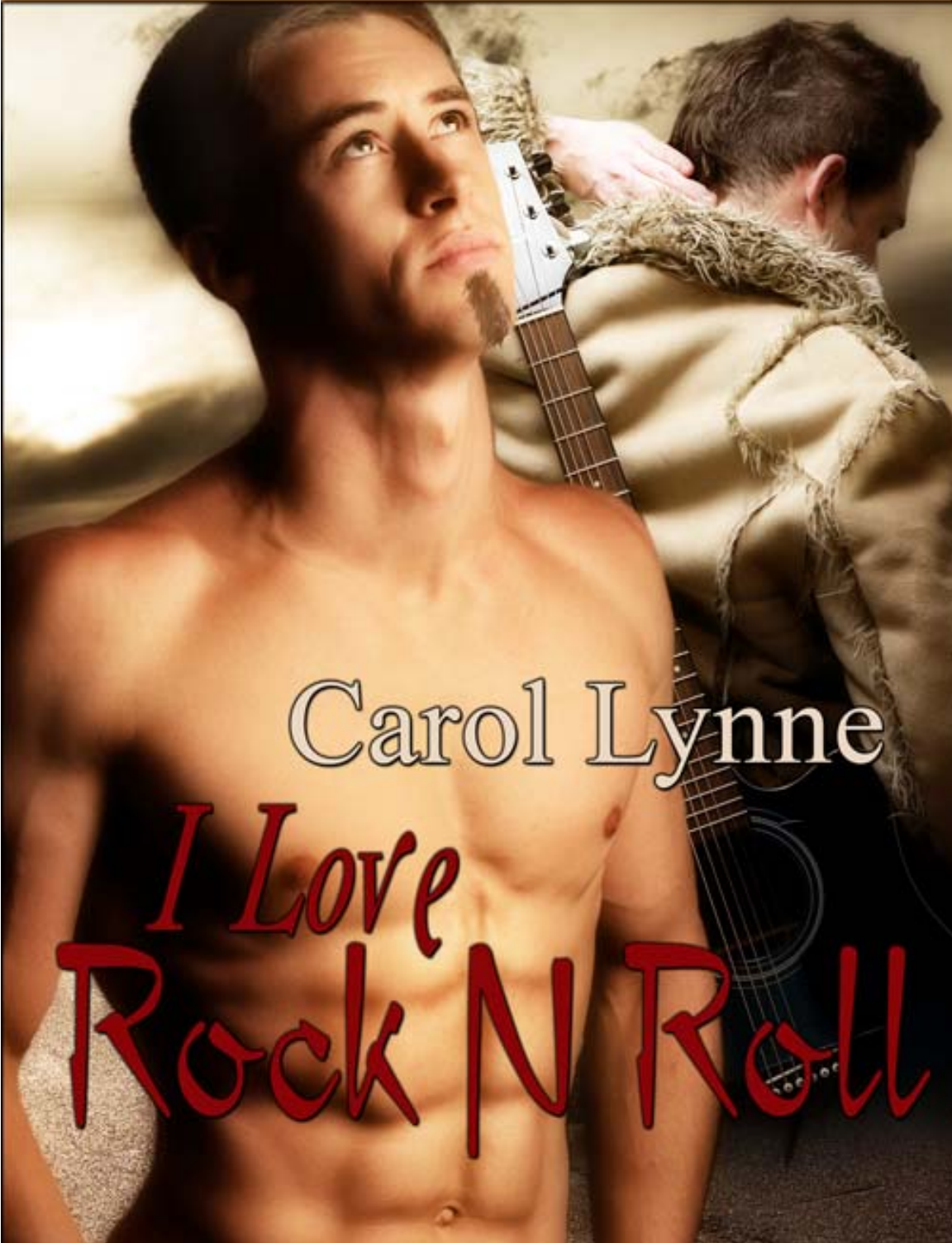




Bodyguards in Love



Carol Lynne

I Love
Rock N Roll

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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I Love Rock 'n' Roll

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

Bodyguards in Love

I LOVE ROCK N ROLL

Carol Lynne

Dedication

For my new friend Leiland Dale, and to the wonderful members of my yahoo group who laughed and fought over the title for this book.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

El Camino SS: General Motors Corporation

Rolling Stone: Wenner Media LLC

Smoke on the Water: sung by Deep Purple

Chapter One

With his worn leather bag slung over his shoulder, he stepped up to the reception desk. "Archer Brant to see Keifer Zane."

He hated using a name other than his own, but the public seemed to think they had a right to know who the man was who'd won a spot in Keifer's bed. So far, Archer Brant had been investigated by every tabloid on the newsstands. He was damn glad the agency had created complete false identities for all their bodyguards.

The young woman at the front desk picked up a phone and spoke quietly to someone. She ended the call and passed a key card to Archer. "PH three. Fit the key card into the provided slot when you enter the elevator."

"Thanks," Archer replied.

