

"Adam..." Necalli stirred and his lips curved into a faint smile.

"Yes?" Adam kissed him again, harder and longer, taking in the spicy scent of his lover again.

"You don't have to go to work today, do you?" Brown eyes slowly fluttered open to gaze up at Adam.

He tightened his hold on Necalli. "Unfortunately, yes, I do."

Necalli frowned and pressed his hips into Adam. "When?"

Hard flesh made itself known on his thigh. Grinning, he glanced at the clock. "Well, in about an hour."

Closing his eyes again, Necalli let out a soft moan and rubbed himself over Adam's leg.

"I told you, if you want to do that in the morning, we have to wake up earlier. Which means, going to bed earlier." He let out a soft chuckle and moved to climb out of bed.

With an inhuman quickness, Necalli wrapped his arms and legs around Adam, holding him down. "No you don't. Just lay here with me for a few minutes."

He relented and relaxed his body, enjoying the feel of his lover surrounding him. "Don't think I don't know what you're up to. Billy's going to kill me if I don't make it down there in time today. I've run out of excuses already."

"Just a few more minutes, that's all I'm asking." Necalli's voice was muffled in skin and pillow.

He knew better. A soft grin made its way across his face. Necalli didn't intend on letting him up until he got what he wanted. "Not today. I really have to get to the pier. I promised."

Necalli shoved off Adam and rolled his back toward him, curling up tight. "Fine."

Guilt flooded his gut. Damned Necalli knew his every button already. Sighing, he turned to his side, propped himself on his elbow, and leaned over Necalli's slim body. "Hey, don't be like that. You know it'll be a short day today and we'll be together this afternoon." He brushed his fingers over Necalli's cheek.

Pouting, Necalli tilted his head to gaze at Adam. "I know. I'm sorry. I just miss you so much when you're at work." He turned into Adam's chest, letting Adam embrace him.

He pecked the top of Necalli's head with his lips. "I told you, you could come with me. I can always use an extra hand."

Necalli shook his head.

If only he could ask why his lover was still so reluctant to go to the pier, why when he talked of the boats and the

fishermen he worked with, his lover's eyes glazed over and sometimes filled with tears. But they'd decided long ago to leave this subject untouched, this and so much more about the mysterious young man's past. He sighed and tightened his hold on Necalli for a moment. "I love you." He'd never tire of those three, simple words.

"I love you." Necalli shifted in Adam's arms.

Soft lips grazed his neck. "Okay, I have to get up now." Releasing his hold on Necalli, he climbed off the bed and ambled into the bathroom to prepare for the day.

After cleaning up and dressing in a tan work shirt and trousers, he opened the bathroom door and stepped into the main room. The smell of bacon and fresh toasted bread made a path from his nose straight into his gurgling stomach.

Smiling, he stepped over the cold floorboards to the kitchen counter, where Necalli was busy pulling plates down from the cupboard in one of Adam's entirely too large shirts. He wrapped his arms around his lover and drew him to his chest. "Smells delicious, just like you."

Necalli tilted his head back into Adam's shoulder and placed his hands over Adam's forearms. "You are so sweet when you want to be." With a soft chuckle, Necalli shifted his attention back to the breakfast he prepared.

After a quick squeeze, he released Necalli and took a seat at the table. A cup of coffee, cream and sugar already waited for him. It made him smile, to think how comfortably they had fit in together. He poured cream and spooned sugar into his coffee from a little porcelain set his aunt gave him a few years ago and stirred before bringing the cup up to his lips. As he blew across hot liquid, his eyes followed Necalli, now setting plates filled with food on the table.

After Necalli set the plates down, he took a seat next to Adam. "So, what time did you say you'd be off today?" Necalli took a bite of buttered toast.

"Um, around three, I think." He sipped his coffee. "I'd like to meet you over at Frank's when I'm done. Maybe we could

have dinner there tonight with Peter?” He set his cup down and picked up a fork.

Necalli nodded his head and gulped. “Sure, I’d like that.”

He sat back and eyed Necalli. “You were going to clean the crap off the roof from the trees today, weren’t you?”

Necalli smiled playfully at Adam. “Yes.”

He frowned. “I’m not sure I like you getting up there when I’m not around. What if you fall or something?”

Sighing, Necalli rolled his eyes. “Oh come on. I think you know my abilities a little better than that.”

He leaned forward and grabbed a slice of bacon, smirking. “Oh yeah, you’re some kind of acrobat, I forgot.” He bit his tongue before making a joke about using those abilities down at the pier. “In any case, please be careful with yourself.”

Necalli scoffed. “I will.”

Adam was worn from the day as he hopped up the steps to Frank’s, but it was a good worn. He tugged the door open and took a brief glance at the billowing fog, lit up by afternoon sun, before stepping lightly inside.

He gazed around the speakeasy as he made his way into the bar, noting the present absence of a certain female pest and the bustle of a mid-afternoon crowd. Excitement mixed with the sounds of a piano and it immediately piqued his interest.

Necalli sat at the bar, listening to Peter’s chatter and taking a long sip from a frosty mug of beer.

“Hey.” He took a seat next to his stunning lover, all wrapped up in a dark sweater and darker slacks.

Necalli twisted on his barstool and gave Adam a wide smile. “Adam, how was your day?” Reaching his gloved hand out, he squeezed Adam’s thigh.

“Hey, buddy.” Peter smiled at Adam before reaching under the bar for another frosty mug.

“Good, really good.” His gaze rested on his lover’s smile. How he wanted to taste those lips, but now was not the time.

Necalli leaned in to whisper in Adam’s ear. “You want me,

right now, don't you?" He sat back with a smug look on his face.

He chuckled, keeping his gaze on Necalli's lips. "Yeah, how'd you guess?"

Peter planted a mug filled with golden beer on the bar in front of Adam. "Oh my God, will the honeymoon ever be over?" Shaking his head, Peter chuckled as he wiped at a spill.

"Oh my, did you see that, Adam?" Suzie came trotting up to stand in front of Adam.

"What?" Adam asked.

Peter and Necalli both turned to look at Suzie in her waitress uniform.

"That horrible man over there pinched my ass, that's what." Suzie placed a hand on her hip, obviously flustered. "Well?"

Chuckling, Adam twisted on his stool to face the bar again. "So? What do you want me to do about it?"

Suzie swatted Adam's shoulder.

"Ow!" Flinching, Adam raised his hand to rub his stinging shoulder and glared at Suzie.

"You should defend me, that's what." She stood her ground, glaring back at him.

"Seems you can take care of yourself with the way you just backhanded Adam." Necalli grinned as he took a sip of his beer.

Suzie's gaze shifted to Necalli. "You better watch yourself. I heard that man saying he'd like to have a go at you, too. He told me guys like you made perfect *pets* in Alcatraz."

"Pets?" Necalli furrowed his brows in confusion and set his mug on the bar.

Adam twisted his stool so he could peer out at the man Suzie talked about. "Which one is he? The one in the dark suit with the hat?"

"Yeah, I think he's a gangster or something. Came in here with an entourage in a bunch of those expensive, long cars."

Peter's eyes narrowed. "You mean limousines?"

Suzie shifted her stance and calmed a little. "Yeah, limousines."

Adam sized up the man. He was taller than himself and looked huskier as well.

"His name's Tony. He's a business associate of my fathers. Don't mess with him, okay? Just keep him happy, if you can." An unusual seriousness swept over Peter's face and he returned to wiping the bar.

Necalli gazed up and locked eyes with Tony.

Tony winked, smiled, and pointed a smug finger at Necalli.

Necalli turned back around to face the bar and lowered his head.

Suzie elbowed Adam's back. "See, I told you."

A combination of fear and loathing filled Adam's chest. He hated the mob and here was one of their kind determined to start something with his lover. He turned and leaned forward over the bar. "Hey, Peter, you know him, right?"

Peter gave a slow shake of his head. "Not really. Like I said, my dad does business with them." He glanced at Necalli and leaned towards Adam. "Just leave him alone, Adam."

Adam sat back in his chair and took a sip of beer. What could he do if the man made any more moves toward Necalli?

Necalli twisted his head to look up at Adam from under his long hair. "Let me handle it. I sense something in him, something not quite right."

Memories of yellow orbs, thrashing, and screams down at the pier in San Francisco flashed in his mind. He rushed his hand to Necalli's thigh and squeezed. "No. I don't want you getting into any trouble."

"Adam..." Necalli glared at him. "I can take care of it."

"I'm sure you can, but I don't want you getting involved. It's not like it'd be easy to just walk away if something happened, not like in the city." He maintained his lock on Necalli's eyes, driving his point home.

Hurt spread quickly over Necalli's face before his gaze shifted to the wall. He lifted his mug, gulped down the

remainder of his beer, and clapped the mug back onto the bar surface. "Give me another, okay, Peter?"

Peter eyed Necalli with suspicion. "Sure." Leaning down, Peter grabbed another mug.

"Here he comes." Suzie stepped to the side, letting Tony pass behind her.

Tony stepped up behind Necalli, took a quick, appreciative glance at him and shifted his attention to Peter. "Get a drink for my friend here." He gestured to Necalli.

Frowning, Peter took a deep inhale and poured Necalli a beer.

"I don't need you to get me a drink and I am not your friend." Necalli twisted on his stool to glare at Tony.

With his brows rising in surprise, Adam glanced at Necalli and slowly shook his head.

"That's a bit rude, don't you think?" A snide smile played across Tony's face before he nodded to Peter. "I'll get that drink."

"Yes, sir." Peter set Necalli's beer before him on the bar.

Tony's hand came up to rest on Necalli's shoulder. "So, tell me about yourself."

Rage started deep in Adam's gut. "Did you not hear him? He's not your friend and he doesn't want you buying him a drink." He turned to lock eyes with Tony.

"And who the hell are you?" Tony took a step back and looked Adam up and down.

"He's Necalli's friend, best friend. They live together." With her hand on her hip, Suzie flipped her hair back in defiance.

"Damn it, Suzie..." Adam said, under his breath.

Tony gazed between Adam and Necalli with a wide grin. "Oh, do they now. Seems the pet already has a lover, then?"

Suzie's brows furrowed in confusion. "What? No."

"I am not a pet," Necalli said, with anger filling his voice.

Feigning a cough, Peter shifted his stance, obviously uneasy with the scene before him.

Adam stiffened his shoulders and maintained a steady glare at Tony. "It's none of your business. I'll ask you nicely, once, to please leave us alone."

"And what will you do if I don't? This is becoming too much fun to just walk away now." Chuckling, Tony reached a hand up and fingered the ends of Necalli's hair.

Necalli's eyes flashed yellow and he twisted back to face the bar with his fists clenched.

Seizing Tony's wrist, Adam yanked his fingers out of Necalli's hair. "That's not a good idea."

"Oh, don't want me touching your lover?" Tony grinned at Adam and dropped his hand to his side.

"What the hell are you talking about? He is not his lover. They're just friends, right, Adam?" Suzie's gaze flicked between Adam and Necalli.

"Stay out of this, Suzie," Adam growled.

"Well, you are, aren't you?" Suzie asked.

"Shut up." Adam kept his eyes locked on Tony.

Tony chuckled. "Don't be rude to the girl, Adam, answer her question."

"He's, he's, my friend, that's all. I stick up for my friends, don't you?" Adam glanced at Necalli.

Necalli's lips pursed and his eyes held a fierce defiance in them, but he remained still and quiet.

"Sure, but men get *protective* over their lovers. Just like what you're doing now." Tony's voice and stance challenged Adam.

"Adam?" Suzie's confused gaze focused on him.

He stood and stepped toward Tony until their chests almost touched, letting his anger swell.

"That's enough." Peter walked out from behind the bar and placed his hands between Adam and Tony, separating them. "I'm sorry Mr. Valerio, but I can't have any scuffles in the bar. You understand, I'm sure."

Adam took a step back and glanced at Necalli, now turned toward them.

"Of course. We should take this outside, maybe?" Tony

turned and gestured toward the door.

Adam gathered his courage, puffing out his chest, and nodded once.

Reaching up, Necalli grasped Adam's arm. "No, Adam. I'll go." Flecks of gold danced in his eyes.

"No you won't." Adam stood firm.

"No one's going outside. Come on, fellas let's stop all this." Peter faced Tony. "Mr. Valerio, these are close friends of mine and although I know you had the best intentions, unfortunately my friends are not always so...cordial. How about a drink on the house?"

Tony's gaze shifted from Adam to Necalli and back to Peter. His lips pursed for a moment while his hands clenched into fists and released. "Yeah, okay, but just because I like you, Peter. I think you need to pick better friends. These two could get you into some real trouble. Know what I mean?" He gave Peter a sly grin.

Adam looked at his friend in disbelief. How could Peter just take that from this jerk?

Peter glanced at Adam before turning his gaze to the floor. "I'll, uh, take that into consideration." He walked back to his position behind the bar with Adam, Necalli, and Suzie all watching him and set his attention on Tony with a forced grin. "So what'll it be?"

"Get me a scotch, and make it a good one, your best."

"Yes, sir." Peter pulled out a short glass from behind the bar along with a liquor bottle and poured Tony his scotch.

Adam, still stunned, took his seat at the bar.

"Well, if no one else is going to speak up, I'll tell you—"

"Shut up, Suzie." Peter's voice was low and menacing and his eyes held an unusual angry fire while he placed Tony's scotch on the bar.

Suzie's eyes grew wide and her mouth hung open.

With a slight tilt of his head, Tony reached forward and took his scotch. "Thank you, Peter. At least one of you has some grace and manners."

Suzie gasped.

Tony turned and strolled back toward the dining room.

"I never. What's the matter with you, Peter? How could you let that, that, asshole say those things?" Suzie stomped her high heeled foot to the floor.

"Get back to work, Suzie." Peter picked up a rag and wiped at the bar.

"I won't." Suzie's attention focused on Adam. "Necalli's not your lover, is he, Adam."

Could Adam tell her the truth about him and Necalli? Peter and Necalli would expect it, wouldn't they? Adam shrugged his shoulders and rushed a quick glance at Necalli before bowing his head.

"Adam..." Necalli furrowed his brows, slowly shaking his head at Adam.

Suzie took a deep inhale, studying Necalli, as if taking in his actions. "Wait, uh, you like me, don't you, Adam?"

"Well, Adam?" Peter stood still behind the bar.

"I, uh, well, Necalli and I, uh." Keeping his gaze on his hand over the bar, Adam fingered the rim of his beer.

Suzie clutched Adam's shoulder, yanked and twirled him around to face her.

With his heart pounding in his chest, he slowly raised his eyes to meet her gaze.

Through her teeth, she said, "You like me, don't you, Adam." Worry and agitation swept across her face.

"Sure, I like you, Suzie." He couldn't look at her or Necalli or Peter. He let his eyes wander over the floor, the tables, the customers, anywhere but over the faces of the people he disappointed. A strong hand gripped his shoulder and he twisted around on his stool to face Necalli.

"Tell her, Adam. She deserves to know." An unusually stern expression rested on Necalli's face.

"What do you mean, I deserve to know?" Suzie shifted her weight and looked between Necalli and Adam. "You'd better tell me what all this is about, Adam Ross, and you'd better tell

me right now.” She placed her hands on her hips.

Adam breathed in deep and held it for a moment. “Suzie? I, uh, Necalli is my, I mean, no, I don’t really like you the way you like me.”

With her lower lip trembling, her face tensed. “Go on.”

“Uh, I like you and all, just, just not the same way I think you like me.” He directed his gaze into her eyes.

Unshed tears glimmered in her eyes. Her finger rose to poke at Necalli’s chest. “Is Necalli your lover, like that man said?”

“Hey.” Grabbing her finger, Necalli held it for a moment before she yanked it away.

“Um...yes. He is.” Adam nodded once and turned back to face the bar, grabbed his beer mug and held it to his lips, gulping down the rest of it. “Give me a shot of whiskey and make it quick.”

Peter reached under the bar for a shot glass.

“Adam Ross, you face me this instant,” Suzie shouted.

He turned toward her again. A sharp sting raced across his cheek as her hand slapped squarely over it. His head jerked back with the force of it and his eyes widened in surprise.

Her glare blazed behind tears and hurt permeated every part of her being. “I can’t believe you led me on like that. A whole year of my life I wasted, waiting for you to come around. You and your damned boring stories about fishing boats. God, to think I had to sit and listen to that crap thinking maybe you’d finally take me home. Maybe you’d finally ask me out on a date. That was rotten, Adam. You told me you liked me. You told me you were jealous of Bobby. You bought me drinks, for Christ sakes. What do you have to say for yourself?”

“I, um—”

“And now I find out you’re queer? No wonder you never wanted to take me to San Francisco. Were you afraid I’d see all your little boyfriends up there? Huh? Were you afraid I’d find out what a Goddamn—”

“Suzie, that’s enough!” Peter’s voice rang out in the

speakeasy, making the whole bar hush and take notice.

Suzie rushed her hands to her face just as the first tears spilled onto her cheeks. A short, muffled sob escaped her as she ran in the direction of the restrooms.

Adam let out a loud exhale.

“Okay, people, show’s over. Drinks on the house!” Peter slapped a shot of whiskey on the bar in front of Adam. “Well, that was easy.”

Excited voices and gestures filled the air of the bar.

Adam turned around to face Peter. “Damn. I knew it’d be bad, but I never thought it’d be that bad.”

Necalli placed his hand over Adam’s forearm. “You needed to tell her.”

“Yeah, but now how many people will she tell I’m gay? I’m sure to hear about this down at the piers.” Adam groaned and took his shot. The liquor burned as it ran down his throat, making him wince and hiss.

“Ah, don’t worry about it. I don’t think many people will believe her. They’ll just think she’s a woman scorned, you know?” Peter turned his attentions to the numerous drink orders and patrons coming up to the bar for their free drink.

Adam gazed at Necalli, sitting close and focusing on him. “Go ahead, say *I told you so*.”

“What? Why would I say that?” Necalli’s brows furrowed in confusion while he sat back in his seat.

Adam sighed.

Necalli patted Adam on the back and rose up from his seat. “I’ll be back.” He headed in the direction of the restrooms.

“Don’t say or do anything to Suzie now, she’s been through enough,” Adam called out to Necalli.

Necalli turned and gave Adam a quizzical look before returning to his previous path.

“Hey, Adam.” Peter came back to stand in front of him.

“Yeah?” He gazed up at Peter.

“I almost forgot to tell you the latest with the rumrunners and Indians. I figured you didn’t want me talking about it in

front of Necalli, being he's Indian and all."

He leaned forward. "Okay, what's up?"

"Well, the full moon's only a few nights—"

"I know." Impatience made him snap. Couldn't Peter just state what he knew and leave out the obvious? If Necalli came back quickly, he might not hear what Peter had to say.

"And I heard the Indians have some kind of compound they make with some, I don't know, cactus or something that kills the demons. So, the Indians are going to make this stuff and the rumrunners are going to use it in their bullets to kill the demons." Peter smirked for a moment.

"Oh, really. And are they going to wait to get attacked again?" He scoffed.

"No, I heard they're going out to the islands tomorrow night, the day before the full moon, and try to find them. I guess it even takes more than the compound to kill the things."

"It does?" Adam let his gaze roam over his friend.

"Yeah, I guess they have to burn them, too." Peter nodded once while pouring another beer for him.

His chest tightened with the mention of fire. "How do they think they're going to burn them?"