"Do you have bags?" the woman asked to Archer's retreating back.

"Just this one and I think I can handle it," Archer assured her. No way was he going to tip some shmoe to carry his bag upstairs. He stepped onto the elevator and fit the card in the slot.

Although he'd spoken to Jimmy several times on the phone, he hadn't seen the rock star for nearly three months. He was supposed to meet up with Jimmy in Philadelphia, but flights had been screwed up to the point it didn't make sense. After apologising profusely for the mix-up, Archer had agreed to fly to Los Angeles for the next leg of Jimmy's tour. *Shit. I need to remember to use Keifer instead of Jimmy.*

The doors opened and Archer carried his bag to room three of the penthouse floor. He grinned and shook his head at the large double door to the suite. He knocked on the door and was surprised when a guy he didn't know answered.

"Hey, you're that guy!" the unknown man said.

"Yes I am. And you are?" Archer questioned.

"Yo, man, I'm Dreamer."

"Of course you are." Archer pushed inside and glanced around the large living room. Every available surface was taken up with long-haired kids all below the age of thirty in baggy ripped jeans.

"Where's Ji-Keifer?"

One of the guys pointed towards a closed door. "Been in there all day."

Archer gave the slugs one last glance before striding over to knock on the door.

"I told you to leave me the fuck alone," Keifer yelled.

Archer took a chance and opened the door, sticking his head inside the room. "It's Archer."

The lump in the large bed rolled over and for the first time in months, Keifer smiled at him. "Hey, old man. It's about time you got here."

Archer snorted as he tossed his bag to the floor. "Old man? That's a bold statement for someone only three years younger than I am."

Keifer put his finger to his lips. "Shhh, I'm only twenty-eight, remember?"

Archer laughed and fell onto one of the large overstuffed chairs. "Yeah and you started in the business when you were only thirteen."

Archer wondered what it would be like to live a lie in order to appeal to your fans. "So what time do we need to head out?" he asked, throwing his feet up on the end of the bed.

Keifer sat up and scrubbed his hands through his hair.

Getting his first good look at Keifer, Archer's eyes widened. "Wow. Someone got a haircut." The last time he'd seen Keifer, the man had long black hair nearly to the middle of his back.

"Yeah. I needed to cut it back home. Mom's neighbours didn't feel comfortable with a damn hippy living next door." Keifer grinned and Archer grinned in return.

"I like it."

Keifer laughed. "You're the only one. Benny's been all up in my ass demanding I get some extensions put on." Keifer winked. "I've refused."

"Good man. He told me to dye the tips of my hair black. My boss told him to fuck off."

Keifer continued laughing as he stood and stretched. Clad only in a tight pair of white trunks, Archer was forced to look away or suffer the embarrassment of an obvious woody.

"I'd better get in the shower. We need to head to the stadium in thirty minutes."

Archer nodded, suddenly remembering the men in the other room. "By the way, what's with the groupies?"

Keifer waved his hand. "Roadies. Benny didn't want me alone until you got here."

Archer's eyebrow lifted. "Trouble?"

Keifer shook his head. "I got another letter. I'd have just added it to the stack, but Benny freaked."

"From now on, I open your mail," Archer stated in an authoritative tone, hoping Keifer wouldn't argue with him.

Keifer nodded amicably and walked into the bathroom.

Archer's job would actually be a lot easier if he didn't like the guy so much. Keifer was nothing like Archer had imagined. He'd seen the guy on television for years. It seemed Keifer was always in the headlines, either by attending Hollywood parties, rocking out on stage for charity or in news clips.

Archer shook his head. The guy currently in the shower was nothing like the man Archer thought he was. *That's because Jimmy Cook is in the shower, not Keifer Zane.* It didn't matter how many times Keifer had asked Archer to call him Jimmy when they were alone, Archer refused.

Archer had spent the time away from Keifer trying to get his head on straight. He had a job to do, one that didn't involve fucking his client into oblivion. Jimmy was definitely his type, while Keifer was the kind of guy he'd always steered clear of. Archer had found out the hard way how difficult it was trying to make a relationship work between two workaholics. He'd been burned before and refused to step into a situation that couldn't succeed.

Crossing to the mirror, Archer studied his reflexion. Seb sent him on this particular assignment because of the way he looked. If someone didn't already know what he did for a living, they would never be able to guess. Archer looked nothing like a bodyguard. He was smaller than the average guard at only five ten and one hundred and eighty pounds, but evidently Seb didn't think he'd have a bit of trouble passing for a groupie. Archer supposed it had something to do with either his light-brown soul patch or his unruly blond hair, perhaps both. The diamond earrings probably didn't help either. He grinned and studied his lean face. Although he could use a touch-up shave, he decided he could more easily pass for a rock fan without one. He reached down and picked up his bag, tossing it onto the bed.

He pulled out his tightest pair of jeans and a Keifer Zane concert T-shirt. Zipping up his suitcase, his gaze wandered to the bed that only moments earlier had cradled Jimmy's body. He spotted the faint spunk stains on the sheet and wondered if they were from Jimmy's own hand or if Keifer had brought one of the boy toys from the living room to his bed.

Archer's jaws clenched at the thought. No way would he fuck around with someone with access to almost any gay man he wanted. Horny or not, he'd do best to stay far away from acting on his attraction.

The bathroom door opened and Keifer came back into the bedroom on a cloud of steam. Archer noticed he wasn't the only one deferring an afternoon shave. With a white towel wrapped precariously around his hips, Keifer walked to the large closet.

"What's the temperature outside?" Keifer asked.

Archer chuckled. "It's LA."

"Hot. Right." Keifer selected a pair of low-rise black leather pants and a matching leather vest. "Oh, Benny finally talked Jesse into rehab, so we've got a new bass player for this leg of the tour."

"Name?" Archer asked, crossing to the small desk in front of the window. He found a small pad of paper and pen and waited.

"Tim Kroger, but he goes by Kog,"

Archer's pen hovered above the paper. "Kog?"

"Yeah," Keifer confirmed.

"Is that with a C or a K?"

"K," Keifer said, swiping his hand across his bare chest.

Archer couldn't seem to take his eyes off the twin silver hoops that dangled from Keifer's dark brown nipples. He felt his cock begin to stir. *Shit. Not now.*

Archer dropped the pen and focussed on getting dressed. He turned his back to Keifer, not wanting the man to see his predicament. He unbuttoned his jeans and pushed them down and off, keeping his underwear in place. "According to the schedule I got, we're due to leave on the bus tonight for San Francisco. Why not just drive up in the morning?"

"I tend to get carsick, so it's better if I ride at night when I can sleep through it," Keifer answered, coming up behind Archer.

Archer jerked when he felt Keifer's hand on his lower back.

Keifer ran his fingertips over the long thick scar. "What's this from?"

Archer glanced over his shoulder and pulled his jeans on. "Knife."

Trying like hell to fight his body's reaction to the touch, Archer reached for the T-shirt and pulled it over his head. When the soft material reached Keifer's hand, Keifer got the hint and retreated back towards the closet.

"Your job is pretty dangerous, huh?" Keifer asked.

After digging in his bag for a clean pair of socks, Archer turned and sat on the bed. "It can be if you're not on your A game. That's why I try to stay alert at all times. Distractions can mean the difference between life and death."

He had to remember that. It was the number one rule in the bodyguard business. This assignment wasn't like the others. Rarely was he actually told to kiss and fondle his clients in front of others. But, Seb was right on this one. Playing the part of a love sick groupie would be to his advantage. He just hoped he could pull it off without having it spill over into his personal life.

With his retro, canvas sneakers in place, Archer stood and dug out his comb, toothbrush and toothpaste.

Keifer noticed what Archer held in his hands and smiled. "Getting your breath all minty fresh for me?"

Archer rolled his eyes and continued on to the bathroom. "By the way, I'm gonna need to see the most recent fan mail. Did Benny keep that latest letter or do you still have it?"

He refused to think about kissing Keifer. They'd only kissed a couple of times before Keifer had taken time off to be with his dying mother, but those times had been hot, too hot. To make matters worse, it seemed the more Keifer was caught in public displays of affection, the more his fans ate it up. Evidently there was something extremely sexy to the Keifer Zane fans of the world about seeing their favourite rock icon doing something out of the norm.

Keifer appeared to lean against the bathroom doorjamb. "I can't remember if Benny gave it back or not, but the others are on my bus."

Archer spit into the sink and wiped his mouth on a hand towel. "And nothing strange happened when you were back in Des Moines?"

Keifer shook his head. "No. Like I told your boss, to the people I grew up with I'm still Jimmy. It's not like I go to the mall or anything when I'm home. I try to stick around the house as much as possible."

Archer nodded and started styling his hair. "Can I use some of your product? I didn't get a chance to get more before I left this morning."

"Sure." Keifer stepped passed Archer, brushing Archer's back with his vest clad chest. He reached around Archer and held up a jar. "Keep it. I've got more."

Archer met Keifer's gaze in the mirror as he reached up to take the jar. "Thanks."

"Anytime."

There was a loud knock on the bedroom door, breaking the spell Archer had been trapped in by Keifer's dark blue eyes.

"That'll probably be Benny. At least he knocked this time." Keifer left the bathroom and headed to the door.

Archer closed his eyes and willed his erection to deflate. The first boom of Benny's irritating voice succeeded in getting Archer's body under control. He quickly applied the product to his hair, making sure it was even spikier than normal.

When he stepped back into the bedroom, Keifer was sitting on the end of the bed with his arms crossed over his perfectly sculpted chest, staring at his manager. Benny stood in front of the window, obviously unconcerned by Keifer's mood.

"What's up?" Archer asked.

"The concert in Vegas sold out within thirty minutes. They've been begging me to add another show," Keifer informed Archer.