"Oh, well, the islands are littered with eucalyptus trees, you know. You've heard about them, right?"

He shuddered. "Yeah."

Necalli walked up to the bar, smiled at Adam and Peter, and took his seat.

Adam eyed Peter.

"So, what're you two talking about?" Necalli brought his beer to his lips and took a quick sip.

"Nothing important." Adam turned and did his best to give Necalli a warm grin.

Peter walked to the end of the bar where a female customer waited.

A serious look washed over Necalli's face as he leaned forward. His voice was low, so only Adam could hear him. "I sense fear in you. Don't lie to me."

“It’s nothing you need to be concerned about. Please, I think I’ve had enough drama for one day.” He shook his head before taking a large gulp of beer. When he set his mug down, Necalli still looked at him with suspicion. “It’s nothing.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FRIEND OR FOE

Necalli twisted the knob on the cabin door and shoved it open. “In you go.”

Adam let go of Necalli’s shoulders and stumbled into the main room, chuckling. “Come here, you little demon.” His head spun as he whirled around to grab at his lover.

Necalli stepped into the cabin, closed the door and locked it behind him.

Wrapping his arms around Necalli’s shoulders from behind, he plunged his face into Necalli’s hair at his neck and took in his spicy scent. “God, you smell good. You know that?”

Necalli straightened. “I think you had too much to drink.” He tilted his head back into Adam, grinning, and reached forward for the light switch to flick it on.

“Oh, damn...” He shut his eyes tight against the all too sudden brightness. “Why’d you do that? We don’t need any light to do what we’re going to do.” He bit playfully at the tender skin of Necalli’s neck while swaying behind him.

Necalli’s body shivered with Adam’s touch and a soft moan escaped him. “I just thought I’d turn it on for a minute, enough time to undress and get into bed.” He ripped off his gloves with his teeth and reached up, brushing the back of Adam’s hair with his fingers.

“Who said anything about getting into bed?” He thrust his hips forward, grinding his hardening cock into Necalli’s backside. He wanted his lover and he wanted him now. His

hands roamed down over Necalli's hipbones to center over his groin. He squeezed and rubbed the swelling flesh below the thin fabric of Necalli's pants.

Necalli let out a soft gasp. "For once you're the one who'll have to wait." His hands pried Adam's fingers from him before stepping forward and turning around.

He peered down into Necalli's dark eyes. "Where you going?"

Necalli swaggered further into the room with his hips swaying seductively, looking back at Adam with a wicked grin.

"That's too much." He lunged forward and seized Necalli by the wrist, yanking him back into his embrace.

"Adam." Necalli played coy, tilting his head back to expose his neck while grinding his solid cock against Adam's thigh.

Sucking and nipping at Necalli's neck, he let a momentary grin play across his lips. "You're not going anywhere." He wrapped his arms tight around Necalli and placed a hard kiss over his lips, attempting to force his surrender.

"Not even to the bed?" Husky desire laced through Necalli's voice.

"Not even to the bed." He filled his senses with his lover, roaming his hands over his body, kneading the solid muscles underneath his soft sweater, pressing his hardened cock into any part of him he could.

A loud moan escaped Necalli and his body moved in a languid motion against Adam's. "At least get away from the door."

He chuckled and moved Necalli, never letting his hands stop their quest for flesh, never letting his lips leave his lover's neck, toward the center of the room. Quiet pleasure raced his system as Necalli returned the heated kisses and thrust with increasing urgency into him.

"Touch me..." Necalli gasped and shut his eyes tight as if overwhelmed.

Trailing his hands down over Necalli's back, he cupped his buttocks and pulled his hips hard against him.

Necalli's body shuddered and another quick gasp released from him. His clawed hands clutched at the fabric of Adam's shirt and pulled it taut. "More."

Quickly, he pulled Necalli's sweater up, over his head, and off, exposing his lover's hard chest and erect nipples. He dove down and flicked his tongue over the raised flesh, taunting, before nipping them with his teeth.

Shivering, Necalli gripped Adam tight and tilted his head back in obvious ecstasy.

His desire surged through him, making him ache to surround himself with his lover. Panting, he pulled away to fumble at the buttons of his shirt. "Undress, now." He practically ripped the buttons off his shirt in his haste to discard it.

In an instant, Necalli had his pants and boxers pooled around his ankles. His cock arced tall against his stomach and lust burned fiercely in his eyes.

He unfastened his belt and pants and lunged for the bed, realizing what he'd need was hidden underneath it. Bending over, he grabbed the jar of Vaseline and strode back to his waiting lover.

Necalli's eyes smoldered with longing and a ravenous need.

He placed an urgent kiss over Necalli's lips. "God, I want you."

"And I want you. Take me, Adam, please."

Twisting Necalli around, he pushed him toward the couch.

A faint smile swept over Necalli's lips as he bent his body forward, over the paisley fabric of the arm, exposing his entrance to Adam. He quickly kicked his pants off.

A light chuckle escaped him. "Oh, you're good." Coming up behind Necalli, He dropped his trousers to his thighs and opened the jar. He slicked his erection, hissing as pleasure rippled through him, before focusing his attentions on Necalli. He caressed his behind, admiring the perfect curves and hallows. "You're so beautiful." He dropped the jar to the floor.

Necalli turned his head to Adam. "Hurry."

“And you’re damned impatient.” He grinned while taking a slick finger and making light circles over Necalli’s passage.

Necalli bucked into the sofa and let out a sharp gasp.

Coming forward, he kissed the soft skin of Necalli’s back and gently slid a finger into him. His cock ached for attention, but he wanted Necalli ready. He slid a second finger into Necalli and stroked, finding his internal bundle of nerves.

“Adam,” Necalli whined while twisting his body over the couch’s arm.

He removed his fingers and placed his erection at Necalli’s entrance, watching in fascination as his firm cock entered his lover. Moaning long and low, he succumbed to the slick, hot pressure engulfing him. He waited a moment before he pulled back out, slow and even and then he drove in hard.

Arching his back, Necalli cried out and panted. “More, Adam, more.”

He gripped tight to Necalli’s hips while he pulled out and drove in, solid and fast, over and over, hearing their bodies slapping with each thrust of his hips. Sweet, pulsating pleasure ravaged his body, made him gasp and moan and coiled a delicious tension in his groin. His breathing became ragged and his body shook as release threatened to push him over the edge.

Quickly, he grasped Necalli’s hips and pulled him back from the couch, just enough to allow him to reach under him, between his legs, and place jerking strokes over his lover’s seeping cock with his palm.

Filling the room with a loud cry, Necalli’s head fell forward between his arms and his knees bent, almost giving way. “Adam, I’m—”

Necalli’s erection swelled further in Adam’s grip before short pulses and shudders announced his climax.

Necalli squirmed underneath Adam, letting out deep moans of pleasure as his seed surged between Adam’s fingers and over the floor.

Necalli’s body tightened around him in waves, bringing his

release to the surface in an eruption of pleasure. He held Necalli tight, gasping, while delicious pulses spilled his seed into his lover. With one last shudder, he relaxed against Necalli's back. "Damn, that was good."

Necalli's breath still came in deep inhales and exhales. With his arms bent under him, his forehead rested on curled hands over the armrest of the couch.

"Got nothing to say to that?" He gave a lazy smirk and placed a soft kiss on Necalli's back.

"I, I, no..."

He chuckled. "I left you speechless, huh?"

Necalli slowly shook his head. A dazed, but content expression swept over his face. "Adam?" A soft huskiness threaded through Necalli's voice.

He squeezed Necalli's waist. "What?"

"Can you get off me now?"

A wide smile spread over his lips. "Sorry." He straightened and pulled out of his lover. A wave of sensation rushed his body as his shaft slid out through the tight opening, making him gasp. He pulled his trousers and boxers up over his hips and placed his palm over Necalli's bare behind. "I'll clean you off, just a minute."

He made his way into the bathroom, grabbed a washcloth and wet it. Peering into the mirror for a moment, he saw a peace and happiness in his eyes he'd never noticed before. It was Necalli. It was the wondrous feeling of loving and being loved. Somehow it mended his tortured soul.

He padded back out to Necalli, still bent over the couch, and gently ran the washcloth over his thighs, between his legs and over his groin. "How's that?" Grasping Necalli's arm, he pulled him up to standing.

Necalli turned and wrapped his arms over Adam's shoulders. Stepping on his tiptoes, he placed a lingering kiss on Adam's lips. "Perfect, like you."

He blushed, to his surprise, and placed his hands on Necalli's hips. "Oh, stop it, no one's perfect." He looked

deeply into Necalli's eyes for a moment, taking in all the love and admiration they held for him. "I'm so glad I found you on the beach that night. You know that?"

A sheepish grin curled Necalli's lips. "I think so."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yes. I do."

He drew Necalli close and kissed him hard. "Good, because I want you to know how much you mean to me." He took a deep inhale, feeling sudden tears in his eyes. "You are everything to me." Leaning down, he buried his face in Necalli's neck. Repeating those first simple words of adoration Necalli spoke to him so long ago rushed a tumult of emotion to the surface.

Necalli tightened his hold on Adam and brought his hand up to brush over the back of his head.

Sniffing, he pulled away to peer down at Necalli. "How do you do that?"

"What?" Necalli's gaze moved between Adam's eyes.

"Make me get all emotional."

Necalli smiled and gave Adam a quick kiss. "I don't know. But every time you do, I feel as if my own heart will burst." Necalli placed his fist over his heart.

He took Necalli's fist, brought it up to his mouth, and placed tender kisses over his knuckles, the back of his hand, his wrist. "I love you."

"I love you more." Necalli smiled, though tears shimmered in his eyes.

He seized Necalli in a desperate embrace and released him. "Let's go to bed."

Light scratching filled the dark room, making Adam toss to his back in the bed. His eyes remained shut while visions continued to play over his eyelids and mix with the unusual sounds raining down from the ceiling. A thud and scraping, like something dragging across the roof, cut through his dozing, making his eyes flutter open. He reached to the side,

anxious and confused. Was Necalli somehow on the roof, cleaning the tree branches they'd spoken of at breakfast?

"Did you hear that, Adam?" Necalli's voice was barely a whisper.

He turned his head to see the shine of Necalli's wide eyes in the darkness as he lay next to him, also on his back. "Yeah, how long have you been awake?"

"Ever since it started, I think."

He reached to Necalli to draw him near. Quick taps, like footsteps, sounded from above and a thud reverberated right outside the window. He startled, remembering he'd left it open. "Holy shit, what was that?" His heart pounded in his chest. Adrenaline raced through his system. "What is it? Do you sense anything, an animal of some kind?" He shifted his eyes from the window back to Necalli's face.

Necalli froze, only his mouth moved when he spoke. "I don't know. It's not human, but it's familiar, somehow, it's..."

"Necalli?" A soft, low voice floated on the air and drifted inside the cabin.

Adam jolted and sat upright in the bed. "Who is it? Who's there?" He peered at the window, but the curtains were drawn. Fear paralyzed him. Thousands of questions invaded his mind, but he couldn't dwell on any of them.

"Necalli?" Another voice, similar to the first, called out louder from outside.

"Adam?" Reaching up, Necalli snatched Adam's arm in a frantic clutch. His chest heaved as fear and panic washed over his face, making his breath come short and quick and his lower lip quiver.

The clear crunching and snap of twigs in a rhythm sounding all too much like more footsteps snaked in through the window.

Placing a tender hand over Necalli's, he searched the inside of the cabin and listened for further clues of whom or what crept around outside. "It's okay. Whoever it is, it'll be okay."

"Don't tell them I'm here. Don't let them see me."

Necalli's voice wavered as tears formed in his eyes.

He leaned down, wrapping an arm around his lover. "Don't worry, I—" Sharp rapping pierced the inside quiet of the cabin. His gaze darted to the door. "Oh, shit."

"Don't get it, Adam. Don't let them in, please."

His eyes swept over his lover. The emotion and pleading in Necalli's voice sent a ripple of fear and sympathy all at once rushing through him. What should he do? Would they leave if he didn't answer?

"Necalli, we know you are there. We hear your heart. We feel you." The door muffled the firm voice, a voice that held the same accent as Necalli's, only more pronounced.

Necalli shook his head and tensed his brow as a tear tumbled down his cheek. Trembling in the bed, he drew his legs up. "No, Adam, don't listen to them."

His whole body prickled, readied itself for some sort of action. "Do you know who it is?"

The hard rapping came again, more persistent this time. "Necalli!"

His gaze raced to the door and back to Necalli, shaking and closing himself up further with each second. Deliberate and slow, he asked, "Do you know who it is?"

"N-no."

"Necalli, tell me the truth." Pursing his lips, he remained still, unable to make a decision.

"I-I don't remember." Necalli's arm muted his voice.

He sighed. Whoever it was, they didn't seem all that menacing after all. He supposed if they wanted to force their way in, they would have.

"Necalli, you must let us in. It is Acalan and Itzli."

"No, leave me alone! I don't know who you are! I don't!" Necalli's voice rang out in the small cabin.

He flinched with the pure agony in his lover's voice. He threw himself over Necalli, blanketing him, holding him close, attempting to soothe his fears. "Hey, it's all right. Maybe they're your family? Maybe they just want to know you're

okay?”

“No...” A broken sob escaped Necalli as he buried his face deep into the sheets, clutching them with his fingers to his face.

The pounding at the door came again. “We must see you.”

“Damn.” Indecision plagued his mind. If it was his family, he had to let them in. He had to let them at least see him. But why was Necalli so upset? Did they do something terrible to him? Where they the real cause behind his memory loss? “I’m letting them in.”

“No, Adam, please,” Necalli whined. A sniffle escaped him.

“I promise you, I won’t let them hurt you. I won’t let them take you away. I won’t let them do anything you don’t want them to do. If there’s a chance that is your family out there, I have an obligation to let them in, to let them see you’re okay.” Sighing, he sat up with reluctance. Was he doing the right thing? He hoped so. “I’m sorry.”

He climbed off the bed, stepped into his boxers and trousers and strode to the door, glancing once at Necalli, still huddled in the bed. “I’m coming. I’ll let you in, but I’m warning you not to try anything.” When he reached the door, he unlocked it, flicked on the light and slowly turned the knob, not sure what to expect. The door opened and he looked down.

Two young men, about Necalli’s age, stood on his stoop gazing up with wide eyes at Adam. Their long, black hair spilled down over their shoulders almost to their waist. Their dark clothes were worn with rips at the knees. They were indeed, he mused, short like Necalli and also beautiful, with the same exotic and dark eyes. The yellow specks he’d come to love in Necalli’s eyes were there, too, rimming their pupils. “Uh, who are you and what do you want?”

They glanced at each other and the one on the left nodded before facing Adam. “I am Acalan and Necalli is our master.”

“He’s your what?” His mouth hung open in shock. Rustling and the quick tapping of feet pattered behind him, making him

turn and look behind him.

Necalli huddled, crouched down, with only a sheet around him, in the corner of the cabin with his back to Adam.

"Oh, no." *Damn it, Necalli...* "Come in." He left the door wide open and raced to Necalli. After crouching down, he placed a hand on his back.

Necalli shook. "No..."

"Hey, they're not here to—"

Shoving Adam to sitting on the floor, Necalli crawled into his lap with his arms drawn up. "Don't let them take me."

"They're not going to take you." A shadow darkened the space around him, making him look up to see the young men standing before him.

A pained expression rested on Itzli's face as he lowered himself down to sit on his legs beside Adam. His hand rose to rest on Necalli's back.

Gasping, Adam saw dog-like nails on Itzli's fingers, the same as Necalli's.

Necalli shivered and attempted to draw away from Itzli's touch, pushing harder into Adam's chest. "Don't touch me."

With his face tensing in worry, Itzli gazed up at Acalan.

Adam listened while words in a strange and foreign tongue poured out of Itzli's mouth, directed at the still standing Acalan. His mind struggled to find some similarity between the words and foreign languages he'd heard before, but there was none. "Speak English, please." He gazed between the two young men.

Itzli shifted as if uneasy, while Acalan came down to sit with his legs crossed.

Acalan placed a clawed hand on Adam's leg, stretched out under Necalli and between the two young men. "It is as we thought. He has found another." He gestured toward Necalli.

"What do you mean another?" Confusion muddled Adam's mind. Why couldn't these people just tell him what was going on?

Acalan tilted his head forward for a moment before

meeting Adam's befuddled gaze straight on. "He loves you, does he not?"

Necalli lifted his head and glared at Acalan. "Yes, I do." He pushed his face back into Adam's neck.

Itzli's head slowly shook. "No."

"No what? For God's sake, just come out and tell me what's going on here." Anger and fear grew at a steady pace in Adam's chest. He glared at the young men.

Acalan nodded once to Adam and stood. "Come with us to the table. We have much to tell you." Acalan stepped to the table and took a seat.

After standing, Itzli walked to the table and sat beside Acalan, folding his hands in front of him.

They seem civilized enough... Adam pushed Necalli away just enough to peer into his face. "Necalli, come on. Let's go to the table and hear what they have to say."

"No, I'm afraid. They're going to take me away from you." Necalli's voice shook and tears glimmered in his eyes. "Don't listen to them."

He glanced at Acalan and Itzli, sitting with such patience at his table. "I won't let them. You have to believe me."

Necalli's lips curved down to a sad frown. "Not even if they tell you terrible things about me? Not even if they threaten you with death?"

"What? Why would they threaten me with death? They seem reasonable enough. In fact, they seem to genuinely care about you." Impatience gnawed at him. It was finally his chance to solve the mystery behind his lover.

With a tear racing over his cheek, Necalli bit his lip.

"You know what they're going to tell me, don't you. You remember."

Necalli slowly shook his head, keeping his tortured eyes on Adam.

"Yes, you do."

Necalli's breath hitched.

"He may very well not remember," Itzli called out from the

table with emotion edging his voice.

Adam shifted his gaze to Itzli. "And why not? What have you done to him?"

Sighing, Itzli glanced at Acalan. "We need to talk to you."

Adam pulled Necalli close to whisper in his ear. "No matter what they say, you need to remember that I love you. Nothing they say can change that. I have to know, Necalli. I have to find out who you are. Please, understand this for me."

Necalli gazed up into Adam's face, lifting his hand to gently brush across Adam's cheek. Tears pooled like heavy jewels at the corners of his eyes, but didn't fall. "I understand."

He nodded once. Finally, this mystery would be solved. But why did it feel so frightening, so altogether terrorizing, all of a sudden? His heart pounded while sweat slicked his palms. As he helped Necalli off his lap and positioned himself to stand, his knees felt weak. What sort of foreboding ate at him?

Necalli stood and rewrapped the sheet tight around him before holding Adam's hand in his.

He took a deep look into Necalli's eyes and walked with him to the table. As he approached the table, it became hard to breathe as if all the air was sucked out of it. He pulled a chair out from under the table, across from Acalan and next to Itzli, and took a seat with a heavy sigh, trying to calm himself.

Necalli stopped next to Adam and gazed down at him with an agonizing look on his face.

Adam wrapped an arm around Necalli's hips and drew him close. "Sit in my lap. It's okay." His voice was soft.

Nodding once, Necalli climbed up sideways into Adam's lap, facing Itzli.

Itzli gave Necalli a sympathetic, desolate smile while reaching a hand out for him.

"Don't touch me." Necalli's voice growled.

Itzli's hand jerked away and the smile turned into a frown before his head lowered.