"And?" Archer wasn't sure what the problem was, but from the scowl on Keifer's face, the man wasn't happy.

"We don't have another date built into the schedule, which means I'd have to do another show the same night." Keifer glanced from Archer to Benny. "Which is impossible and Benny knows it."

"It's a lot of fucking money, Keifer. Pull up your goddamn big boy pants and just agree to it," Benny blustered.

Archer had witnessed firsthand Keifer's exhaustion after a show. He agreed with Keifer, there was simply no way Keifer could do two and still maintain the energy level his shows were known for. "The extra money isn't going to be much help when Keifer ends up in the hospital."

Benny's face went even redder as he turned his focus on Archer. "We're not paying you to have an opinion on this."

"You're wrong, Benny. I'm the one paying Archer, and I'm always interested in what he has to say." Keifer said as he stood to lean towards Benny.

Benny shook his head like he couldn't believe what he was hearing. He turned to Archer again. "You must be fucking him already. Keifer's a sucker for a man with a big dick."

Archer reared back to punch the sonofabitch, but Keifer beat him to it with a slap across Benny's face.

"Fuck off, Benny. What I do in my bedroom is absolutely none of your business."

"It is when you start taking financial advice from a bodyguard," Benny screamed back.

Archer grinned. He'd put his stock portfolio up against Benny's any day of the week. He may only be a bodyguard, but he had enough money to retire any time he wanted. Archer seriously doubted Benny could say the same.

Deciding the situation needed to be defused, Archer stepped between the two men. With a comforting hand on Keifer's chest, he stared at the face that threatened to suck him in. "Let it go. You've got a performance in a couple of hours. Save your energy for the people who pay big bucks to see you."

Keifer tore his narrowed gaze away from Benny and looked slightly down into Archer's eyes. After several moments he nodded. "You're right."

Archer gave Keifer a supporting smile and stepped away before his body betrayed him yet again. He lifted his dirty jeans from the floor and retrieved his keys and wallet. "You ready?"

"Almost," Keifer grumbled and disappeared into the bathroom.

Once Keifer was out of the room, Archer addressed Benny. "Do you still have the latest letter Keifer received?"

"Yeah," Benny grumbled.

It was obvious the man was still pissed at Archer for interfering, but that wasn't Archer's problem. Keeping Keifer safe was his job and he'd take on anyone if it helped keep his client from harm.

"Can you get it to me by the time the show ends later?" Archer asked.

Benny nodded, but kept silent.

"Good." He glanced around the room before clapping his hands together. "Why don't you go clear out the suite? I don't think we'll need the groupies anymore now that I'm back."

Before leaving the room, Benny levelled one last hateful stare at Archer. "Don't interfere in Keifer's business. I'm warning you."

Archer let Keifer's manager leave the room without dignifying the threat with a response. "Fucker," he said to the closing door.

Keifer stepped out of the bathroom looking perfectly put together. "I'm ready."

Archer just hoped he was.

* * * *

Little did Archer know, Benny had set-up an interview with Rolling Stone magazine before the concert. Archer sat in one of the comfortable chairs in Keifer's dressing room as the interviewer fired off questions.

Archer was impressed by the intelligent answers Keifer provided. When it came time for the inevitable love life questions, Archer squirmed in his seat.

"So, tell us about your new relationship?" Pete asked.

Keifer glanced at Archer and grinned. "Archer's everything I've ever wanted in a partner."

Even though Archer knew the answer was merely to protect their cover as a couple, the statement still warmed him.

"Did he help you get through the recent loss of your mother?" Pete continued to probe.

"Definitely. Although we weren't able to physically be together while I was taking care of my mom, Archer's phone calls gave me something to look forward to."

Archer sucked in a breath. He could tell by the honest expression on Keifer's face he was telling the truth. Archer suddenly felt bad for not calling more than he actually had. He figured Keifer had plenty of friends around him at the time, but maybe he was mistaken.

"Would you mind if we got a few shots of the two of you together?" the photographer piped in.

"Do you mind?" Keifer asked Archer.

Archer shook his head and stood, waiting for instructions. When the photographer suggested the two of them lie on the couch, Archer's eyes rounded. He expected just a few of them with their arms wrapped around each other. What the photographer was suggesting was far more intimate than he was comfortable with. He started to object, but stopped himself when Keifer immediately moved to spread out on the sofa.

If he objected it would seem strange to both the interviewer and the photographer. Biting his bottom lip, Archer walked over to the couch and stood looking down at Keifer. "How do you want me?"

Keifer gave Archer a supporting smile and opened his arms. "Just lay on top of me."

Keifer had spent years doing photo shoots, so he decided to do as instructed. He braced one arm on the back of the sofa and one on the cushion beside Keifer's ribcage as he slowly lowered himself to rest on top of the slightly larger man.

Pete walked over and adjusted Keifer's leather vest to expose one of the pierced nipples. "Let's play this up," Pete suggested.