A deep inhale filled Adam's lungs and calmed some of his nerves. "Okay, so it seems we're all set. What do you have to

tell me?” He pulled Necalli tight against him, placing a gentle kiss on his head for reassurance.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ANSWERS

“What is it you know of our master?” A seriousness permeated Acalan’s voice and demeanor as he sat forward in his chair.

“Wait, what do you mean *master*? What is he the master of?” Adam let his hand trail circles over Necalli’s back.

Necalli buried his face in Adam’s neck.

Itzli rocked a moment in his chair. “We should start from the beginning.”

“Starting anywhere would be great, as far as I’m concerned.” Adam’s gaze ran between the two young men.

Acalan set his clawed hands on the table surface and entwined his fingers. His brows tensed. “Necalli is our prince. He was the son of a great king. Our people are known as the Aztecs by your people.”

Adam gasped in surprise. So some of Necalli’s memories were true? “Necalli is an Aztec prince?”

“No...” Slight tremors shook Necalli’s body.

Both Itzli and Acalan nodded.

Fear seized Adam’s heart. His words came out slowly. “How old is he then?”

Acalan looked away for a moment as if pondering Adam’s question. “We have lost track of the years, but it has been well over four hundred since we can remember.”

Adam gasped.

Lifting his head, Necalli glared at Acalan. “No, it’s not true.

I'm only twenty, or maybe twenty-eight, right, Adam?"

Pain washed over Itzli's face and he said, softly, "No, Necalli, you have been with us for centuries."

Necalli's head returned to Adam's neck and his grip tightened around Adam's torso.

Adam sat in stunned silence. It was hard, if not impossible to believe what they said, but on some level it made sense. "Okay, so if it's true, how is this possible? How do you explain living for so long? And don't tell me you're demons or part of some Indian curse." A nervous smirk ran across his face.

"Demons?" Itzli's brows furrowed. "I know of no such things. But we are cursed, we have a curse, of that I am sure."

"It was the fever. That is what started it." Acalan scrubbed his face with his palms.

"What fever?" Adam's chest tightened and Necalli's body trembled in his lap.

Acalan sighed. "It started when I was only seventeen years of age, when a strange visitor came to our palace." He gazed beyond Adam, at the far wall. "I was the first to get it. It was a fever that raged in my body for a night and in the morning, I woke with these hands." He held up his hands for Adam's inspection. "And these teeth." Reaching up, he lifted his upper lip to reveal long eyeteeth. "Our *chichtli* was called for, but there was no explanation except for marks, like small holes in the skin of my neck and wrists."

"Your what was called for?" Adam peered at Acalan as if it would give him a better understanding of what he spoke of.

Confusion washed over Acalan's face. "Our *chichtli*, our..." He glanced at Itzli.

Itzli shrugged.

Necalli lifted his head to gaze sadly at Adam. "He means doctor."

"You speak their language?" Adam directed his attention to Necalli. He must remember.

Tears formed in Necalli's eyes while agony returned to his face. "I don't know, maybe some."

Adam blinked hard a few times and swallowed. "So, you said you were the first and there were puncture wounds? Does that mean the same thing happened to Necalli, and you, Itzli?"

Itzli nodded. "Necalli was only sixteen, same as me. It happened the same night for us." Itzli's gaze fell to his lap. "We shared a bed once." A ragged breath filled his chest.

Acalan reached a hand out to Itzli's forearm and gave it a brief squeeze before pulling it away.

Numbness replaced any emotions boiling around inside Adam. It was all too much and it seemed he'd only scratched the surface. "Okay, so I'm to assume you were his lover back then?" The room spun for a moment.

Necalli lifted his head to gaze at Itzli, sitting dejected beside him. "Itzli?" With his lip trembling, he gave Itzli a sad smile and tilted his head.

Seizing Adam, Necalli buried his face once again in the safety of Adam's neck, shivering as if the room were cold. "I love *you*, Adam. I don't know them. I don't know what they're talking about. I never had any fever. I was never an Aztec prince. I've only been me, only yours." His voice wavered.

"Oh, Necalli..." Adam returned the solid embrace and kissed the side of Necalli's head. It hit him. Was Necalli still Itzli's lover when he separated from them? Pain and jealousy pierced his heart as his gaze raced to the crestfallen young man setting next to him. "Tell me, Itzli, are you still Necalli's lover? Did you still share a bed when he disappeared?"

Itzli's head rose and tears clearly shimmered in his eyes. "Necalli has always been with me. At one time, I was even his slave, only allowed to exist for his pleasure. But as the years passed, we became equals and finally, we became friends. I still love him. He is still everything to me." Anguish showed plainly in his eyes, his face, his being.

"Oh, God." How should he deal with this? The young man watched while Adam soothed, held and kissed his lover, never getting angry, never showing the normal ugly emotions he should have. "I'm sorry." He felt terrible, like he just stole a

baby from a new mother. Sorry wasn't enough.

Itzli shook his head, letting a tear fall to his lap. "No, Necalli has loved others. He loves easily and quickly and totally. His heart is unbound and free and I love him for that. It is what makes him what he is. It is what makes him my prince."

Nausea filled Adam's stomach. *Unbound and free?* "What do you mean he's loved others?"

Acalan sat forward and gazed directly at Adam. "About twenty years ago, a fisherman washed up in a large boat on the shore of our island."

"No." Necalli groaned, shivering turned to tremors.

"By the time he fixed his boat, Necalli had spent much time with him, attracted to his books and knowledge. We pleaded for Necalli to stay with us. We warned Necalli of the problems with the full moon, but he is our prince and did not need to listen." Acalan glared at Necalli.

A sob, muffled in Adam's shoulder, escaped Necalli and heaved his chest.

Adam held Necalli tighter, but was unable to rip his attention away from Acalan's words. "And so?"

"And so, Necalli went with him back to the mainland. When the full moon came—"

Necalli's head reared up. "Stop! It never happened! I didn't kill Luke, I didn't!" Tears marked his cheeks. His breath came fast and ragged, hitching with the occasional sob threatening to break out of him again.

Adam's arms dropped to his sides, remembering the story Billy told him of Luke, who had the Indian friend. It was Necalli all along. Necalli had loved Billy's friend and killed him. Stunned, he could only watch the scene unfold in front of him as if far away.

"Necalli, my sweet prince." Itzli reached an arm out.

Necalli slapped Itzli's arm away. "I didn't. Tell Adam I didn't do it. I don't kill my lovers!" Necalli let out a sharp sob.

"But you do, Necalli. It is the fever. It is not your fault. We

are all the same, all of us, all living in *mictlan* and unable to leave." A great pain burdened the features of Acalan's face.

"I am not living in hell. I am here, alive, among the living. I can control it this time. I know I can." Necalli's breath hitched as he turned to face Adam. He placed both palms on Adam's cheeks while tears, one after another, raced down his face. "I won't hurt you, Adam, I promise. I won't."

Adam slowly let his gaze wander into wet eyes. "What?"

Acalan rose from the table, strode to Necalli's side and yanked him up out of Adam's lap. He held tight to Necalli's shoulders, shaking him. "You cannot control it. When the full moon rises, the fever comes with it. You know that. You have suffered with it the same as us. You will kill Adam, same as you killed Luke. Your desire for him will drive you to him." He looked Necalli up and down.

Necalli held his breath.

"What will you tell the men in the uniforms? Will you let them capture you this time? Will you let them see what you are and expose us all?" Acalan glared at Necalli, gave him a short shove and took his seat again, grunting in disapproval.

Stumbling back, Necalli's head lowered.

Itzli stood and wrapped his arms around a still and silent Necalli, drawing him close. His gaze met Adam's for a moment before he plunged his face into Necalli's neck. "You cannot endure this again. The last time almost took you from us. And this time you completely wiped us from your memory."

Adam snapped out of his daze and glared across the table at Acalan. "Do you mean to tell me that Necalli, uh, fell in love with this fisherman named Luke, killed him during the full moon and then was hunted by the police?" It all fell into place. The puzzle pieces fit and there was no denying it this time.

"I didn't kill him," Necalli sobbed, holding tight to Itzli.

"They chased him with dogs and guns, but we found him first and brought him home." Acalan shifted in his chair, and curled his fingers together over the table as if waiting for Adam to process his words.

Adam lifted his arm to the table and traced an absent pattern over its surface. "Tell...tell me what happens to you during the full moon. Tell me about the fever."

Necalli gave over to quiet weeping in Itzli's arms while Itzli spoke softly to him in his native tongue.

Acalan drew in a deep breath. "During the full moon our other self, the animal that lives within us, rises to the surface. It takes over our bodies and soul and forces us to do things we would not normally do."

Adam's voice was almost a whisper. "Like kill lovers."

"No." Necalli's head rose and he glared at Adam.

Itzli pushed Necalli's head back down with more soft and foreign words.

Why was he so numb? Shouldn't he be falling apart with this news, the same as Necalli? Shouldn't he be losing his God damned mind? Adam shook his head for a moment, trying to get his mind back on track. Staring at the pattern his finger drew on the table helped somehow. *Keep staring. Don't look up. Don't look at Necalli. Not yet.* "So, you drain people of blood and rip them to shreds?"

Necalli let out a long, sorrowful sob. "No..."

"Very simply, yes. We need to feed to sustain ourselves and the animal in us is sometimes like a child who doesn't understand what it is to pull the leg off a cricket. Our bite is like poison and if we do not drain the body completely, it will rise again with the fever."

A too real vision flooded Adam's mind of Necalli coming at him with yellow eyes and long claws, smiling at him all the while, ripping off his arms and plunging his fangs deep into his neck. He gasped and looked up at Necalli. Tears blurred his vision.

Necalli stood close to Adam, quietly gazing down at him, free from Itzli except for the grasp of a hand. His tears fell in silence. His face screwed up in despair. "You're afraid of me. You hate me."

Adam started to shake his head, but what Necalli said was

true For the first time, he was terrified of him. He opened his mouth to speak, but the words were caught in a net of confusion and fear. His gaze shifted back to the table surface. It was easier this way. The table didn't look back at him like he'd broken its heart and soul. Necalli's quiet weeping reached out and attempted to rip through his defenses. But he kept his gaze on the table. "So tell me, why are you on those islands out there? How'd you get there? Are there any more of your kind?"

"There were quite a few of our kind. But they have all perished, mostly by their own hand. It is not natural, not the way of the world, to live as long as we have. We are all that is left." Acalan glanced at Necalli.

"We were Gods, once. We were worshiped and proper sacrifices were given to us to satiate our hunger. Then, your father's fathers came to our land and we fled. We took the gold so sought after by your people and came north to these lands."

Adam looked up in sudden awe. "Montezuma's gold?"

"That is what you called the king in power at the time we left," Acalan said.

"And so how do you live out there?" Adam let his gaze travel to meet Acalan's.

"We have keepers. When we first arrived, the Ohlone tribe worshiped us as our own people did. But as with all things, time causes change. Your people settled here and brought with them a new religion and way of thinking. Soon we were banished to the island we now call home, far away from humans. Our keeper, the *chichtli* of their tribe, brings supplies and food and keeps our existence a secret to the world. Before the rumrunners came, we fed on seals during the full moon." Acalan frowned.

Adam returned his gaze to the table. "And when the rumrunners started coming to your island, all hell broke loose."

Confusion raced across Acalan's face. "I don't understand."

Adam sat forward. "The rumrunners, they began to use your island to stash their liquor and you attacked and killed them during the full moon, when you were unable to control

the fever, as you call it.”

Acalan nodded. “Yes and Necalli was lost to us this last time.”

Adam took a deep inhale. “And my life was turned upside-down.” His eyes roamed across the floor to Necalli’s bare feet and up to his face.

Necalli stood facing Adam, peering through long locks with an expression of depressed surrender.

Itzli’s arms surrounded Necalli from behind as if holding him up.

How beautiful Necalli looked. How much Adam wanted to wrap his arms around him and make everything better for him, for them both. Now he understood it all. Now he knew why Necalli hated policemen, why he never wanted to go to the pier, why he loved books, why he was so afraid to let Adam know what he really was, why he blocked his memories from his mind. “Necalli?” On impulse, he held out his hand.

Necalli’s breath hitched as he raised his head, letting his hair slide from his face. Slowly, deliberately, his hands came up to pry Itzli’s arms from him. He took a few timid steps forward and grasped Adam’s hand as if waiting patiently for a sign he was still wanted.

Adam stood from the table and gazed down at Necalli. “It’s like I’ve said all along. I don’t care who or what you are, I still love you. I will always love you.”

Lurching forward, Necalli gave Adam a fierce embrace. “Hold me, Adam.”

He wrapped his arms around his lover, stuffing his fear inside and letting sheer will and strength replace it. He kissed the side of Necalli’s head. “We have two days to prepare. Somehow, we’ll find a way around this. I won’t let it destroy us.”

Acalan stood at the table. “I am afraid for you both.”

Placing a protective hold on Necalli, Adam focused on Acalan. “There has to be a way, restraint, maybe? Or you said they used to give you sacrifices, would some sort of sacrifice

satiate his hunger?”

Acalan shook his head and dropped his gaze to the floor. “No. He will still desire only you. He will hunt you down.”

“Then I’ll find a way to restrain him.” Adam’s brows tensed and his lips pursed.

“There is no way to restrain him from you. He will find a way to you, of that I am sure.” Acalan stepped to Itzli, quietly watching the exchange.

“Come on. What if he’s chained to a tree or something?” Frustration filled Adam’s voice.

“He will break the chains.”

“And what if I, uh.” Adam looked around for a moment while he tried to think of something. “Lock him in the hold of a boat?”

“He will break the hold.”

“How the hell could he do that?” Anger swelled in Adam’s chest. He couldn’t believe such a thing.

“He will. You have seen the strength and power he has now when his animal is allowed to surface?” Acalan took a step toward Adam.

Adam nodded, remembering the night in San Francisco, the thrashing, and the blood.

“He will have that power a hundred fold. On the full moon, we are indestructible and able to do things even we do not fully believe. It is how our animal ensures its survival.” Acalan eyed Adam with suspicion. “He needs to come with us. That is your only hope. That he stays on the island and cannot get to you.”

Necalli’s body shuddered in Adam’s hold.

Adam’s conversation with Peter raced forward in his mind. “Oh my God.”

Necalli lifted his head to gaze up at him. “Adam?”

He let his gaze wander to the wall before fixating on Acalan. “They’re going to kill you.”

“What?” Itzli took a step forward.

“The rumrunners, they’re working with the Indians to get some sort of special cactus concoction to kill you with. Can

they do that?" Fear once again pushed its way to the surface of Adam's emotions.

"Yes, there is a cactus that produces a poison flower for us. It is how our kind were able to end their lives. It allows fire to take our bodies and soul." A stern expression swept across Acalan's face.

Adam held Necalli tighter. "Well, they plan on going to your island tomorrow night. There is no way I'll allow Necalli to go out there with you. If you're smart, you'll stay away from the island, too."

"But it is our home." Pain laced Itzli's voice.

Acalan took Itzli by the hand and glanced at him before turning his attentions back to Adam. "We can fight. We are strong."

"How can you be so sure? It won't be during the full moon." Adam's eyes narrowed.

Necalli broke free from Adam's embrace and faced his tribesmen. "Acalan, you can't go back."

"We must defend what is ours. We won't be chased out, not anymore. If it is our destiny to die tomorrow, then we will face that." Acalan placed his clawed hand on Necalli's shoulder. "We have been too long in this place. We will meet our fate with honor."

Necalli's eyes filled with fresh tears. "No, I won't let you. I order you to stay with us." He turned to Itzli. "Stay with me, please."

Itzli's gaze ran from the floor up to Necalli's face, sadness filling his eyes. "My sweet prince, Acalan is right. If they don't find us tomorrow, then they will only come back again and again. We cannot run. We must face them. It may very well be our time is ended. If they know of the poison cactus flower, then our keeper has given us to them already."

"No, I order you to stay with me." Necalli's gaze flicked between Itzli and Acalan. "You have to do as I say. I'm your prince, I'm your master." With a tear racing down his cheek, his hands came up to grasp Itzli and Acalan by the wrist. "I

won't allow you to go back and die."

Adam watched the exchange, dumbfounded and completely unable to offer anything. It wasn't his place to interfere.

"Yes, you are my prince, but I cannot follow your order. This is my fate to decide." Acalan let go of Itzli's hand and came forward to give Necalli a quick and solid embrace and released him.

"Don't go." Necalli's voice was small with defeat. "Itzli? You'll stay with me, won't you?"

Itzli glanced at Adam, bowed his head forward and shook it slowly. "I cannot."

Rushing forward, sheet rustling around him, Necalli wrapped his arms around Itzli, making him take a step backwards. "I won't let you leave." Necalli's breathing became ragged.

Itzli buried his face in Necalli's neck and trailed his hands up and down his back, soothing his master. "It will be all right. We will survive. We will find a way without having to run. And if we cannot, I am ready to meet Mictlantecihuatl."

"No, I won't let you go to the Goddess of Hell. I won't..." Necalli slowly shook his head against Itzli's neck.

"Necalli, let them go." Stepping forward, Adam placed his hand on Necalli's shoulder.

"No, I can't." Necalli kept a strong hold on Itzli, even as Itzli released him and attempted to push him away.

"Necalli, let go." Adam put his other hand on Necalli's shoulder and, with a strong grip, tugged him backward.

Whirling around into Adam's chest, Necalli surrounded Adam with his arms. "Don't let them go."

Adam held Necalli tight and kissed him once. "It's not up to you, Necalli. You heard them. It's not right for you to make them stay." He turned his attentions to Acalan and Itzli. "Go now. I sincerely hope you find a way to save yourselves. I really do. But I can't let him go with you."

"You will die. He will kill you on the full moon." Acalan's serious demeanor returned as he crossed his arms on his chest.

“Let me and Necalli deal with that. At least I have the advantage of knowing the danger I’m facing.” *There must be a way.* Nothing was impossible, really, was it? He had time. He’d think of something.

Reaching forward, Itzli placed a tender touch on Necalli’s shoulder. “We will see you soon, if not at our home, then in the life after this one.”

Necalli’s sad eyes rested on Itzli.

“It is done.” Acalan turned to Itzli and nodded.

The pair walked to the cabin door. After opening it and taking one last, despondent glance at their master, held tight in Adam’s arms, they departed into the fog, and shut the door behind them with a soft click.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PROTECTOR

Adam gazed down at his lover, appearing defeated and altogether lifeless leaning against him. “Are you okay?”

Necalli shook his head.

“Come back to bed with me and we’ll talk. We’ll work this thing out.”

Necalli stood as if frozen against Adam’s chest.

“We *will* work this out.” He gave Necalli a brief squeeze.

Nodding, Necalli released Adam.

He kept an arm around Necalli’s waist as he led him to bed. All Acalan and Itzli told him spun in his head, had his mind reeling. The comfort and solidness of his bed would help, it had to. When they reached the bed, he waited while Necalli climbed into it.

Necalli sat with his legs drawn up in sheet, his arms hugging tight around his knees, and watched Adam with wide eyes.

He positioned himself next to Necalli, his legs bent partially underneath him. He leaned toward his lover. “So talk to me. Tell me all of it.”

“But do, do you still want me, Adam? Are you sure you want to take this risk?” Necalli’s brows furrowed and his gaze searched Adam’s face.