Keifer pulled Archer's head down and whispered in his ear. "Sorry about this. I'll owe you big time."

Rolling Stone was edgier than most magazines, but when the photographer suggested Archer tug on the nipple ring with his teeth, Archer was shocked. He stared at Keifer to see the man's reaction to the direction.

"It's okay," Keifer whispered.

As Archer started to comply, he heard the camera shutter begin whirring as the photographer captured frame after frame. Archer managed to snag the silver loop with his tongue and draw it towards his mouth.

Behind the photographer, Pete was going crazy with praise for the shots.

Archer could feel his cock hardening in the tight confines of his jeans just as he felt an answering erection press against him from below. With his teeth still clutching the silver hoop, he stared up into Keifer's gaze.

"Oh, fuck, that's sexy," the photographer commented. "Hold it right there."

Keifer moved his leg just enough to rub against Archer's cock. Archer's eyes started to close at the delicious pressure against his raging hard on.

"Now a couple shots of the two of you kissing," suggested Pete.

Archer was so horny he didn't need to be asked twice. He scooted further up Keifer's body until their erections were almost perfectly aligned. Gazing down at the beautiful man, Archer slowly closed the distance between their lips. He was only slightly aware of the camera's hum as it continued to capture the erotic moment between them.

Archer sucked Keifer's bottom lip into his mouth, and ran his tongue over the plump flesh. A soft groan erupted from Keifer as he moved enough to thrust his tongue deep into Archer's mouth.

Within moments, the two men were lost to the kiss, fucking each other's mouths with their tongues. Archer was barely aware they had an audience until a loud knock on the

dressing room door brought him back to reality. He broke the kiss and stared down at Keifer, wondering if he'd gone too far with the man.

"Twenty minutes," someone yelled through the door.

Keifer eventually broke eye contact and turned to address Pete. "I need to get ready. Do you have enough?"

Pete's eyes were as big as saucers as he closed his notebook. "Yeah. That was fantastic. The two of you should consider doing more shoots together. You're going to melt the pages right out of the magazine."

It wasn't until Keifer showed the guys from Rolling Stone out that reality hit him. Those pictures would be seen by a lot of people. How would he explain them to his family? Of course they knew he was gay, he'd come out to them in high school, but he'd never thrown his sexuality in their faces quite so blatantly. "Do you know when that interview is supposed to come out?"

Keifer openly adjusted the hard ridge behind the fly of his leather pants. "Pete said he was going to beg to get it in the next issue. Why?"

Archer ran a hand over his face. "I just have a few people I need to warn."

Keifer stood in front of Archer. "Will it be a problem for you?"

Archer started to answer immediately that it wouldn't, but he stopped himself. He wasn't sure what was going to cause more problems, the photo shoot itself or the resulting pictures. "Hopefully not."

Chapter Two

With his earplugs firmly in place, Archer sat on his stool and watched the show and crowd from the wings just beyond stage right. He'd purposely situated himself behind the speaker which helped, but even with the earplugs he thought he might be permanently deaf.

He just didn't understand rock music, even the classic rock stuff Keifer had brought back to life. That wasn't to say Keifer didn't have a damn good voice, he did, but Archer would enjoy the show a hell of a lot more if it were more rhythm and bluesy or even a nice soft jazz. With Keifer's gravelly voice, Archer could picture him singing something else.

Archer scanned the front of the stage, once more, to make sure the security staff continued to control the screaming, dancing fans. It was becoming increasingly more difficult to concentrate on the security aspect of his job with Keifer's leather-clad ass moving around the stage. The man was nonstop once he walked out in front of the crowd. He definitely knew how to put on a show.

Several times, Archer noticed Keifer playing up to Kog. What kind of fucking name was Kog? Keifer had just met the base guitar player, but the two of them seemed to have a definite chemistry on stage. Every time Keifer leant in close enough to share Kog's microphone, the crowd went crazy. On a few occasions, Archer had even heard a chant of "Kiss, kiss, kiss."

It wasn't like Archer to get jealous, and damn, Keifer wasn't even his to begin with. He pushed the feelings away and tried to concentrate on the fans pressed against the front of the stage.

When the last song ended and the lights dimmed, Archer stood, prepared to rush the front of the stage if he needed to. The fans' excitement level rose even higher right before the dutiful encores began.

Keifer exited the stage to stand beside Archer. The two men didn't bother talking. It was impossible to hear over the yelling sea of people chanting Keifer's name. Keifer gave Archer's shoulder a slight squeeze before resuming his place on stage for two more songs.

Archer bent and retrieved the clean towel beside his stool and waited for Keifer to wind up the show. As the last notes of the evening were sung, Archer pulled the earplugs out and

jammed them into his pocket. He doubted Keifer would think kindly of Archer's distaste for his music.

The moment Keifer rejoined him on the side of the stage, Archer wrapped the towel around Keifer's neck. "Good show," he said, as he ushered Keifer down the corridor to the side entrance where the tour bus awaited them.

As ordered, there was a rather large security staff waiting just inside the entrance. On Archer's nod, the doors opened and the guards formed a protective barrier with their bodies between the door and the bus.

The fans that hadn't been able to see the show screamed and pushed against the security force in an effort to get to Keifer. Several times arms managed to break through and reach for Keifer. Archer kept himself glued to Keifer's side with a hand on his back, protecting his client.

Archer followed Keifer up the steps. With a bang of his fist against the narrow door that separated the driver from the rest of the bus, David pulled away from the arena. Archer turned just in time to see Keifer disappear into his back bedroom. Although he was still new to Keifer's routine, Archer had learnt the first thing Keifer did after a show was shower and change.

Reaching for the remote, Archer sat in one of the chairs and turned on the overhead flat screen television. He muted the sound, knowing Keifer's need for quiet after the loud atmosphere of the arena. After flipping through the channels, he settled on a basketball game.

Sports weren't a passion for him, but every now and then he enjoyed watching something completely mindless. As his eyes followed the action onscreen, Archer let his thoughts wander back to the photo shoot the previous day. He'd need to make the call to his parents, but he'd hoped to put his feelings into perspective first.

Keith and Nancy Adams knew what their son did for a living, so they would believe him if he told them the photos were nothing more than an assignment. However, lying to them wasn't an option. Archer had no doubt his mom would question him regarding his feelings for Keifer. The impending questions were what kept Archer from calling. *What is Keifer to me?*

He wasn't sure how long he sat there before Keifer finally walked out of the bedroom clad only in a loose fitting pair of pyjama bottoms.

"You hungry?" Keifer asked, scratching the centre of his chest.

"Yeah. I thought I'd make us a couple of omelettes if that sounds okay," Archer offered.

Keifer shrugged. "That sounds good, but you don't have to cook for me. I can always have David stop somewhere. He'd be more than happy to run in and get us anything we want."

Archer shook his head. "I checked before the show to make sure there was stuff to make my famous omelettes."

"Thanks. That sounds good." Keifer walked over and sprawled on the couch. "What're you watching?"

"I had the game on, but I wasn't really paying attention. Turn it to whatever strikes your fancy." Archer handed the remote to Keifer and walked to the small kitchen.

As he worked preparing their late-night dinner, Archer tried to keep his eyes off the lounging man. Keifer had twisted his body just enough that the left leg of his pyjamas pressed snugly against his flaccid cock, clearly outlining the perfectly shaped specimen.

"So where'd you learn to cook?" Keifer asked, running through the available television channels.

"Cook or starve, I guess," Archer answered. "I didn't sit on the counter and watch my mom if that's what you're asking."

Keifer tossed down the remote and wandered into the kitchen area to grab a bottle of sports drink out of the fridge. "I bet you were a cute kid."

Archer let out a snort. "I was a skinny tow-head who didn't hit puberty until I was almost fifteen."

Keifer took his drink to the banquette and sat down. "Beats being the fat kid in class."

Archer glanced over his shoulder. At six feet tall, Keifer was far from fat. The man was built like a world class swimmer, with the same broad chest and sculpted muscles Olympic medallists would kill for. "Why do I find that hard to believe?"

Keifer started to chuckle. "Because I'm so fucking sexy now."

Archer rolled his eyes. "Conceited much?"

Continuing to laugh, Keifer flexed his muscles. The movement affected Archer more than he was willing to admit.

"Damn, I was fat," Keifer mumbled, turning serious.

Archer set the whisk down and walked over to sit across from Keifer. "Maybe so, but you evidently overcame it."

Keifer glanced up at Archer. "By my junior year in high school I was sick of all the taunts. I don't know, I guess something in me just snapped. I bought one of those plastic jogging suits. You know, the kind that make you sweat? Anyway, I spent my entire summer running the steps of the football stadium. Up and down until I thought I'd either die or lose weight."

Staring into Keifer's eyes, Archer could still see that fat teenager in the man's gaze. Evidently Keifer had lost the weight but not the scars the cruel teasing had inflicted. Archer reached across the table and covered Keifer's hand with his own. "Do you ever wanna just go back and get in their faces and say, 'Look at me now, bitches!'?"

Keifer grinned, but shook his head. "As hard as I worked to lose the weight, when I returned for my senior year, they started in with something else. I guess it wasn't me being fat they didn't like, it was me being me."

"Idiots! Is Des Moines full of them or just the group you went to school with?"

Keifer finished off his sports drink and tossed the plastic bottle into the small recycle bin. "Are you cooking or what?"

It was an attempt to change the subject. He understood perfectly. He'd never dwelt on the past, it served little purpose. Sure, you learn from your past, but the knowledge is in the present, inside of you. The past holds nothing but memories, some of them too painful to revisit.

Going back to the small stove, Archer poured the whisked eggs into a pan. "I usually add ham, cheese, onions and peppers, but I can leave any of those out if you don't like something."