He exhaled, putting an arm round Necalli’s shoulders and drawing him near. Their heads met, his forehead to Necalli’s temple. “Of course I still want you.” His head twisted slowly against Necalli’s, rubbing softly against it. “I’d do anything for you, risk anything, even my life. I won’t lose you and I’ll find a

way. I promise you that.”

A shimmering droplet fell to make a small splash on Necalli’s thigh.

Adam lifted his head. Reaching up, he cupped Necalli’s chin in his palm and brought his face up.

His eyes wet and brimming again with tears, Necalli’s lip quivered and his mouth quirked downward in a frown. “I didn’t mean to kill him, Adam. I didn’t mean to lose control.” His anguished voice wavered as he blinked, releasing large tears from the corners of both eyes. “I loved him, so much.”

His heart felt as if it would burst inside him, seeing his lover in such agony. How awful it must have been for him. No wonder he didn’t remember. No wonder the fishermen and policemen held such pain for him.

“I’m so sorry, Necalli. If I could, I’d take all those memories away again, I really would.” He pulled him into his chest, holding him close, wrapping himself around him as if to shield him from any more pain. He would make it right again, somehow.

Necalli’s body shook with soft weeping.

“Shh, it’s all right.” He brushed his palm along the back of Necalli’s head, soothing him as best he could.

Necalli calmed. “I just wanted to be human again. I just wanted to live in this world. I’m so tired of being alone and being afraid.”

He held him tight. “What are you afraid of?”

Necalli pulled away to gaze into Adam’s face. “I’m afraid of being what I am. I hate it. I never liked the killing, the way my body surrenders to the fever. I was never a strong warrior, like Acalan. It would have been better if I was. I was always more interested in learning and knowledge, in loving.”

“Was Acalan a bodyguard of some kind?” He wanted the full story now. It was time to find out all he could about his lover.

“I suppose that’s what you’d call him.”

“And Itzli, he was your.” Adam cleared his throat. “Your

sex slave?" He winced.

Necalli glanced at Adam and looked at the far wall, nodding. "It was like he said. I had many slaves, male and female, but he was my favorite. We had a special bond."

He gulped hard - needing to pose the next question but not sure if he really wanted the answer. "Do you still love him?"

Necalli's gaze came back to rest on Adam's face. Opening his mouth, his eyes darted between Adam's for a moment. "I...I suppose, yes, I do."

Tightness and a sharp pain stabbed his chest. He flinched against his will. *Oh God, Necalli loves another.* How it hurt inside. He didn't like this feeling, not at all. He had to look away. "Um, so what does that mean for us?" His voice shook and the room grew hazy in front of him.

"I don't understand?" Placing nimble fingers on Adam's chin, Necalli drew his gaze back to him. "Adam? Why do you look as if you're going to cry?"

A lump formed in his throat. He gulped hard again, but it wouldn't go away. "Well, you just told me you're in love with someone else. What did you expect?"

"It doesn't mean I love you any less. Remember, I told you I chose you. I'm with you. Itzli will always be dear to me, but you're my life now. You. I love *you*."

Blinking hard, a choked chuckle escaped Adam while a tear blazed a trail on his cheek. He'd never understand Necalli, it seemed. Even knowing everything about him wouldn't change that.

Necalli brushed the tear away, arcing his thumb across Adam's cheek. Leaning forward, he placed a lingering kiss on Adam's lips. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." He forced a smile. "Tell me more about this fever, how it happened to you."

Necalli rocked for a moment and gazed up at Adam. "I remember Acalan suffering first. I remember being at his bedside while the fever took hold of him. Then there were others in the palace, all suffering with the same marks. We

were all afraid, but not able to determine where the marks came from. We had exterminators come and spread poison, in case it was some rodent or insect, while we fled the palace and stayed in the homes of those who could be trusted.”

Necalli’s gaze focused on the wall. “It was a time of war and my father would conquer the whole of our world eventually. So we didn’t stay long outside the palace, we were too exposed. The first night of coming back, Itzli and I awoke to the fever. It seems all the poison in the world couldn’t stop it.”

He placed his hand on Necalli’s shoulder. “Did you ever figure out how it started?”

Necalli’s attention drew back to Adam. “Yes, it was the strange visitor Acalan spoke of. He came to advise my father from a land in the East, far away from our cities by the lake. One of our scribes noticed that his hands were always covered and when we made him show us his hands, he had claws, same as I have now.” Necalli held up his hand, fingers splayed.

“So did he bite you and turn you into whatever it is you are, like a vampire or something?” How could he actually ask such a question? It just seemed so ridiculous and unnerving.

Necalli nodded. “He must have, but I don’t remember it. We seem to have some traits of both a vampire and a werewolf, at least that’s what I’ve found through reading books.” Necalli climbed off the bed, crouched on the floor and reached deep underneath the bed frame, letting out a grunt. When he came back up, he held up two hardbound books, one red and one brown.

He gasped, reading over the book titles while Necalli held them up for him. “Braham Stoker’s *Dracula* and *The Book of Were-Wolves* by Sabine Baring-Gould.” He gazed at Necalli in utter confusion. “When did you buy those and why were you hiding them?”

Necalli shrugged. “I think it was about a week ago when I bought them.” He dropped the books in his lap and lowered his head. “I didn’t want you to know.”

“Why, for God’s sake?” He turned in the bed to fully face Necalli.

“I just wanted to know what I was. Something was happening to me. I could feel it. It was starting to scare me.” Necalli placed the books on the floor and wrapped his arms around himself.

Exhaling aloud, he crawled to the edge of the bed, reached down, grasped Necalli’s arm and tugged him back up onto the bed. “As usual, you didn’t want to tell me about it.”

Necalli sat hunched over on his legs in front of Adam. “I’m sorry, Adam. I’m sorry I’m like this. I’m sorry I might hurt you.”

“Nonsense.” Wrapping his arms tight around Necalli, he dragged them both to lie down on the bed, sideways, entwined in each other. An idea clarified itself in his mind. “Uh, so a bite from you without draining the blood completely would give someone the fever, right? I mean, that’s what Acalan said.”

Necalli nodded against Adam’s chest.

“And apparently, you don’t kill each other during the full moon... You love Itzli and you never killed him and he obviously loves you and he never killed you, right?” He trailed a soft stroke over Necalli’s back with his fingertips.

“Yes.” Necalli tilted his head to peer into Adam’s face.

He took a deep inhale, mentally preparing himself for what he was about to say, and gazed down at Necalli. “So if you bit me and I got the fever, we wouldn’t have to worry.”

Necalli’s brows furrowed. “I would never do that to you, never.”

He pushed Necalli away, but held his shoulder to make him look at him. “But then we’d be together, forever, or as long as we’d want to be. I’d never have to worry about you dying and you wouldn’t have to worry about killing me. See? It’s perfect.”

“But you’d be a monster, Adam. You’d murder people, innocent people, and be a blood drinker, a demon.” Necalli’s eyes flared with anger and dread.

“We’d figure that out. We’d find a way around it, the way

you and Acalan and Itzli did on the island. How long were you out there feeding on seals?" His eyes roamed over Necalli's beautiful face, admiring him fully.

Necalli said, softly, "That was not a life." His eyes dropped down to Adam's chest and his lips pursed. "There has to be another way. I won't do that to you."

He sighed and brought Necalli back to his embrace. "I'm tired. Let's sleep on it and see how things look in the morning, okay?" Tomorrow was another day. He'd talk Necalli into seeing things his way. He knew it.

Silent, Necalli snuggled into Adam's chest and drew the covers up around them.

Adam woke with a start. He rolled to his side, reaching across a jumble of sheets for his lover, but grasped at nothing. Lifting his head, he willed his eyes to focus on the bed around him, searching out the familiar outline of a small body and dark hair.

With his heart pounding, he sat up straight. *Where the hell is Necalli?* His eyes swept over the empty bed, the inside of his empty cabin, the books still sitting on the floor next to the bed. Adrenaline raced through his body while panic threatened to overtake him. *Calm down, Adam, there has to be an explanation. He wouldn't just leave you. He loves you too much for that.*

He raked a hand through sleep-mussed hair and forced himself to think. Could he have simply gone out for groceries? Maybe he was just out for a walk? Yes, that's it, just a walk. He'd comfort himself with this thought, even though his heart begged otherwise. Necalli didn't go for walks, didn't go to get groceries, not this early in the morning.

Panic groped at his insides, made slight tremors rush his fingers as he pushed the bedcovers aside to climb out of the bed. Get some breakfast, get dressed and wait. If Necalli didn't return by the time he finished, he'd look for him. Surely he wasn't far. Surely he didn't do anything...stupid.

Adam sat in his khaki work clothes and boots at the kitchen table, with a second cup of coffee almost drained, and sighed. His gaze drifted to the clock on the far wall. It was ten and still no sign of Necalli. He rose from his chair, coffee cup in hand, and walked to the sink. Washing the cup, he peered out the window toward the cliffs and the ocean. A fog bank loomed offshore waiting to lay claim to land, looking to him like an ominous, gray blob hanging over foaming waves. "Where are you, Necalli?"

Shaking his head, he went for the door. He'd find him. He wouldn't stop until he did. That much he could count on. That much kept panic at a reasonable level.

After climbing in his car, he drove to Frank's, hoping for some strange reason Necalli went to see Peter.

He parked his sedan on the side of the building, by the speakeasy's apartment, slid out and strode to the door. Shoving one hand in the front pocket of his work trousers, he rapped on the door three times. The faint sound of muffled footsteps worked their way toward it.

The door opened and Peter squinted up at Adam, shirtless and his hair a disheveled mop. "Adam? What's up?"

Adam shifted and glanced up at Peter with tears filling his eyes and a lump in his throat despite attempts to control himself. "I, uh, you haven't seen Necalli, have you?"

Peter blinked and stepped out of the doorway, shutting the door behind him. "No, what's happened?"

"Uh, probably nothing, I just can't find him. That's all." He focused on the cement stoop. Talking about it made it real. Necalli was gone.

"Maybe he went for a walk or something. Did you check the beach?"

He shook his head and pushed his other hand into his front pocket. His brows furrowed. "He was gone when I woke up at, uh, six or seven this morning. He's never been gone that early before."

"Did you have a fight or something?" Peter raked a hand

through his hair.

He sniffled. “No.” The stoop blurred. He couldn’t cry, not now, not in front of Peter.

Peter placed a hand on Adam’s shoulder. “Damn. I don’t know what to tell you, buddy.”

The door creaked open and wavy, platinum hair showed through the slit. “Adam? What are you doing here?” Just one of Suzie’s eyes shined from the darkness behind the door.

Gasping, Adam’s gaze met Suzie’s. “What the hell are *you* doing here?” He glared at Peter.

Peter shrugged and dropped his hand. “Well, you’re with Necalli...”

“You had your chance.” She huffed and the door creaked, opening a bit more.

Peter turned his head to face her. “Stop it, Suzie. Now is not the time.”

The door slammed shut.

“Adam, I hope you find him. Let me know, okay? Maybe later I can help you look if you need me to.” Peter gave Adam an apologetic glance.

He nodded. “Yeah, sure.” He turned and headed for his car. Had the world gone mad?

After running a thorough search through town, checking each street and shop Adam could think of, and not finding Necalli, he decided to try the pier. Maybe Necalli had somehow wandered down there, hoping to come to terms with killing Luke?

He parked at the dock, climbed out of his car and walked up the pier. Squinting, he held his hand up to cover his eyes from the sun. The afternoon grew unusually warm for September and gulls and turns alike floated soundless in a clear sky.

Billy’s boat swayed in the water just mid way out on the pier. He headed straight for it. *Oh please, let Billy be on board.*

Movement behind the windows of the cabin caught his eye

and he moved faster, eager to talk to Billy. When he came up on the boat, Billy's capped head rose up in the window and a wide smile swept over his face.

"Billy!" He grabbed the side of the boat and stepped aboard.

Billy walked out from behind the opened cabin door and shut it. "Adam, what a surprise. Got a job today?"

He shook his head. "No, no, I just wanted to ask you something."

"Sure thing." Billy came to stand in front of Adam.

"I'm sort of looking for someone. An Indian, actually."

"Indian?" Billy's brows furrowed in confusion. "What on Earth for?"

"I um, have this Indian friend and he's gone missing. You wouldn't have noticed anyone with long, black hair hanging around here today, maybe this morning, would you?"

"God, no. Been quiet around here. I think everyone's preparing for that raid I heard about." Billy put his hands on his hips.

"Raid?" He forgot. The rumrunners would be out at the Farallons tonight. "Oh, yeah." He twisted in the boat and looked out toward the offshore islands.

"That's going to be some show, I'll bet." Billy spit over the side of the boat.

He kept his gaze on the ocean, straining to see the islands his lover once called home, but the fog denied him. "You don't believe in demons, do you?" A soft wind ruffled his hair.

"I'm a fisherman. I believe in all sorts of things I can't explain."

"Can you take me out there?" He turned back around to Billy.

"What, now?"

"Yes."

"What for?" Billy shifted his gaze out to sea. "What's out there, Adam? Why are you looking for an Indian?" Billy looked with narrow eyes directly at Adam.

“Please, I need your help and I can’t explain. I just have to get out there, no questions.” Tears surfaced again in his eyes, making them sting. His body shook. It was all so clear. Necalli was out there. He knew it. He blinked, sending a tear racing down his cheek. Quickly, he swiped it away with the back of his hand. “Please?”

Billy grunted and nodded once. “Help me untie Bessie, will you?”

He grinned. “Of course.”

Adam stood on the deck of Billy’s boat. They were in a small bay of the largest island and an unusual calm made the waves turn to ripples in the water. The fog billowed around them, but not thick enough to be a hindrance. He leaned up against the wall of the cabin, peering out at the outline of rough land jutting out over the water. Rock with small patches of swaying green made up the island. Tall trees, the eucalyptus, stood in miniature forests. “You sure this is where the boats would land?”

Billy popped his head out of an open window of the cabin. “Of course, there’s no other logical spot. Start looking for rocks!”

Adam moved to the edge of the bow and leaned over the railing, dropping his gaze to the water around them. “All clear so far.”

“Yeah, well, keep your eyes peeled. I heard those damn rocks come out of nowhere round here.” Billy’s arms swung over a large wheel, steering the boat.

Grinning, he saw beach straight ahead and pointed. “There’s a beach. You were right. Looks like we can go ashore there.”

“I see it. You just keep looking for the damned rocks.”

The water changed color, going from a deep blue-green to a shade of gray. “Uh, I think it’s getting shallow.” He looked back at Billy.

Billy pulled a lever and the engine ground down, slowing

the boat. "Drop the anchor here and get the dinghy."

He trotted to the front of the bow to the winch, released the mechanism and watched the cable unwind as the anchor dropped. When it stopped, Adam put the lock on the winch and waited a few seconds. The boat lurched slightly as the anchor caught on the ocean bottom.

"That's it." Billy stepped up behind Adam and gestured to the wooden dinghy, resting hull-out against the front of the cabin. "Let's drop her in."

He nodded, leaned down and grabbed hold of the aft of the dinghy.

Billy grabbed hold of a rope, tied to the dinghy's bow and wrapped the free end over a cleat on the abeam of the port side of the larger boat.

With Adam at one end and Billy at the other, the two picked up the dinghy and heaved it over the side, watching it slap down to the surface of the water.

"You get in first and I'll follow." Billy's voice was gruff and his expression serious as he threw a rope ladder over the side.

He climbed over the railing, onto the ladder and lowered himself down to the waiting oar boat. Once seated inside, he reached out, secured the bottom of the ladder and grabbed hold of it, waiting for Billy to climb down and join him.

Billy untied the dinghy and heaved himself onto the ladder. "Got a good hold on it?"

"Yes, sir."

Billy stepped down the ladder and into the boat. He sat opposite Adam. "Well then?"

"Oh." A quick smirk swept his face as he clamored to unclip the oars and swing them into the water. He rowed in tense silence, slicing easily through calm water. After about ten minutes, they reached the shore. The shushing sound of sand and groaning of a few rocks rushing the boat's bottom came up from the hull. He gave one hard row and the boat slowed to a stop, swaying lazily in the surf.

Billy gestured to Adam. "Pull it up for me."

He placed the oars back in their clips before standing and jumping onto the beach. Grasping the dinghy's rope at the bow, he waited for Billy to jump into the sand before tugging it further up.

With the boat mostly out of the water, he looked around him at the island. Footsteps dented the beach and a clear path cut through tall grasses at the beach's edge. Tall, rocky foothills rose up not far off. They were in the right place. Billy had been right about that. He turned to his friend. "I need you to wait for me. I shouldn't be long."

"I'm not letting you go off alone, not with all those rumors about these islands." Billy spit into the sand and gazed with determination at Adam.

He glanced at his work shoes. "I really need you to wait for me." Necalli would come to him, he was certain of that. But if Billy was with him, he wasn't so sure.

Billy sighed. "Adam, it's dangerous. I can't let you go alone. What if something happens? How would I find—"

"It won't. I'm perfectly safe here. Don't ask me how I know that and don't try to follow me." He glared at Billy. His gaze softened. "Listen, I can't thank you enough for helping me get out here. But I have to do this alone. Give me two hours, please." He placed a hand on Billy's forearm and gave it a quick squeeze.

Billy grunted. "Someone has to watch the boat with all these damned rumrunners skulking about." He turned and looked out at Bessie.

"Thanks, Billy. I'll be back, I promise." Twisting in the sand, he trotted off in the direction of the path.

He followed the path into a grove of eucalyptus. The thin leaves rustled and twirled, gray and green, over his head. Strips of fallen bark, like jagged ribbons, littered the rocky ground around him. The tangy scent filled his nostrils, making him shiver. The oil, it must be the oil he smelled.

He passed into shadows, peering through naked trunks, attempting to make out anything at all resembling something

manmade. "Necalli!" His voice rang out around him. The beating of wings and flutter of a bird startled him. His heart pounded in his chest. *Where the hell is he?*

He lifted his arm to glance at his watch. It was four already. He had to hurry. "Necalli! Where the hell are you?" His eyes scanned around him, but still, nothing. Necalli would hear him. He was sure of it. If not, the bastard would sense him.

A rhythm of crackling snuck up from behind him. He whirled around, eyes wide, fear prickling his skin. "Oh, shit." His hand seized his chest, over his heart.

Itzli and Acalan stood before him.

"Why are you here?" Acalan's brows furrowed in confusion.

Adam glanced at Itzli, looking as dumbfounded as Acalan, and shifted his gaze to Acalan. "I'm here to get Necalli and bring him home."

Acalan glanced at Itzli.

"Adam, he is not here." Itzli stepped forward. Worry washed over his face.

"What do you mean, he's not here?" He's lying, Adam knew it. "Tell him I'm here to bring him home." He wouldn't be deterred.

"We cannot. He is not here." Reaching up, Itzli went to grasp Adam's arm.

Adam yanked his arm away. "Tell him I'm here. Tell him he needs to see me. He has to come home." Panic threaded through his body, slowly taking hold.

Acalan sighed. "Itzli is not lying to you. Necalli is not here. We would know if he was. We would feel him."

"No..." Adam took a step back, his heart racing, his vision blurring. "Wh-where is he then?" His gaze flicked between Acalan and Itzli. They had to know where he was. They just had to.

"He is alive, of that I know." Itzli placed a palm over his heart. "If he is not here, he must be on the mainland." Itzli's head tilted as if in empathy. "Adam, he would not leave you. I

know that.”

“B-but he did. H-he just, uh, vanished. H-he wasn’t there when I woke up and I, I can’t find him. Anywhere.”

Itzli’s voice was soft. “I am sorry.”

“Why would you be sorry? Um, you said he’s alive, right?” Adam blinked hard, trying to clear his vision. A hot tear tumbled down his cheek.

“Adam.” Itzli stepped forward, wrapping his arms around Adam, drawing him close. “I understand more than anyone how you must feel.”

He shook his head. This wasn’t happening, couldn’t be happening. It’s impossible. Necalli would never leave him. “N-no...” He buried his face in Itzli’s black hair. The scent was so familiar, so much like his lover’s. The skin and body so much the same. If he just closed his eyes, it was Necalli holding him, not Itzli. He shut his eyes tight and breathed in deep. “Where did he go?” His voice cracked with sorrow.

Itzli brushed his fingers up Adam’s back and held him tighter. “I don’t know. But he is alive. He must still be on the mainland.”

His wet eyes flashed open and he lifted his head to search Itzli’s face. “You can sense him, right?”

Itzli nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“If he were here or if you were on the mainland, you’d be able to find him, wouldn’t you?” Desperation seeped into him, forcing his grief away.

Itzli released Adam and took a step back. “Yes, eventually.”

Reaching out, Adam seized Itzli’s arm just above the elbow. “Then you have to come with me. You have to help me find him.”

Itzli shook his head. “No, I cannot.”

Acalan stepped forward. “We must stay here. You know that and you know why.”

For a second, all hope was lost. Necalli was gone and if he was on the mainland lost somewhere, somehow, Adam was a dead man and Necalli was gone forever. He pursed his lips,

trying to think and took a sharp inhale. “You have to make me one of you.”

“What?” Acalan’s eyes widened.

“No, we cannot.” Determination lodged on Itzli’s face.

Reaching up, Adam grabbed Acalan and Itzli’s shoulders. “You can’t or you won’t?”

Acalan glared at Adam. “He won’t. Necalli made us promise many years ago to never do that.”

“Times change, my friend, and sometimes old promises need to be broken.” Adam gazed between them—sure he could talk them into seeing things his way. “You both love Necalli, right?”

Itzli nodded.

Acalan let out a soft grunt.

“Then give me the fever and I’ll find him. I’ll take him and leave. I’ll find someplace where we can be safe. Where he’ll never have to worry about killing innocents again. Where he can read all the books he wants and never be alone. I promise.” Adam let out a short exhale. “If you do this, he won’t have to grieve over killing me.”

Itzli glanced at the ground and looked at Acalan.

Acalan nodded. “He is right. He is our prince and we must protect him. Only then can we die with honor tonight if it is our destiny.” Stepping directly in front of Adam, Acalan looked deep into his eyes. “You know you can do these things?”

“I know it. This is my time and my place and the land is filled with my people.” Adam grinned.

“Then you will take our place as the protector and lover of our prince.” Acalan lurched forward, seizing Adam with an iron grip over his shoulders.

Pain pierced Adam’s neck. Fire filled his veins from his spine and spread outward. His vision blurred. His hands and feet chilled. He fought to breathe as if the air was sucked out of his lungs. Muffled voices floated around him and everything spun in a whirl of faces, trees, and fog. At last, it went black.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

UNEXPECTED

Adam's eyes fluttered open. Leaves swirled overhead in a gentle breeze and fog billowed above them. Warmth covered his hand. He tilted his head.

Itzli smiled sadly down at him. "You are all right now. It is all over."

He blinked. Legs shifted underneath his back. He was in Itzli's lap, lying on the ground. "I-I'm a d-demon now?"

Itzli nodded. "You have been poisoned."

He raised his free hand and looked at his fingers. They looked the same, nothing changed. He twisted his hand in disbelief. "No I'm not. It didn't work. Look at my hands. They don't look like yours."

Itzli brushed a lock of hair from Adam's forehead. "It takes time. Soon, maybe tonight, you will get the fever and then you will change."

He sat up. A wave of dizziness swept over him, making the trees spin once again. "Damn." He closed his eyes for a moment, hoping to clear it.

Itzli stood, placed his hands under Adam's armpits and helped him up. "You have lost a lot of blood. You must forgive Acalan. It is close to the full moon and I had to pull him off you."

He turned to face Itzli. "You mean, he almost killed me?"

Itzli glanced at the ground. "I would never allow that." Grabbing Adam's hand, he brought it up to the side of Adam's

neck. "Here, this is where he bit you."

His fingers probed a hole in his neck. He felt further down and found another. Bringing his hand back out, he gazed at crimson-streaked fingers. "I'm still bleeding?"

Itzli nodded once. "Only a little. It will stop soon."

He gazed into Itzli's eyes, noticing wet trails on his cheeks. "You were crying for me?" His heart ached for him, this soul who'd lost so much.

Quickly, Itzli lowered his head. "I was crying for my prince, my Necalli." Raising his head, he locked eyes with Adam. They shimmered in the early evening glow. "You will do as you say? You will save him?"

He surrounded Itzli with his arms, holding him tight, the same way he'd held Necalli so many times. "I promise you, I'll save him. I'll do whatever it takes."

"I love him, Adam."

He placed a tender kiss on the side of Itzli's head. "I know you do and so do I. I'll save him for the both of us."

"Thank you." A soft sob escaped Itzli and his arms tightened around Adam.

He let his cheek rest against Itzli's head and brush softly over black locks. "I have to go," he whispered.

Itzli released Adam, took one long, sad look at him and vanished into the trees.

He gasped. Would he ever get used to that? Wait, what will it feel like to move that fast? He chuckled as he strolled back to the path, certain everything would be all right. But he had to get back and find his lover.

He kept his gaze on the path. Let the damn trees and everything else blur. As long as he had this path he could get back to the boat. Stumbling as he walked onto the beach from the tall grass, a dumb smile played on his face.

"Adam, what happened?" Billy rushed forward and grabbed him by the arm, steadying him.

"It's all right, Billy. I'm fine."

"You don't look fine. You look drunk. Don't tell me you

found the liquor bottles and started drinking?” Billy hauled Adam to the dinghy. “And what’s that on your neck?”

He tilted his head so Billy couldn’t see the puncture wounds. “Nothing, never you mind.” After stepping into the boat, he fell forward, but caught himself on the other side. “Damn it.”

“You just lay down there and take it easy. I’ll get us back.”

Adam gripped tight to the table edge inside the pale-blue cabin of Billy’s boat while he rose to standing. “I’ll help you dock her.”

“Sit your ass down, Adam. Henry’s there, he’ll do it.” Billy’s voice growled. His hands whipped the steering wheel around and played with the lever controlling the boat’s engine. The engine gunned, the boat lurched and Billy hit another lever. The boat reared back as if in defiance.

“Fine.” He plopped back down onto the beige, vinyl cushion of a bench seat, watching the pier get closer outside the cabin windows. “But I’m feeling fine now, honestly.”

Billy pressed a black button and a horn blew atop his boat. “You just sit.”

A man with dark, curly hair and a pipe hanging out of his mouth turned from a clipper docked on the other side of the pier.

Billy waved and stuck his head out the cabin window. “Little help here!”

Henry waved and took a position on the pier.

Billy expertly maneuvered the boat against the dock, shut off the motor and ran out of the cabin to throw a thick rope at Henry.

Henry caught the rope and secured it to a large, iron cleat. “Evening, Billy. What’re you doing out?”

“Ah, just doing Adam a favor.” Billy threw another rope out to Henry.

Adam stepped out of the cabin door and shut it. His legs still trembled, but at least his vision wasn’t so blurry. The boat

bumped the dock and he stumbled, but caught himself against the cabin grab rail.

“Easy, Adam. I don’t need you splittin’ your head open after finally getting you home.” Billy grabbed Adam’s arm and helped him to a plank Henry had pulled out. “Give me a hand with him, will you?”

Adam was handed from Billy to Henry, stepping carefully over the plank and onto the steady pier.

Henry looked Adam over. “What the hell happened to you?”

He pulled the collar of his shirt up to cover his neck wound. “Nothing. I think I got a flu or something, that’s all.”

“Yeah?” Henry’s gaze narrowed.

“You okay to drive, Adam?” Billy stepped off his boat and walked to Adam’s side.

“Sure, I’ll be fine.” Turning into Billy, Adam placed a hand on his shoulder. “Listen, I can’t thank you enough for what you did for me today. I wish I could explain it, but I—”

“It’s fine. Just take care of yourself.” Billy looked at Adam with concern filling his eyes.

“I will.” He nodded and strolled down the pier toward his car, nodding at Henry as he passed.

Adam pulled his car up to the cabin and sighed, letting his hands fall from the steering wheel to his thighs. Where the hell was Necalli and when would this damned fever kick in so he could sense him? He let his gaze run over the yard surrounding the cabin, taking in the long shadows of early evening. *Wait, what is that?*

His eyes stopped and focused on a mound of branches, twigs, and leaves. He thought back. It must be the cypress debris Necalli cleaned from the roof. How the hell did it get to be *that* much? He’d never cleaned that much off the roof before. And when did it get piled up like that? He swore it wasn’t there this morning.

His eyes widened as adrenaline rushed through his body.

Tearing at the car door handle, he fumbled with it before throwing the door open. He jumped out of the car and raced to the door of the cabin. Sweat slickened his palms as he gripped the knob, turned, and threw the door open. The door smacked against the stopper and he lunged through the open doorway, panting. The room went dark while a wave of dizziness threatened to overtake him. *Damn it, not now.* He needed to see.

Slowly, the room came back into focus. Dark hair splayed out over the kitchen table. Under it, the quiet and still form of Necalli sat hunched over in a chair.

He rushed to his side and crouched down on his knees. "Necalli? Oh my God, Necalli, talk to me." He gripped his lover's arm and shook it in desperation. "Where were you all day?"

A drop shimmered and fell to Necalli's pant leg.

He examined Necalli's legs. The tan cloth covering his thighs was darkened in splotches. Holding his breath, he ran his fingers over the dark area. It was wet from tears. He trembled as he lowered his head to gaze up under Necalli's hair.

Necalli twisted his head away.

"N-Necalli? What's going on?"

"You have to do it, Adam." Strain and defeat laced Necalli's voice.

"Do what?" He didn't like this. His chest tightened up and heaved under his work shirt. He couldn't breathe. "Do what, Necalli?" he shouted, shoving Necalli's body hard.

In a blur of black hair and red shirt, Necalli rose up to stand in front of Adam, pistol held tight in his hand, handle out toward Adam. He lifted his face, tears streamed down, one after another. His eyes were vacant, lifeless. "You have to shoot me and burn my body in the pile out—"

"No!" He stood and stomped toward Necalli, tossing the oak chair between them aside. It toppled over by the stove. "Where the hell did you get that?" He glared at Necalli, letting

rage take control. How dare he even suggest such a thing.

Necalli lowered his head. "I stole it from the rumrunners."

"You did what?" A sudden paralysis washed over him, leaving him wholly unable to even think. Thinking was bad. Thinking would mean there might be good reason behind Necalli's actions. He couldn't allow that.

Necalli lifted his head. His face tensed into an angry snarl, exposing long fangs. Yellow danced in circles over the irises of his eyes. "I won't kill you, Adam. This is the only way. You have to kill me, now, before I change completely. Before I lose control. I can't do it myself. I tried. My beast won't allow—"

"No, listen to—" Adam flew backwards, hitting the wall with his back, and slid down to the floor. He slowly lifted his head. Necalli would never shove him that hard, would he? Hot wetness tickled down his neck and over his collarbone. He was bleeding again.

With a feral growl, Necalli raced forward. Grabbing hold of Adam's wrist, he hauled him to standing. The pistol dangled between clawed fingers, the claws now much longer than normal. "Take this and shoot me, now, before it gets worse. Do it!"

He fought to clear his mind, blinking his eyes, turning his head. But his vision kept blurring. Dizziness rushed over him again. "No, I won't." His voice was soft.

Necalli thrust the gun into Adam's hand. Gruff claws tightened over Adam's fingers, attempting to make them hold the gun. "Take it, damn it! Do as I say. I am your prince, you must do as I say."

His face grew slack. His gaze met Necalli's yellow eyes. "You are not my prince. You are my lover. I will not kill you. There's no ne—"

"Take it!" Necalli's claws squeezed Adam's fingers.

Pain seared through his hand. He jerked back in reflex, screaming. "Listen to m—"

A shot ripped through the inside of the cabin.

Adam fell. Darkness enveloped him once again.

Adam lifted his head. Crackling flames surrounded him. He whirled around. The flames snapped out, reaching for him. Orange and yellow tendrils turned into clawed fingers and flicked over his skin. Searing heat snaked over his arms and legs. Sweat dribbled down his naked body. It was hot, too hot. "Aloise?"

He twirled around, trying to see past the flames, but only darkness and the crackling fire came back at him. "Necalli?" Nothing. He was alone. Clenching his fists, he tilted his head up and screamed, a guttural, heart-wrenching scream. The tears came, flooding down his cheeks, pouring all the grief and shame and fear out of his body.

"I'm sorry, Mom. Oh God, I'm so sorry, Aloise." He held his fists up to his cheeks and sobbed, his chest heaving. "Necalli, I'm sorry, I couldn't save you. Oh, God, Itzli, I couldn't do it. I can't save anyone, not anyone."

He knelt down, curling up his body into a tight ball and wept. The flames towered over him, cackling, jumping out to flick over his skin as if tasting him, hungry for him. The fire roared and reared up.

Slowly, he stood, the traces of tears shining on his cheeks, skin glistening with sweat, quiet and determined. "No. I won't let you do this to me anymore." He took a step forward into the fire. It moved back. He took another step. It moved again, hissing at him. He walked with conviction through the flames, each step clearing a path before him until he was free.

Faint thumping pressed against Adam's chest. Hot pressure wrapped over his body, blanketing him. Droplets trickled down his side, his cheek and his brow. Heat scalded him and oozed out of every pore. His body ached everywhere. Groaning, he slowly opened his eyes.

The beams of his ceiling came into focus, lit up by the dome ceiling light. A clear bullet hole pierced one of the beams. He tilted his head. Golden arches curved around his vision. He lay naked in his bed. Silky, black strands splayed out across his shoulder. Bare arms and legs wound tight around him. "Necalli?" His voice was a harsh whisper.

Necalli lifted his head over Adam's chest. His brows tensed, heavy tears tumbled down his cheeks. His expression changed. Anger burned in his eyes. "Who did this to you?"

"What?" He tried to move. Sharp pain and heat stabbed through him. He groaned.

Necalli's palm came up to rest on Adam's cheek. "Don't move."

He held himself still. An overall ache replaced the pain. He let his gaze rest on the slivers of wood lining the bullet hole in the ceiling. "What happened?"

"I think you know perfectly well what happened." Necalli positioned his face over Adam's, glaring down at him. "I told you becoming one of us was not an option. Who did this to you?" His hand came down to finger the puncture wound on Adam's neck.

He rolled his head to focus on the wall. "I had to. It was our only way out of this mess. I couldn't find you." He shifted his focus back to Necalli's face and glared at him. "Who the hell are you to tell me what I can and can't do with my life? And to just go off and try to end yours? God damn it, Necalli, I can't believe you actually thought I'd shoot you and burn you in a fucking fire." He coughed, sending pain to ravage his body. "Shit."

New tears formed in Necalli's eyes and his mouth curved downward. "I couldn't kill you. It was unbearable to even think about."

"And so you thought *I* could kill *you*? Are you insane?"

Shutting his eyes tight, Necalli shook his head. Tears splashed onto Adam's chin. "I just wanted to right all the wrongs. I wanted it to be different this time."

Despite the screaming in his body, he wrapped his arms around Necalli and drew him into his chest. Something sharp scraped across his forearm. *What the hell?* Lifting an arm up, he brought his hand to his face, fingers splayed.

Necalli sniffled against Adam's shoulder.

His fingernails had lengthened and narrowed, closely

resembling Necalli's. "Holy shit."

"You're turning. Soon, you'll be just like me."

It was then he noticed the heartbeat, the breathing, that was not his own. He sensed sorrow, pain, immense suffering, fear, and love. It was all in the beats, in the breath. How it felt deep inside him, as if some internal part of him took it all in, analyzed it, and stuffed the information into the thinking part of his brain. "You're so sad and afraid and you love me, so much. I feel it, all of it. I sense it."

Necalli lifted his head to gaze into Adam's eyes.

The ache cleared as if an immense cloud drained from his body. Every nerve prickled with sensitivity. The colors of the room became vivid. He blinked. It was all too much. He could hear things, the creaking of wood in the cabin, the scamper of a bug under the floor. His head turned with each sound. "It's, it's weird."

"You need to turn some of it off or it'll take you over."

Necalli brushed Adam's cheek with the back of his fingers.

The fingers made his cheek tingle all the way through his body and downward to his groin. His cock jerked, filling instantly. His hips thrust up into Necalli's thigh. Pleasure rippled through him, so intense he almost cried out. "Oh my God. What's happening to me?" He looked with wide eyes at Necalli.

A faint smile swept over Necalli's face. "Everything is more." Tilting to the side, Necalli ran pointed fingernails down Adam's stomach, slipping over Adam's skin, onto the inner part of his thigh.

Soft, slow circles tickled and teased him in a most delicious way. A low moan escaped him. His whole body ached for contact. His erection pulsed. "Touch me more, all over, harder."

Necalli's hand raced across Adam's body, circling, prodding, caressing. He stopped at his nipple and gave it a pinch.

"Oh, God." His cock, painfully hard, jumped. His back

arched and pleasure hummed through him. His sac tightened for release. He gazed at Necalli, grinning sheepishly back at him. "No wonder you're such a sex fiend."

Necalli came down over Adam's lips and kissed him, hard and insistent, parting his mouth, probing with his tongue.

The kiss was smooth as silk and sent shivers racing down his spine to lodge deep inside his pelvis, heightening the urgency and need flooding out from his groin.

Necalli flicked inside Adam's mouth and sucked over his tongue, deepening the kiss, sending a moan to shiver inside it.

The tension crested. Soft skin brushed over his cock. His climax rushed to a raw edge. Quickly, he drew away from Necalli and tilted his hips back, clenching his teeth. "Damn, I almost came." His body shuddered. Fluid seeped from his erection to drip onto his stomach. He placed his palms on Necalli's cheeks and pulled his face close to his own, searching it. "Is it always like this?"

Necalli's eyes held pure lust. "Yes, it is. But you have to learn how to slow it down."

He let out a deep exhale. "I had no idea. Wow." He didn't know his cock could get this hard or just a kiss or a touch could feel so good, so altogether sensuous. He was going to like this in so many ways. And he had forever to figure it all out. Forever, with Necalli, to explore, to learn, to love. His heart grew heavy with it all. Warmth flooded his soul. His eyes stung and his vision blurred. A tear escaped down his cheek.

"Adam? Are you okay?" Placing his fingers over Adam's chin, Necalli brought his face to his own. He looked with concern into Adam's eyes.

He sniffled and felt another tear tickle his cheek. "I-I'm okay. I think." Why did he feel like crying all of a sudden? Why now? His chest ached. A lump formed in his throat. It was going to happen. Now. He couldn't stop it. Wrapping his arms and legs tight around Necalli, he pulled his small body into him with a force that might crush a human. His body trembled into a steady shake. He surrendered, allowing himself to weep

outright into his lover's embrace. "What's happening to me?" His voice cracked.