"Throw it all in. I'm starving."

Archer glanced over his shoulder in time to see Keifer's hand go from rubbing his muscled abdomen to his cock and balls. He turned back around before he moaned. *Fuck*. This assignment was turning into one hell after another.

Assignment. Yes. Concentrate on the reason I'm here. "Where did you say those fan letters were?"

"In the blue plastic tub in my bedroom. Want me to get them?" Keifer asked.

Archer shook his head. "I'll get 'em in a minute."

After adding the ingredients, Archer folded the supersized omelette and took it off the stove to finish cooking. He cut the omelette down the centre and slid each half onto a plate before carrying them to the table. "Would you like hot sauce or salsa?"

"Salsa sounds good," Keifer answered.

Archer pulled out the salsa and a carton of orange juice. "Mind if I ask you something?"

Keifer poured a liberal amount of salsa onto his eggs. "Shoot."

"Before you were outed, how did you...ya know, without everyone finding out?" Archer asked, filling a glass with juice.

"I didn't," Keifer mumbled.

Archer's head jerked up but Keifer appeared to be studying his plate carefully. "What do you mean, you didn't?"

Keifer shrugged. "When your face is splashed all over magazines and billboards, even anonymous sex isn't really anonymous."

The last thing Archer wanted to do was make Keifer feel bad, so he tried to casually cut into his omelette. "Have you ever?"

"Couple. Before I looked like I do now." Keifer sighed and set down his fork. "Benny's always known. He's offered himself over the years, but he's more of a father figure." Keifer gave an exaggerated shudder.

Archer thought of the photo shoot they'd done the previous day. The kiss had bothered him almost nonstop. It had been too good to forget. Now he wasn't so sure it was him Keifer was even attracted to. "Is that why I'm here? Did you think hiring a gay bodyguard would guarantee you a piece of ass?"

"No!" Keifer yelled, slamming his fist onto the table. "I hired a gay bodyguard because I thought maybe you'd know a little of how I felt. I've never really been able to talk about stuff that I'm thinking or feeling."

Keifer stood and carried his barely touched dinner to the sink. "Guess there was a part of me hoping for a friend." Keifer shook his head as he headed for his bedroom. "Forget it."

Shit. Archer pushed his plate to the centre of the table and buried his face in his hands. He should apologise, but he also feared going into Keifer's room to do it. Was it so wrong to want to be the only one instead of the only one available?

He had no doubt Keifer was attracted to him, and Archer had almost made a fool of himself by welcoming the obvious chemistry between them. For some reason, now that he

knew it had been over fifteen years since Keifer had been touched in an intimate way, it changed things. Could Keifer be desperate for companionship? Was that why he seemed to eat Archer up with a single gaze?

Archer rose and carried his plate to the sink. After scraping both dinners into the trash, he put the plates in the mini-dishwasher and re-shelved the condiments. With the kitchen area once again in order, he found himself at Keifer's closed door.

"Keifer?"

When he didn't get an answer, he carefully opened the door and peeked inside. Keifer was sound asleep and snoring lightly. Archer's body longed to go inside and wrap his arms around the obviously lonely man, but his head and heart wouldn't allow him to make such a brash mistake.

He closed the door and turned off the lights, grabbing a blanket and pillow from the closet on his way to the couch. When he woke up, they'd be in Seattle. Maybe the change of scenery would do them both some good.

* * * *

"Hey, Mom," Archer said into his cell phone.

"How's life on the road?" his mom chuckled.

Archer rolled his eyes. Both of his parents thought the idea of him travelling around with a rock singer was funnier than hell. He couldn't blame them. For years he'd bitched and moaned about anything that wasn't either the blues or jazz. He just didn't understand the appeal.

"It's boring," he finally answered. "Driving all night and waking up in a different city every day sucks. I mean the bus is nice but it doesn't even compare to being home."

"And Keifer Zane? Have you gotten to know him?" his nosy mother asked.

It was the perfect time to tell her about the photo shoot several days earlier. "Keifer's okay. He's a lot different than you'd think. Uh...speaking of, you know I'm supposed to be his boyfriend, right?"

"You mean that's your cover? Yes, I remember you saying something about that," Nancy answered.

"Yeah, well, I kinda got roped into having a few pictures taken with Keifer for Rolling Stone. I just thought you should know in case you see them or someone asks you about them." Archer held his breath, waiting for his mom's reply.

"What kind of pictures were they that you think you have to warn me?" Nancy prodded.

Crap. "Steamy ones." Just thinking about the kiss they'd shared had his cock hardening in his jeans. He turned towards the dressing room wall and subtly adjusted himself.

"Archer?"

Archer rolled his eyes. He knew that tone. His mom thought he was hiding something. The cock pressed against his hand told him she was right. "Sorry, mom, it's kind of noisy in here. What did you say?"

"So you like this Keifer guy?"