Necalli kissed the side of Adam's head. "Everything is more. All your feelings, emotions, senses, they're all more. Someday you'll control it, but now you're like a baby who is just learning about his world."

It was all so clear, so painfully, exquisitely clear. Everything about Necalli was understandable and not mysterious at all. He was such an idiot not to see it before now, not to feel it, not to know. This fever brought him back to himself, broke every wall, every barrier between the man he'd become and the boy who'd lost his family. And so he let the tears fall, for the family he lost, for the boy who crept inside a cave deep inside him, for the lover who stole his heart and held steadfast until he faced it all and was finally able to love and be loved.

"Shh..." Necalli stroked Adam's back while the weeping slowed and stopped.

"This, this is crazy, isn't it?" He sniffled hard and pulled away, letting his head rest back on a pillow.

Lifting his head, Necalli gazed down into Adam's eyes. "It's different for us all. You just have to get used to it."

"Yeah, well, how long does that take?"

Necalli shrugged. "Not long." Dipping his face down into Adam's neck, Necalli playfully licked and nipped tender skin.

He shuddered, letting out a sharp gasp. Severe tingling rushed down his spine and pooled in his groin, instantly hardening his cock again.

Necalli's tongue licked down to Adam's chest, stopped at a nipple, and swirled.

He bucked violently, needing to press his aching cock into something, but only caught open air. He shoved Necalli up. He had to get his wits somehow. "S-stop, damn." Panting, his chest heaved up and down.

A wide grin spread over Necalli's face. "Now is not the time to stop."

"Well, at least slow down. I can't control myself right now."

“That’s the point.” Necalli dove down to Adam’s stomach, licking, sucking, taking small bits of flesh gently between his teeth and teasing it and scratching tickling nails over his chest.

Groaning, he shut his eyes tight and clutched the sheet. His toes curled in anticipation of the eruption building in his groin. His hips thrust. His body writhed and arched below Necalli’s taunting mouth and fingers. If anything touched him, anything at all, everything would release.

Necalli moved down, over Adam’s hips, and continued teasing licks and scratches over Adam’s skin.

He bucked again, attempting to force Necalli to take him in his mouth and finish him.

Necalli moved away at the last second with a wicked grin.

With a low growl, he opened his eyes and gazed downward. “Just do it already.”

Necalli ran the nail of his index finger around the base of Adam’s stiff and pulsing cock. “Look who’s begging for things now?”

“That’s, that’s not fair.” His breath came ragged and raw.

Necalli pulled his finger away long enough to run a slick tongue over the end of it. Placing it on the head of Adam’s erection, he swirled the tip.

“Oh my God.” He grit his teeth and threw his head back into pillow as pleasure raced up the staff of his cock and tightened his sac. “Please, Necalli. I can’t take anymore.” A hot pearl of seed seeped over the slit of his erection.

Necalli slid his thumb over the fluid and spread it down the underside of Adam’s cock, just under the lip, making tiny circles.

Immediately, another drop of seed formed. His whole body shook and became rigid. Pleasure seared, making his peak rush to a sharp edge. “I, I’m going to—”

Necalli’s hot, smooth mouth sucked hard over Adam’s cock, just as his climax surged. His tongue pressed, slick and solid, into Adam’s erection while his mouth pumped him.

He let out a long, carnal cry as his whole body went rigid

and delicious waves of brutal contractions spurted seed into Necalli's lapping mouth. As it wound down, his body relaxed into shallow pants and his eyes slowly closed. One last pulse sent a shudder to ripple through his body. He was speechless, his mind a complete blank. He opened his mouth to say something, but found himself unable to utter a word.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SENSES

Panting and quick movements rushed over Adam's ears. Lifting his head, he gazed down between his legs at Necalli.

Necalli hunched over, sitting on his legs, spread wide, furiously working his palm over his swollen cock. Sharp gasps tore from his lips and his body shook and visibly shuddered.

Quickly, Adam sat up and placed his hand over Necalli's, halting his movement.

Necalli lifted his head, giving Adam a half-lidded look of pure need.

He grinned. "Let me."

Necalli's eyes widened and his breath came in deep, ragged draws.

Repositioning himself on his legs, he slowly guided Necalli to lie back on the bed.

Biting his lower lip, Necalli clutched at the sheets as if needing an anchor. The head of his erection glistened with pre-seed, weeping for Adam's attention.

A jolt of desire shivered down his spine. Seeing his lover like this, so wanting of him, was painfully sensual. Reaching up over Necalli's chest, he brushed his newly formed claws down Necalli's taut stomach. "I love you."

Necalli's head twisted to side and a soft whimper escaped him. "And I love you, so much." His fingers tightened around folds of sheet.

He lowered himself slowly, carefully, between Necalli's thighs, keeping his steady gaze locked to Necalli's eyes. He wet

his tongue to the point of dripping and licked, starting deep under his sac, to trail all the way up his shaft and to the tip of his cock.

Necalli arched, eyes shut tight, and filled the room with a guttural cry.

He let out a low moan. Need filled his groin, rushing blood between his legs, filling his cock as if he'd never been satiated. He leaned to the side of the bed and reached down - desperate to get at the jar of Vaseline he kept there. Trembling fingers probed and fumbled at empty air.

"Adam, hurry, please." Raw urgency threaded through Necalli's voice.

His claws tapped a hard object. In a second, he had the jar out of its hiding place and opened, dipping in to coat his fingers. After throwing the jar to the ground, he spread the gel over his erection. A delicious and violent shudder rushed over his body and made his cock jerk in his hand. He hissed and shut his eyes. "Oh, God. Everything feels too good." His eyes opened and gazed down upon his lover.

Necalli's legs pulled up tight to either side of his body, exposing his passage to Adam in heated expectation.

He let out a soft chuckle, though the sight took his breath away. "Ready?"

Nodding, Necalli's brows contracted.

He leaned over Necalli on straight arms, positioning his erection at his lover's entrance. "Look at me and don't close your eyes. I want to see your desire for me, every bit of it."

Necalli's lower lip quivered.

He locked eyes with Necalli and pushed his hips forward in a slow, agonizing thrust. As tight heat wrapped around his cock, his face tensed and his mouth opened with pure pleasure racing into every nerve of his body, caressing it, teasing it.

Necalli panted and shook, but kept his eyes on Adam's.

When he was fully inside his lover, he pulled out quick and drove in hard. A surge of sweet intensity rocketed through him.

Necalli's legs seized Adam's waist and jerked, slapping their hips together, again and again.

His arms buckled and he fell onto Necalli's chest.

Necalli's arms wrapped tight and frantic around Adam.

Loud moans and sharp cries filled the air as his hips drove down, each time sending brutal waves of pleasure searing through his body. His climax wound into a tight coil.

Necalli's body went rigid. Hot fluid surged between them, coating their stomachs and chest while loud gasps, one after another, ripped from Necalli's throat.

The contractions of Necalli's release pulsed over Adam's erection. He plummeted over the edge, driving into his lover hard. Intense and exquisite tingling started in his cock and rushed to fill every part of his body. Delicious spasms overtook him, filling his lover with seed while he drove out and in, shuddering with each one. It slowed and he lay panting over Necalli. "If it's always going to be like that it's a good thing I'm immortal now. Otherwise, I think it'd kill me." He let out a faint chuckle and raked his hand through Necalli's long hair.

Necalli squeezed Adam. "You'll get used to it."

A sudden and sharp ache filled his chest, making his body jump.

Necalli cried out in pain. "Oh no..."

The ache heightened in his heart. He grimaced. "What the hell is that?"

Necalli shoved Adam off him and sat up in the bed. "Itzli and Acalan. We must hurry." Necalli flew from the bed and in seconds was fully dressed.

The pain came again and he groaned, gripping his chest. "What is that?"

Necalli threw Adam's clothes at him. "Meet me at the beach."

Necalli vanished in front of him. He scanned the inside of the cabin. The front door swung open in a small arc. The stabbing ache came again. "Damn it." He dressed. With little

effort, his fingers flew over the buttons, the zipper of his pants. He smirked. So he could move as fast as Necalli now.

In a flash, he raced from the cabin, slamming the door behind him. The world around him floated by in slow motion. His legs pumped quick, making his body fly over the ground. The sound of Necalli's heart pounded in his ears, guiding him.

He came to the cliff edge and instinctively jumped, letting his body fall into darkness and thump on the sand below. He stood up straight. The ocean waves twinkled under an almost full moon. The beach illuminated in shades of indigo and gray. A soft breeze ruffled his hair and un-tucked shirt.

Terror and immense grief rode over his senses on Necalli's heartbeat. "Oh, no." He knew it, felt it, something was very, very wrong. He picked out Necalli's form, bent at the waist, hands on his knees, feet in the surf.

As he ran to Necalli's side, faint screams and shrieks whispered over his ears. He stopped next to his lover and wrapped an arm around him. "Are they okay?" A burning sensation rushed over his body from head to toe.

Crying out, Necalli turned and seized Adam. "No!"

He held tight to Necalli as another wave of searing heat flared over his skin. "What is that? What's happening?"

A sorrowful, agonizing wail ripped from Necalli's throat. "They're gone, Adam, they're gone!" He clutched Adam's shirt. Long, drawn out sobs choked out of him.

"Oh, God." Tears welled up in his eyes. Could it really be true? Did he just feel their death? His gaze shifted out to sea, straining to see anything, but it was too dark and too far away, even for his preternatural sight. He kissed Necalli's head. "Shh, it's okay." But what could he really say?

Necalli's body shook as he wept against Adam's chest.

"Adam."

Lifting his head, Adam looked to the side on the beach. *It can't be.* Itzli and Acalan stood, only a few feet away. Their bodies didn't pick up the moonlight. Instead, they held an inner glow. The breeze rustling his hair didn't touch theirs.

Instead, their locks lay long and still across their shoulders.

Itzli smiled. "It is done. We are free now. You will do as you promised?"

Necalli lifted his head and turned around, sniffing. "Itzli? Acalan?"

Acalan bowed. "It was a pleasure to serve you, my prince."

Necalli shook his head. "N-no. Y-you can't be..."

"We are free. Adam has made a promise to us." Tilting his head to the side, Itzli gazed at Necalli.

"And I will keep that promise. Don't you worry." Adam kept a firm hold around Necalli's shoulders.

Itzli glanced at Adam and shifted his gaze back to Necalli. "I love you."

The glow of Itzli and Acalan's bodies swirled in the breeze, dissipating the vision of them into a sparkling funnel before rushing upward, mixing with the night sky.

Adam stood motionless and blinked his eyes. Did he really see that? Ghosts existed. Demons existed. He was one of them. *Too much*... He gave his head a shake.

Necalli turned into Adam's chest with large tears dripping down both cheeks. "What did you promise them?"

He gazed down at Necalli, looking so forlorn. "I promised them I'd take you out of here. I'd take you someplace where you could read all you want and we'd find a way around this fever so you'd never have to kill another innocent."

A faint smile crossed Necalli's lips. "I love you, Adam."

"And I love you. Now let's get out of here before the full moon."

Necalli chuckled softly. "Your first full moon."

Adam went straight for the suitcases, hidden in the closet, as soon as he stepped inside his cabin. "Pack everything you want to take with you."

Necalli shut the door behind him, walked into the kitchen and stopped as if in a daze. "What?"

"I'm getting you and me out of here." He flopped a suitcase

onto his bed and unzipped it open. He tore around the room, grabbing clothes, books and anything else he figured was of value and threw them into the suitcase.

"But where are we going?" Necalli's dazed eyes followed Adam's too quick movements.

"I told you, we're getting out of here." He stopped and focused on Necalli.

A look of complete bewilderment rested on Necalli's face.

He strode to Necalli and placed both hands on his shoulders. "Look at me."

Necalli's wide gaze focused and moved up to Adam's face.

"By tomorrow night we have to be somewhere safe, away from anyone we know. I don't want to risk doing something stupid, like killing Peter or Maxwell or anyone else I care about. So let's get out of here."

Necalli's gaze darted between Adam's. "But where will we go?"

He thought quickly. So far, he hadn't had time to work it all out. His gaze raced across his kitchen, the tiles and the cupboards. He smiled and gave Necalli a quick shake. "I got it. We'll go to San Francisco. Maxwell will help us. I know he will. He'll tell us where my uncle's yacht, Chelsea, is docked and we'll go out to sea. I'll get my money out of the bank and we'll find some other island for tomorrow night, then just keep going up the coast."

Necalli blinked hard. "Will it work, really?"

"Of course it will work." He smirked. "Pack your clothes and your books." He gave Necalli a quick, hard embrace and went back to packing.

Necalli grabbed the other suitcase and threw it on the couch. After unzipping and opening it, he raced around as quickly as Adam and packed his things.

"Done?" He stood, suitcase in hand, grinning at Necalli.

Necalli nodded. "Done."

He strode to the door, opened it and took one last look over the room he'd spent the last two years of his life in. He

never thought in a million years he'd be leaving it like this. But then, he never thought in a million years he'd fall in love with a young man who wasn't quite human either.

"Are you all right?" Necalli, standing behind Adam, placed his hand on Adam's shoulder.

He patted his free palm over Necalli's. "Never been better." Turning, he headed toward the car. The night sky was clear of fog and clouds, allowing the moon to illuminate the trees, the ground and his cabin. The absence of the earlier breeze gave everything an eerie calm and quiet. He popped the car door open, flung his suitcase into the back seat and climbed in behind the wheel.

Necalli threw his suitcase in the back, beside Adam's, and slid onto the seat beside him.

He pushed the ignition button and the engine roared to life. Sighing, he looked at Necalli, leaned over and placed a lingering kiss on his cheek.

"Don't you want to say goodbye to Peter?" Necalli's gaze searched Adam's face in the darkness.

He sat back in his seat and gazed at his clawed hands, wrapping around the steering wheel. "No. He's a smart guy and I have a feeling after what happened tonight he'll figure out who you are and what happened to us." He shifted the gear lever and drove the car out onto the road.

Adam pulled up to the side of the road in front of his aunt and uncle's Victorian mansion and turned the car engine off. He looked up at the house. Darkness filled all the windows. He glanced at his watch. It was two a.m. "Well, here goes nothing." Grinning, he gazed at Necalli. "I want you to wait here."

"No, I want to go with you." Reaching out, Necalli grasped Adam's arm.

He sighed. "I need to talk to Maxwell alone. I think he'll be more willing to help us then."

Necalli's head bowed forward and his hand dropped to the

seat between them. "He may desire you more now."

"What? Why?"

Necalli shrugged his shoulders and gazed back up at Adam. "I don't know why, but I've found that those without the fever seem to be drawn to us sometimes."

A wave of memory and understanding washed over him. "Oh, so that would explain my, uh, well, being drawn to you when I found you on the beach."

"Maybe." Necalli gave Adam a sly grin.

"Well, I can handle Maxwell." He shifted to reach the handle on his door.

Necalli grabbed Adam's arm again. "No, you can't. I'm going with you. Did you forget how intensely you reacted to my touch earlier tonight?"

He thought back to Maxwell touching himself before the birthday party. Raw lust seared through him, instantly hardening his cock and making his breathing turn ragged.

"Even now you react." Necalli ran a pointed nail up the fabric of Adam's trousers, over hard flesh.

Gasping, a shiver rippled through him. "Okay, you can come."

Necalli nodded, turned and opened his door.

He shut his eyes and sat still for a moment, collecting himself. He'd have to maintain control around Maxwell no matter what. There was no way he would let Necalli have any indication of what had passed between them. He grasped the door handle, tugged and opened the door. After climbing out of the car, he quietly clicked the door shut and met Necalli on the other side. A hushed quiet floated over the street, lit by a lamp on the corner. The smell of water and flowers wafted on the still air.

He faced his lover and gazed into dark eyes. "Okay, here's the plan. My Aunt Betty always keeps a spare key under a flowerpot in the back yard. So, we'll get it and go in from the back. David sleeps downstairs, so if we can sneak by his room we should be all right."

“Adam, with your new abilities you should have no problem being quiet. Use all your senses and you’ll be able to walk soundlessly through the house.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

He gulped hard. Seems there was no end to the things he could do now.

Necalli reached out and grabbed Adam’s hand. “Let’s go.”

He led Necalli around the side of the house, through a wood gate, and into the back yard. They strolled up to a pot with geraniums planted in it resting beside the back French doors. He crouched down and braced himself for the weight of the pot as he lifted it up. The pot flew upwards in his grasp as if the soil and flowers in it didn’t exist. Shocked, he tilted the pot and looked at it. They were there all right.

Necalli crouched down beside Adam and whispered, “Your senses are kicking in. Look at your eyes.”

He brought his gaze up to his reflection in the glass panes of the French doors. A faint yellow glow surrounded his irises. He shifted his gaze to Necalli’s eyes, expecting to see the same. Necalli’s eyes looked completely normal. “Why aren’t your eyes glowing?”

“I have more control. Just the slightest thing will bring out your inner animal. I sense fear in you and that’s enough.” Necalli patted Adam on the back and stood up.

He grabbed the brass key and set the flowerpot back in its original place. After standing back up again, he carefully placed the key in the lock and turned. The tumbler made a gentle click. It was as if everything around him slowed. His vision sharpened and his hearing picked up the tiniest shifting of wood in the floor, in the walls, in the ceiling. “Holy shit.” His voice was barely audible.

He glanced at Necalli, eyes now glowing yellow, the same as his and stepped inside the house. He waited while Necalli closed the door. When it shut, it was so soft even he could hardly hear it catch.

Turning, he felt like his body walked on air through the kitchen, the hallway, up the stairs and down the upper hallway to Maxwell's room. It was as if his feet knew exactly where to step to keep from making any noise. He turned the knob on Maxwell's door and opened it. With Necalli close behind him, he took light steps into Maxwell's room.

After closing the door and reaching Maxwell's bedside, Necalli placed his hand on Adam's arm, turning him to face him. Leaning in, he spoke so soft only Adam could hear him. "You have to calm down or you'll scare Maxwell."

"What?"

"Your eyes, they're still yellow." Necalli let go of Adam's arm.

He closed his eyes and willed his heart to slow, his fear and excitement to dissipate. A new heartbeat and breath flooded his senses. It was raw and beautiful and wild. It was Maxwell's. He opened his eyes and gazed down at his cousin, curled up on his side in only underwear and rumpled sheets, illuminated in the pale moonlight filtering in through the window. *Oh, God...* Heat rushed his groin, hardening him. He gulped.

Necalli pinched underneath Adam's arm in the soft flesh between his elbow and shoulder.

He jumped and palmed where he'd been pinched. Turning, he glared at Necalli. "What was that for?"

Necalli's lips pursed. "You know."

Maxwell stirred and rolled onto his back, throwing the sheets off his body. A clear erection thrust up under his briefs.

His cock jerked at the sight of his cousin's erection. His senses picked up a quickening heartbeat and fast breathing next to him, clear signs of arousal. He smirked at Necalli. "Seems he got to you, too."

Necalli huffed and palmed the hard flesh under his trousers, adjusting himself. "Did not." He crossed his arms over his chest.

Letting out a soft chuckle, he leaned over his cousin and gently shook his shoulder. "Max."

Maxwell mumbled and licked his lips.

"Hey, Max, wake up. It's Adam and Necalli."

Slowly, Maxwell's eyes fluttered and opened. He jumped and sat up with his knees bent. "Shit. What are you two doing here? What the hell time is it?"

Adam gestured with his hands. "Shh, keep your voice down. We don't want to wake anyone else."

Maxwell rubbed at his eyes with his fingers. "What's going on?"

"I need some information." Adam sat on the edge of Maxwell's bed.

Maxwell glanced at Necalli and at his clock. "It's after two in the morning. Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"Uh, you could say that." Adam gazed down at his hands, suddenly remembering the claws on them, and curled his fingers so his cousin wouldn't see them. "Listen, I can't tell you too much about it. But I need to know where Chelsea is docked."

"Why?" Maxwell's gaze swept over Adam. "You look...different. What happened to you?"

Adam glanced at Necalli. "N-nothing."

Maxwell sniffed at the air. "You smell different. You smell like Necalli. What, did you two start wearing the same aftershave?" Maxwell let out an anxious chuckle and stuffed his hands between his legs, clearly rubbing his thumb across his briefs, over his solid cock.

Lust seared through Adam, making his erection ache, and for a second, he almost lunged at his cousin.

Necalli seized Adam's arm, squeezing hard.

Gazing up at Necalli, Adam forced himself to calm. If it weren't for Necalli being here, he probably would have lunged at his cousin. He definitely had to be far away from him before tomorrow night.

"What's the matter, Adam?" Maxwell's legs parted and his thumb arced back and forth across his erection.

Adam's gaze was drawn to his cousin's groin. There was no

stopping it. He swooned, bringing his own hand between his legs, pressing on his swollen cock. His eyes closed and his breathing grew ragged as a wave of sensation pulsed through his body.

“That’s enough.” Necalli pulled Adam from the bed and grabbed Maxwell’s hand from between his legs.

“Hey.” Maxwell glared at Necalli.

Adam stumbled and straightened, struggling to force his need deep inside.

“We have to leave and Adam was hoping you would help us out. Where is Chelsea docked?” Necalli let Maxwell’s hand drop and stood up straight.

Maxwell’s gaze shifted from Necalli to Adam. “I, I think she’s docked in a slip at the yacht club. I don’t think my dad’s sent her out to be fixed yet.”

Adam stepped forward. “Which slip?”

Maxwell’s gaze dropped to his lap. “Uh, forty-four, I think. At least that’s where she was the last time I saw her.”

“What exactly is wrong with her?” Adam’s eyes were drawn to his cousin’s groin again, to the clear erection still filling Maxwell’s briefs.

Maxwell’s gaze lifted and fell to Adam’s lips.

His cousin’s arousal pounded in Adam’s ears, set all of his senses ablaze. He licked his lips and fought to keep himself steady, fought to focus on getting the information he needed.

“Sh-she just needed some varnishing and I-I think maybe a tune-up or something on the engine, but it runs okay as far as I know.” Maxwell’s hand dove between his legs, pressing on his solid cock. His eyes closed and a soft moan escaped his lips. “What’s going on, Adam? Why do I feel so strange around you?”

Necalli stepped between Adam and his cousin. “It’s nothing. Maybe you were dreaming of him before we arrived?”

Maxwell shook his head and pressed harder on himself, rocking forward. “Wh-why do you need to know about Chelsea?” He seemed dazed.

It took every ounce of Adam's resolve to maintain his distance from his cousin. "Listen, Max."

Maxwell let out a soft gasp and rocked forward again.

Necalli grabbed Maxwell's arms just above the wrist and lifted them up over his head.

"What are you doing?" Glaring at Necalli, Maxwell squirmed to free his arms.

Necalli held his arms tight. "You need to get a hold of yourself and listen to Adam."

Maxwell sighed and fixated on Adam. "Okay. What the hell is going on? Why do you need to know about Chelsea and how are you fucking with me like this?"

Adam's eyes widened in shock. "I'm not fucking with you."

"You are!" Maxwell yanked his arms free from Necalli's grasp and dropped them to his sides.

"Quiet, you'll wake everyone up." Adam stepped forward and nudged Necalli out of the way.

"Tell me what's going on or I promise you, I will wake everyone up."

Adam groaned. "It's true. Necalli and I are in a bit of trouble. We're going to take Chelsea and go somewhere. I don't know where yet. That's about all I can say about it."

"You mean you're stealing my dad's yacht and disappearing?" Maxwell's eyes shined in the darkness.

"Well, yes." Adam placed his hands on his hips and shifted his stance.

"What happened? I want you to tell me where you're going. I-I'll see you again, won't I?" Maxwell's eyes glistened as they filled with tears.

His heart ached. He couldn't tell him the truth. "You'll see me again. I just don't know when, okay? I really can't tell you anymore. It might be dangerous for you." He placed a hand on his cousin's shoulder.

Maxwell glared at Necalli, his lower lip trembling. "You did this, didn't you? It's all your fault my cousin has to leave and steal from his family."

Necalli was visibly shaken. "I-I'm sorry." He stepped back and dropped his head.

Adam squeezed his cousin's shoulder. "It's not his fault. It was a decision I made by myself that caused this. You won't tell Uncle Richard about this, will you?"

Maxwell lowered his head and shook it slowly. "No."

He sat on the bed beside his cousin and wrapped his arms around his shoulders. "Thank you."

Maxwell buried his face in Adam's neck. "Please let me know you're okay. Please let me see you again. Promise me." His voice wavered.

Adam tightened his hold on his cousin. "I promise. As soon as we get established, I'll send you a postcard, okay? Just don't say anything to anyone."

Lifting his head, Maxwell gazed into Adam's eyes. "I won't say a word." He sniffled and blinked, sending a tear racing down his cheek.

Necalli feigned a cough.

Turning, Adam glanced back at Necalli. Irritation showed on his lover's face. He let go of his cousin and faced him again. "Does your dad still keep his keys in the den?"

Maxwell nodded. "In that same drawer. All organized by the size of the boat."

He let out a soft chuckle. "Always was a bit obsessive about that."

Maxwell smirked. "He's going to be so pissed off when he finds out Chelsea is missing."

He nodded. "I know. But, at least she's going to me and I know better than anyone how to take care of her."

Maxwell's gaze rose to Adam's face. "Yeah. Good luck, Adam, and keep your damn promise." He swiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"I will." He rose from the bed and took hold of Necalli's hand before heading for the door. Taking one last glance at his cousin's sad face, he opened the door, stepped through with Necalli and shut it again.

Adam and Necalli moved soundlessly down the upstairs hallway, the stairs and slipped into the den.

Adam went to his uncle's desk and opened a side drawer. His vision sharpened, as if a glow illuminated whatever he focused on. The keys were there, all arranged in compartments by size as his cousin stated. Smirking, he picked up a set of keys, bound by a chain with a silver life preserver ring and read the letters engraved on it. "Chelsea," he whispered. Quietly, he shut the drawer and glanced at Necalli with a wide smile on his face. "Let's go."

Necalli nodded.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FINDING CHELSEA

Adam pulled his car up to a front parking spot in the lot of the St. Francis Yacht Club, pushed the stick shift into first and shut off the car. He peered out the windshield to the dark building in front of them. The moon illuminated the branches of cypress trees and tiles of the roof. He twisted his body to face Necalli, sitting next to him. “Grab your things and we’ll head to the boat.”

With a wide smile, Necalli popped his door open, climbed out and opened the back door to collect his things.

After getting out of the car, he opened the back door on his side, and grabbed hold of his suitcase. It seemed to change weight in his hand, growing lighter as he lifted it from his seat. As he stood and closed the door, a breeze ruffled his hair. “Damn, I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to this.”

Necalli closed his door and came around to Adam’s side. “Your eyes are glowing again.”

He glanced in the window of his car, seeing the same vision of himself he saw at his Aunt and Uncle’s house. “How long does it take to learn how to control this? I mean, I can’t just go around with glowing eyes whenever I get a little excited.”

Necalli took Adam’s hand. “Start now.”

Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and focused on calming himself. His pounding heart slowed and the suitcase became heavy again. He opened his eyes and looked in the car window. His eyes looked normal again. “There.”

Necalli squeezed Adam's hand. "Where are the boat slips?"

"Oh, right." He tilted his head toward the stucco and tile-roofed building in front of them. "Around back of the clubhouse." Releasing Necalli's hand, he walked out over an expanse of grass toward the building. Were there any night watchmen on duty? As his heart rate quickened again, the suitcase grew light and his steps floated.

"Adam..." Necalli caught up to Adam and frowned at him.

"I know. I'm not going to worry about it right now. No one can see me anyway." Picking up his pace, he turned the building's first corner and the second to see the boat docks stretched out like fingers over the water of the bay. The boats in the slips stood motionless in calm water. The occasional slap of a boat fender against the dock or small splash of water filled the air around them. Strolling along the waterfront, he looked over the numbers at the end of each dock, trying to determine which one held slip forty-four. He stopped. "Forty to fifty, it's here." Glancing at Necalli, he switched direction and walked out onto the dock.

Necalli stepped quick behind Adam, their shoes making a quick tapping sound over the wood planks as they went.

He looked ahead and picked out Chelsea among the other boats. "There she is." A wide smile played on his face as he walked out to the side of the boat and stopped. His eyes roamed over the familiar long, white hull as it curved to a sharp point and up to the teakwood cabin above the deck.

Necalli walked up to stand beside Adam.

He held his arm out toward the yacht. "Well? What do you think?" A proud grin swept over his face.

"It's nice."

"You bet ya it's nice. She's all of thirty feet, got a newer diesel engine, sleeps six and a galley you'll be proud to cook in."

"A what?" Necalli shifted his stance.

"A galley." He studied Necalli's confused expression. "A galley is the kitchen on a boat. Didn't Luke ever tell you that?"

Pain washed over Necalli's face as he looked down at the planks of the dock.

Regret threaded through his body. He shouldn't have reminded Necalli about his dead lover. He set his suitcase down and wrapped his arms around Necalli's shoulders, drawing him close. "I'm sorry. Guess I got excited and wasn't thinking."

"It's okay." Necalli stood stiff in Adam's embrace.

"No, it's not." He placed a tender kiss on Necalli's cheek. "I'm really sorry."

Necalli's body softened. "He was going to take me far away, too."

Surprise mixed with jealousy to race through his body. "He was?"

Necalli nodded and buried his face in Adam's neck. "He was going to take me back east, to where his family lived. His grandmother was an Indian, a Chippewa. He told me I looked like them. But he didn't know what I was. I never told him. I thought I could control it. I thought if I worked hard enough, I could..." His breath hitched. "Oh, Adam, I never meant to hurt him. I never—"

"I know. You don't have to talk about it anymore." He tightened his hold around Necalli and lowered his face into his shoulder. "It's all over and I *am* taking you out of here." Necalli's remorse filtered in on his heartbeat to fill his core. He held him tighter still. "I can literally feel how much this upsets you. I wish I could take the pain away for you."

Necalli pulled away from Adam and swiped his eyes with the back of his free hand. He gripped his suitcase with the other.

"Tell me one thing." He grabbed hold of Necalli's hand.

Sniffling, Necalli gazed up into Adam's face. "What?"

"Did you really lose your memories or did you just not want to tell me? Because you told Peter you were Chippewa the first time I took you into Frank's." He listened closely to the signals entering him with Necalli's heartbeat and breath,

attempting to sense any lies.

Necalli's gaze darted away from Adam.

"It's all right. I just want to know. I promise I won't be mad. I won't think any less of you."

"You don't trust me." Necalli's voice was small.

He ducked his head, trying to see into his lover's face.

"Necalli, please. Just answer my question."

Glaring, Necalli twisted his head to face Adam. "If I do, will you believe me?"

"Yes."

"You promise? And you'll never ask me again?"

"Yes, I promise." He squeezed Necalli's hand between them.

Necalli's gaze softened along with his voice. "I didn't remember. Bits and pieces came to me at different times, but I wasn't able to put it all together. When we were at Frank's, I just blurted out that I was Chippewa. I was as surprised as you. It wasn't until Acalan and Itzli found me that all my memories came back."

He searched his new senses. It all rang true. "I'm sorry I doubted you."

Necalli gulped, lifted his head and gave Adam a lingering kiss. "It's over, like you said."

A sly grin swept over his face. "And we have a new life to look forward to." He released Necalli's hand and swatted him in the ass. "Get on the damned boat already."

Necalli's eyes widened for a moment and a shy smile curled his lips just before he dashed onto the boat, flung the cabin door open and raced down wooden stairs, into the living quarters.

He chased Necalli onto the boat, feeling his body move with ease over the railing. He shut the door behind him as he entered the cabin and flew down the stairs, his suitcase bumping into the walls as he went.

Necalli dropped his suitcase in the main room and turned, waiting for Adam in near darkness.

He stopped, admiring his lover in the faint moonlight filtering in through the lower cabin windows. He dropped his suitcase to the floor and strolled to Necalli. "So, what should we do now?" He brushed a lock of black hair off Necalli's brow and ran his fingers down Necalli's cheek.

Necalli's head tilted with Adam's touch and his brows tensed. His breath and pulse quickened. "D-don't we have to leave?"

He slowly shook his head. "Not till tomorrow. I still have to go to the bank and get my money." Necalli's obvious arousal filled his senses, making his cock harden. He closed his eyes for a moment, trying to control himself. He wanted it to last this time.

"B-but won't your uncle—"

"He won't know the boat is gone until long after we're gone. The people here all know me. They won't question me being here. See? It's a perfect plan." A soft moan escaped him as a rush of desire raced down his spine. Just the mere whisper of having Necalli was almost too much for him.

Necalli took Adam's hand and brought it to his mouth, placing a soft kiss on his palm.

His erection jerked with Necalli's kiss.

"You don't need to sleep, do you." Necalli's eyes shined in the faint light as he gazed up at Adam.

"No, guess not." His heavy breath filled the space of the room.

"You will. After the full moon, you'll be exhausted. The newness of the fever and the full moon being so close is making you this way." A sly grin spread on Necalli's face. "*I do* need to sleep."

Disappointment hit him hard. His groin ached. "You mean you're turning me down?"

Necalli chuckled. "Yes." Turning, his eyes took in his surroundings. "Where's the bed?"

Rejection lodged in his chest. There was no way Necalli was getting away with this. Lunging forward, he seized Necalli's

arm and towed him to the largest sleeping quarters, off to the left.

“Adam!”

His vision sharpened, allowing him to see easily in the darkness.

“What are you doing?” Necalli’s voice held a hint of playfulness.

He flung Necalli to a bed, on his back.

Necalli gasped and squirmed.

Jumping onto the bed over Necalli, he straddled his lover.

A soft snicker escaped Necalli. “I won’t let you have me that easily.”

“Oh yeah?” Quickly unfastening the buttons of his shirt, he ripped it open and threw it to the floor. “Easy or hard, I will have you.” He worked on getting his trousers open.

Wiggling, Necalli made a feeble attempt to push Adam off him. “No you won’t. I’m going to sleep.”

He opened his pants and fell forward, grabbing Necalli’s wrists, throwing his arms up over his head, and pinning him down. Grinning, his eyes roamed up and down his imprisoned lover. “What was that?” The hard flesh of Necalli’s erection pressed up under him. He moved his hips around, grinding down over Necalli’s cock. “Seems I’m not the only one enjoying this.”

Necalli’s gaze turned hungry. “Let me take you.”

He stopped all movement and stared at Necalli. “What? Are you serious?”

A predatory grin spread over Necalli’s lips and his hips thrust up under Adam’s. “Very serious.”

Stunned, he released Necalli’s wrists and sat up straight. “I uh...” He never even considered this before. Fear and intrigue washed over him all at once. He raked his fingers through his hair. “Well...”

Necalli’s hands were quick to come down and run under the band of Adam’s boxers, caressing and rubbing the firm cock below the thin fabric.

Pleasure seared through his body, making his eyes close, his hips thrust forward and a low moan crawl from his mouth. "Damn."

Necalli's fingers and palm stroked Adam's shaft and swirled over the seeping head, rubbing Adam's pre-seed over his erection. "I want to make you feel as good as you make me feel."

"B-but won't it, uh, hurt?" Another long moan escaped his mouth. His head tilted back with a rush of sensation.

"I'll be careful. I'll prepare you." Necalli's voice was husky and ragged. He sat up in the bed, with Adam straddling his lap and pulled the front of Adam's boxers down to expose his pulsing cock. Quickly, he slicked his palm with saliva and came back down, placing fast jerks over Adam's erection.

Bucking his hips forward, he cried out and clutched at the bedcovers behind him. The urgency in his groin coiled for release. "Oh my God, you better hurry then."

A sly, ravenous grin spread across Necalli's lips. He pushed Adam off him and undressed in seconds. "Where's the Vaseline?"

He lay panting on his side on the bed. "In my s-suitcase." His hands reached down between his legs and pressed on his aching cock, unable to control the need filling his body.

Necalli jumped off the bed, ran into the other room and opened Adam's suitcase. His clawed fingers fumbled in the contents before he picked out the glass jar. With a wicked smile, he brought the jar back into the bedroom. "Stop touching yourself."

"I can't help it." He continued to press on his erection. It wasn't enough to satisfy, but enough to keep him on edge.

Necalli climbed onto the bed and grabbed Adam's arm, pulling his hand from between his legs.

He groaned in frustration.

Grasping hold of Adam's pants and boxers, Necalli lowered them down and off his legs. Reaching his hand up to his mouth, he bit off the nails on his index and second fingers and

spit the nails out onto the floor. He slicked his fingers with the Vaseline and rubbed it over his solid cock, gasping and tilting his head back for a moment as his hand ran over the head and squeezed. He trailed his fingers through the gel another time and placed his hand into the crevice of Adam's behind.

His eyes popped open and his hips thrust forward. "Hey."

Necalli came down to hover above Adam on his forearm. His head lowered over Adam and his lips crushed Adam's in a heated kiss. His tongue probed and entered Adam's mouth, flicking behind his teeth, while his fingers circled Adam's passage.

A strange but wondrous sensation hummed in Adam's groin. Each stroke of Necalli's fingers made his cock jerk and his need heighten. He kissed Necalli with all the passion welling up inside him, making his lips tingle all the way through to the pleasure in his groin. Low moans came out of him, one after another, as Necalli's adept fingers worked to relax his entrance.

Slowly, Necalli pushed a finger inside Adam. He lifted his head and gazed down at him, waiting. "Are you okay?"

He squirmed. "Yeah, I think so. It feels...weird, but not bad."

A faint grin spread over Necalli's face and he placed a quick kiss on Adam's mouth. Inserting a second finger into Adam, he pushed them both deeper and stroked.

A blinding jolt of pleasure rippled through Adam, making his erection pulse and pre-seed bead over the tip. "Oh my God. What did you do?"

Necalli smiled. "This?" He stroked Adam's insides again.

His hips thrust forward. His climax surged to a raw edge. His body trembled. "If you do that again, I'm not responsible for what'll happen."

Necalli's fingers slowly backed out of Adam's entrance. "You're ready."

As the fingers left his passage, he groaned.

"Sit up."

“What?” He looked up at Necalli, sitting on the bed, his cock standing tall and firm and slick. “I said, sit up.”

He sat up and Necalli guided him to straddle his lap with his legs bent underneath him. His erection rubbed over Necalli’s taut stomach while Necalli’s hard cock stroked his passage, driving him crazy with need. “What do I do?”

Necalli grabbed hold of Adam’s shoulders. “Look at me. Use your legs for support and lower yourself down onto me. This way, you’ll have control of it.”

Apprehension threaded through him. “Control of what?” His gaze searched Necalli’s face.

“Of me entering you.” Necalli’s eyes burned with lust and his breathing grew heavy. “Do it, Adam.”

Slowly, he adjusted his body, placing the head of Necalli’s erection at his entrance. He stopped.

Necalli groaned and shut his eyes. “Do it, please, Adam.” Desire laced his voice.

“Um, okay.” He lowered himself in a gradual decent, feeling Necalli’s hard cock enter past his opening. Burning filled him for a moment, but was replaced by a delicious pressure. As he remembered the feel of Necalli’s fingers over the spot inside him, he let out a soft moan. Sexual hunger rushed through him and he came down hard over Necalli, filling himself in one swift motion. A sharp gasp mixed with Necalli’s loud cry to fill the room.

Necalli held Adam tight and pulled his cock out of Adam only to drive it back up, fast and hard.

He cried out as Necalli’s erection stroked his insides, pouring delicious pleasure and searing heat inside him. He craved more. Rocking forward onto his legs, he pushed up and down, over and over, in time with Necalli’s thrusting hips. An internal climax rushed to the surface, but teetered on the edge, making him gasp and pant. The sensation inside him taunted and teased with the promise of a sweet release, but wouldn’t bring it through.

“Does it feel good?” Strain laced through Necalli’s voice.

He clung to Adam's torso.

"Y-yes, Oh God yes, it feels incredible." He shut his eyes tight and let the sensation control his movements.

Necalli's hand came up between them and grasped Adam's seeping cock. He jerked his palm over it.

Intense pleasure rippled through him, pushing him over the edge, uncoiling the tension in his groin. He surrendered, letting out sharp gasps, allowing his climax to pulse through him, to spurt his seed high up on his chest and over Necalli's pumping hand.

Necalli's body went rigid as he drove hard into Adam and held it for a moment. His teeth clenched and his toes curled. He pulled out and drove back in, crying out as his climax erupted into Adam.

He held Necalli tight, enjoying the look of pure, carnal pleasure on his lover's face. As Necalli's actions slowed, he placed quick kisses over Necalli's cheek, forehead and nose.

Necalli grinned and relaxed his hold on Adam. "Adam..."

"What?" He continued the assault of tiny kisses.

Necalli chuckled. "What are you doing?"

He stopped and gazed deep into Necalli's eyes. "I love you and I thank you for that."

Tears filled Necalli's eyes, shimmering in the dark. "You know how much I love you. I can't thank you enough for all you've done for me, all you've sacrificed."

He smiled. "And I'd do it all again in a heartbeat."

Placing a hand on Adam's cheek, Necalli gave him a lingering kiss.

"We should get some sleep now, I guess." He rose off Necalli's softening cock. As it slipped out, a shiver raced up his spine. "Damn, now I know why you like that so much."

Soft chuckles filled the room.

Adam stepped onto the boat with filled paper bags in both hands, opened the cabin door and took one quick glance at the men in club uniforms hustling about the yacht club building in

the early morning sun. Sighing, he walked inside and shut the door behind him.

He made his way down the steps and took in the full amenities Chelsea offered. Large, square windows let in the view of the docks and bay from all sides of the main room between teakwood panels. Two blue and gold striped sofas sat opposite each other with a rosewood coffee table between and end tables on either side. Colorful tiffany lamps sat on the end tables and a slew of yachting magazines littered the coffee table.

Adam turned at the bottom of the stairs and made his way into the galley. He passed a dining table with six chairs, upholstered in the same color and pattern as the couches. He set the paper bags down on a white tile counter and popped a few cupboards open before finding the coffee pot.

Poor Necalli was still sleeping. A smile spread across his lips. He really wore him out last night. He filled the coffee filter and placed the pot into a porcelain sink. He turned the chrome spigot and filled the pot with cool water. As he turned to set the coffee pot on the stove, movement caught his eye.

He looked toward the table to see Necalli wiping at his eyes with the back of his hands, yawning. A white, terrycloth robe threatened to drown him in fluffy softness. His black hair lay mussed over his shoulders.

“Well, look who’s finally up.” He turned and placed the coffee pot on a gas stove.

Necalli padded to stand next to Adam.

Adam turned the black knob on the stove. Clicking followed by the whoosh of the burner catching swept over his ears. He twisted to Necalli and wrapped his arms around him, drawing him close. “While you were spending a nice lazy morning in bed, I went to the bank and the store. We’re all stocked and ready to go.”

Necalli gazed up at Adam. Sleep still made his eyelids heavy. “Does that mean we’re leaving?”

“Yep, right after breakfast. I’m starved.” He kissed the top

of Necalli's head.

Necalli buried his face in Adam's shoulder. "Just give me a few minutes and I'll make you something. You feel too good right now."

He swayed Necalli in his arms and let his cheek rest on his head. "You can have whatever you want."

"I can't believe this is real." Necalli's head buried deeper into Adam's shoulder.

"What, that we're leaving?"

"Just everything. That I have you, that Acalan and Itzli are gone, that I no longer have to live on those islands and be subject to the whims of the Ohlone shaman. It doesn't seem real."

He kissed the top of Necalli's head. "It is real. Get used to it. We can sail around the world if you want."

Lifting his head, Necalli gazed into Adam's eyes. "Really?"

He smiled. "Yes."

"Can I see where your people came from? Can I see Europe?"

He gazed toward the living area for a moment. "Well, yes, eventually. It is kind of far away, but we'll get there if that's where you want to go."

"It is." A soft grin lit up Necalli's face.

"First I need breakfast and we have to get the boat out of here." He placed a quick kiss on the tip of Necalli's nose.

Necalli nodded. "I love you, Adam."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

EVERYTHING

Adam stepped out onto the portside deck and closed the cabin door behind him. He took in his stunning lover, black hair billowing out behind him as he stood at the bow in a dark sweater and trousers with his arms crossed on his chest.

The sun hung low in a clear sky, sending hues of orange and deep blue to dance above their heads and twinkle in the ocean. The cool wind twirled Adam's hair as the boat drifted in the waves.

A content grin curled Adam's lips as he walked forward over the wooden planks of the deck, toward Necalli, steadying himself on grab rails. When he neared his beautiful lover, he wrapped his arms around him from behind and buried his face into his neck, taking in the familiar scent of spice and wood.

Tilting his head into Adam, Necalli let out a soft sigh and placed his hands over Adam's forearm. "Dinner should almost be ready."

"Good, I'm starved." He gave Necalli a tight squeeze.

"Are there really islands out here?" Necalli's eyes remained fixed on the open expanse of sea before them.

"Yes, according to my uncle's chart there are. I know the seals roam all up and down this coast, so there should be plenty of them, too."

A shiver shook Necalli's body.

"Are you cold?" He placed a soft kiss on Necalli's cheek.

"Maybe a little." Necalli leaned back into Adam's body as if taking in what warmth he could.

He chuckled. "Then why are you standing out here all alone?"

Necalli's head lowered. "I don't know. I suppose I just wanted to see what was out there. It seems I'm just now realizing how big the world really is. How much I've missed all these hundreds of years."

"Wow, hundreds. It sounds incredible to me that you've really lived so long." He looked out over the ocean as if seeing it for the first time. "I still can't believe I'm going to live that long. Holy shit."

Necalli turned in Adam's embrace, facing him. His gaze came up to look directly into Adam's eyes. "We'll see it all together, won't we, Adam?"

"Yes, we will." He gave Necalli a lingering kiss, tasting the velvet sweetness of his lips. "So how about that dinner?"

Necalli smiled. "I'll get it on the table."

He released Necalli and took his place on the deck, gazing out over the ocean and the lowering sun. Something stirred inside him, something he couldn't quite explain. It was as if his blood grew hot in his veins and his legs begged to run. A steady restlessness tried to overtake him. Was it the fever? He looked up into the sky and saw the full moon rising as the sun set.

Fear ebbed over him. What would happen tonight? When would this thing inside him turn him into a monster? How would it feel?

He shook his head and turned back toward the cabin, taking careful steps across the deck and back to the door. It was too late to turn back now. All he could do was wait and find an island with seals so they could feed. He opened the door, stepped into the cabin and shut the door behind him. The scent of braised beef floated on the air around him and made his stomach growl. The clanking of dishes rose up from down below. He went to the stairs and hopped down them.

“Okay, it’s all ready.” Necalli took a seat at the table.

He strode to the table and sat at a chair next to Necalli, looking down at a blue plate with slices of brisket with gravy blanketed over top along and an assortment of cooked vegetables. A tall glass of orange juice sat at the top of his plate. “Wow, you’ve outdone yourself.”

Necalli smiled at Adam and picked up his fork. “Thank you. I figured we should have something special on our first full moon together.” He poked at a carrot with his fork.

“About that, what’s going to happen to me, exactly?” He lifted his orange juice glass to his lips and took a sip.

Necalli shrugged. “I’m not exactly sure.”

“Ah, I see. You’re going to tell me it’s different for everybody. But maybe you could just tell me what it’s like for you?” He set his juice down. “At least then I’d have some clue as to what to expect.”

Necalli gulped down a bite of food. “Well...” His gaze travelled from his plate up to Adam’s face and his brows furrowed. “It’s hard to say because I don’t usually remember much of it.”

He sat forward, stunned. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t get angry, Adam.” Necalli picked at a piece of beef with his fork and knife.

“I’m not angry. I just want to know what to expect.” He certainly didn’t want to hear any more about not remembering. They’d better be over that little episode of their lives.

“But you sound angry.” Necalli lifted his gaze again to Adam’s eyes.

“I’m not. Please, just tell me what you know.” He did his best to control his voice and make it at least sound calm.

Necalli continued to play with the food on his plate.

“There’s something you’re not telling me, isn’t there?”

Necalli’s head shook slowly. “N-no.”

“What is it?”

Necalli sighed. “It’s like being in a dream. Everything you feel now you’ll feel a hundred-fold.”

He let his gaze wander down to Necalli's plate. "Everything?"

Necalli's eyes lifted again. "Yes. Everything."

He gulped. "Well, that could be really good, or really bad."

"Uh, yes." Necalli's eyes glazed over. "Just don't be mad when it happens, okay?"

A smirk played over his lips. "Maybe we should be naked in bed when it happens." He lifted a large piece of brisket to his mouth and stuffed it in.

Necalli's face flushed. "Maybe."

A small chuckle escaped him while he chewed. "Why are you blushing? You can't tell me that embarrasses you, not after everything we've done together."

Shrugging, Necalli's eyes shifted to the windows beside them. "It'll just be different, that's all."

"Fine. I can see I'm not going to get much out of you." He took another sip of juice. "Guess I'll just have to wait and find out."

Adam steered Chelsea close to a small island of long grasses and rock. He could already make out the outlines of seals on the shore in the quickly dimming light. The last speck of sun just disappeared into the horizon and restlessness threaded through every fiber of his body. Emotions churned inside him, one after another as if spinning on an internal wheel. He hit a lever for the engine, making it whirl backward for a moment before shutting it off. Necalli came up the steps and stopped in front of him, still at the helm. "So, that does it. Let's drop the anchor and get in the dinghy so we can go ashore."

Necalli nodded his head, turned and left the cabin for the bow of the boat.

As he stepped out the door of the cabin, the boat lurched to a stop. Raking a hand through his hair, he shut the door behind him and walked toward the aft of the boat. He looked up. A dinghy hung between two posts at the stern, balanced by a system of ropes and pulleys. He untied two ropes and

unhooked a set of gears, allowing him to swing the posts and the dinghy out over the water. "Necalli, I need some help!"

Necalli walked out from behind the cabin on the starboard side and stopped at the far post.

"Take hold of that rope and help me lower her down into the water."

Necalli nodded, untied the rope and waited for Adam's direction.

"Let the rope out slowly." Watching the boat lower, he let his rope out in time with Necalli's. The dinghy hit the water with a splash and swayed in the ripple of waves. Fear and excitement came to him, riding along Necalli's heartbeat to mix with his own. He walked to Necalli and draped his arm around his shoulders. "You okay?"

Necalli's gaze rose from the deck to Adam's face. "Yes. I'm just..." He sighed. "A little nervous. I just hope it'll turn out okay."

"Of course it will. What could possibly go wrong?"

A smirk crossed Necalli's lips. "Nothing, nothing at all."

"Let's get in the dinghy and out to the island then." With a quick kiss, he released Necalli and walked to the stern of the boat. He unlatched a gated section of the side, swung it open, and latched it again in the open position. He glanced back at Necalli. "Come on."

With a smirk still planted on his face, Necalli crouched down and jumped. His body flew in a blur over Adam to land squarely in the center of the dinghy with a loud thump.

He let out a soft chuckle. "Well, that's one way of getting off the boat." His head shook as he lowered himself onto a metal ladder and down into the dinghy. He took a seat opposite Necalli. "Okay hot-shot, you can row us ashore."

A wide smile played on Necalli's face. "You can move like that, too."

"Yeah well, I'm afraid if I tried at the moment I'd end up overshooting it and land in the ocean." Prickling raced over his skin. "I think we better hurry. Something doesn't feel, uh, quite

right.”

Reaching down, Necalli unhooked the oars and dipped the flat tips into the water, pulling them back and making the boat slice through small waves. “I know, I feel it, too.”

Necalli’s powerful strokes made the boat move quickly over the water and in a few minutes, they were pulling the boat onto a rocky shoreline.

Adam straightened after tugging the boat completely out of the water, and looked out over the island. “Jesus, this island’s probably only 100 yards wide.”

Necalli nodded. “It’s time.”

“Wha—” Heat seared his body, making an instant sweat break out over his skin. He looked down at his hands. The clawed nails lengthened and appeared to sharpen. “Holy shit.” As he spoke, sharp teeth elongated over his lower lip. The island lit up in an orange-yellow glow. His gaze shifted to the seals, maybe ten feet away and squawking. Deep red rivulets raced across their bodies as if he could see their very blood flowing under their skin.

His gaze shifted to Necalli and an intense hunger raged in the core of his body. Reaching a hand out, he placed a soft touch on his forearm. The touch further enflamed the hunger and thirst. He yearned to taste him, now. “Necalli...” His demon lover turned to face him, his eyes glowing yellow. Lust and hunger rippled through him on Necalli’s heartbeat. Necalli’s quickening breath raced over his skin as if to touch every part of him, hardening his cock in an instant.

“Adam, I need you.”

He licked his lips and gulped, feeling parched like never before.

Necalli brought his hands to his groin and pushed, letting out a low moan. “Please.”

All at once, he pinned Necalli below him over the hard beach. His hips thrust in a violent rhythm while his teeth sought flesh and his body craved blood. A rush of sweet fluid flooded his mouth as his fangs entered soft tissue. A sharp

pain punctured his neck and pulsed waves of need through his body and into his aching cock. On and on it went, lapping, sucking, thrusting, and a mounting need fed by harsh pleasure.

The ripping of fabric swept over his ears. His erection fell between hot thighs and drove in and up, rubbing against hard flesh. Feral growls filled his head, swimming in a whirlpool of sensations. Sharp tension coiled in his groin. An eruption shook his whole body as his climax surged out of him, forcing his seed to spurt in severe contractions over his stomach.

Necalli writhed and cried out, a long, guttural cry—his mouth full of Adam's blood, as his hot seed mixed with Adam's to cover their chests.

Sharp nails dug into Adam's buttocks, spurning him on, forcing him to keep sucking, drinking his lover's blood. Delicious tension coiled in his gut, in his still hard cock again, only to release a second time. Intense pleasure tightened his sac, racked his body and sent his mind reeling.

Necalli's seed pulsed between them again, with another long, guttural cry of pleasure.

His thinking mind gave way to the animal inside, to the hunger within. He thrust harder, more urgent, into Necalli and felt another climax building, taunting with every frenzied movement of his body.

Thrashing, screaming, the taste of blood, it all mixed together into an insatiable dance, a never-ending cycle of stimulation, of crashing to the brink and tumbling in ecstasy over the edge.

Soon he moved with quick, agile motions, slashing with his claws, thrusting his fangs deep into hard skin and blubber to find more and more blood. He attacked with claws and fangs, sometimes with Necalli, sometimes without, every living creature within his reach. His voracious appetite spurred him on in a blur of racing heartbeats and panting breath.

Adam's body shivered, despite the warm, naked body wrapped around him from behind. His eyes fluttered open to a

haze of dark splotches and ripped flesh. Carnage, it was the only way to describe the sights around him.

He lifted his head and let his eyes fully take in the scene in front of him. The sun's first rays cut through a clear blue sky to light a patchwork of deep burgundy pools surrounding ravaged seal carcasses. The long grasses were flattened and soiled and rocks were littered with fragments. Of what, he didn't want to know. Groaning, he turned onto his back.

Necalli scooted out from under him and sat up with his arms straightened behind him.

Looking up into the deep blue of the sky, his mind crept back to the night before. What was that exactly? Did it really happen? It all seemed like a dream to him. Maybe he didn't really change after all. His gaze dropped to the side. A gash oozed in a lump of flesh just out of reach. Oh yes, it happened all right.

"Are you okay?" Necalli drew his legs up and wrapped his arms around his torso.

"Yeah, I think so. Just trying to figure out if what I remembered really happened." A shiver rippled down his spine.

"It happened."

"I know." He sat up and let his eyes wander down his naked body. Blood crusted over his skin like body paint in a macabre play. "Wow." He glanced at Necalli.

Crimson marred Necalli's bronze skin as if someone had splashed him with it. Necalli's gaze followed Adam's. "Yeah, it's a bit messy."

He let out a soft chuckle. "You think?"

Necalli shifted and stood up. He held a hand out to Adam. "Come on, let's get cleaned up."

He looked up at Necalli's lean body, dumbfounded for a moment. "Ah, okay." Grasping Necalli's hand, he hoisted himself up to his feet. "Where the hell are my clothes, anyway?"

Reaching up, Necalli covered his smirking lips with a

clawed hand. "I sort of ripped them off you last night."

He grinned. "You did, did you? Well, I suppose next time we'll have to start off naked. Otherwise, we'll go through a lot of clothes." He turned to the dinghy, still sitting on the far shore, and started walking, draping an arm around Necalli's waist.

"Adam?"

"Yes."

"I need some new books." Necalli's head tilted to rest on Adam's shoulder.

"Uh, okay. Maybe tomorrow we can get some in Portland or something." He squeezed Necalli as they strolled down the rock-strewn beach.

"And Adam?"

"What?"

"When will we get to Europe?"

"Impatient little bastard, aren't you." Smiling, he placed a tender kiss on the top of Necalli's head. "But I wouldn't have it any other way. You are everything to me."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christie Gordon's first loves were art and science. She gave way to her passion for art for many years after getting an education in engineering and business and worked in the high tech industry in California's Silicon Valley. Her career allowed her to travel the world, Australia, Africa, Europe, and Asia. After moving to Arizona to be close to her family, she married, gave birth to her son, Jared, and adopted a second son from Russia, Nicholas. When her boys were old enough to attend school, her passion for art flared once again and a new passion, writing, took hold of her. Now, she lives in a small town on the outskirts of Phoenix with her sons, Jared and Nicholas, and dog Riza, enjoying a life filled with writing and art, friends and family. For more information, log on to: www.christiegordon.com