Archer's gaze travelled to Keifer. It was one of the rare backstage parties Keifer allowed and everyone seemed to be having a good time, including the star of the show. Archer watched as a twink who barely looked old enough to shave started rubbing against Keifer. *Disgusting.*

"I like him okay, but not the way you think," he denied. He didn't consider it a lie because he truly didn't want the attraction that was so obviously between them.

Archer watched as Keifer's gaze began canvassing the room until it stopped on him. Keifer gave him a pleading look and subtly nodded at the touchy twink. "I gotta go, Mom. I'll call you later in the week. Give Dad my love."

"I will. Don't get all caught up in that crazy lifestyle," Nancy warned.

"Don't worry. Parties are a rarity around here. Usually Keifer just goes to the bus and collapses after a show." He ended the call and strode across the room. It was time to play jealous boyfriend, something he thought Keifer secretly enjoyed.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" He asked, adding a little more swish to his walk.

"Uh oh, you've got me in trouble now," Keifer told the twink. He unwound the guy's arms from around his neck and gave him a gentle push.

Archer came to stop in front of the twink and crossed his arms. Standing toe to toe with the kid, Archer grinned. Although he was by no means tall, he towered over the skinny dude. "Find someone else, Bitch. This one belongs to me."

The twink didn't let Archer's size intimidate him. "Then keep him on a leash."

Archer took a step forward and grabbed the front of the guy's T-shirt. "You can't blame a dog for sniffing after a bitch in heat. Now, back-the-fuck off!"

The twink gave Archer a narrowed gaze before turning to smile at Keifer. "Great concert. It was so nice to meet you."

Keifer nodded at the twink and reached out to pull Archer down in his lap. "Thanks for coming."

Once the kid was gone, Keifer whispered in Archer's ear. "Thanks for the save."

Archer glanced down at the big hand resting on his inner thigh. He wasn't sure if Keifer even realised what he was doing, but the soft scrape of fingernails against the denim seam had Archer's cock taking notice. "Do you have to do that?"

Keifer brushed his lips across Archer's cheek and ear. "Just trying to keep the groupies at bay."

It was part of his job to play Keifer's lover, but for the last three days Keifer had barely spoken to him. That the man could make him hard with a simple touch pissed Archer off more than anything else. He covered Keifer's hand with his own and leant in to nip at the man's neck. He bit harder than was prudent, but if Keifer wanted to play this game, he was going to suffer the consequences.

The gesture backfired as Keifer moaned and reached out to grab Archer's face. Archer let himself get pulled into a savage kiss. But knowing it was wrong and pushing Keifer away were two entirely different things. He welcomed Keifer's tongue with exuberance, turning to straddle the man's lap.

As Keifer's hands slid to the back of Archer's neck to hold him in place, Archer couldn't help but grind his throbbing erection against the noticeable ridge behind the soft leather pants. He was relieved he wasn't the only one feeling lost in the moment.

He heard a chorus of whoops ring out in the room, bringing him back to their surroundings. Archer tore his mouth away from Keifer's. The blatant want in the rock star's expression almost knocked Archer on his ass. If he didn't get control of himself, he'd end up in Keifer's bed by morning.

Using the chair's arms for support, Archer untangled himself from Keifer's lap and stood. "I need to use the bathroom."

Keifer blinked several times before giving Archer a short nod in reply.

Satisfied he'd once again put some distance between the two of them, Archer turned and faced the group of drunk fans, band members and record company executives. "Don't any of you get any ideas while I'm gone. Like I said before, Keifer's mine."

After sending a hard stare Kog's way, Archer managed to walk his way through the crowd in a calm fashion. Once inside the restroom, he leaned against the door and let out the breath he hadn't even realised he'd been holding. *Get a fucking grip.*

With his need under control, Archer pushed away from the door and stepped up to the urinal. He unzipped and pulled his half-hard cock out of his underwear, aiming the head of his cock at the drain.

He'd just begun to work up a good flow when the door opened and Benny stepped inside. Archer nodded but returned his attention to the task at hand.

"Quite a show," Benny said as he joined Archer at the urinal trough.

"From what I hear, Keifer's shows are always good." Archer noticed Benny's sideways glance at his cock and willed himself to finish and get the hell out of there. The second he was done, Archer shook his cock and quickly stuffed it back into his jeans.

"I wasn't talking about the show on stage. I meant that bump and grind routine the two of you just put on," Benny clarified.

"That's what I'm being paid for," Archer said, reminding himself once again of his place in Keifer's life.

"That's not all you're being paid for. What's the latest on that letter?" Benny asked, turning around to flash Archer before tucking his cock back into his suit pants.

Slipping back into work mode, Archer tilted his head to the side. He heard and felt a satisfying crack before answering the question. "It was postmarked in Denver. So far I've found seven others from the same guy. No return address, no last name. The first three were sent before Keifer was outed. They were typical fan stuff although it was obvious this Mark guy is gay. He had a few too many comments about Keifer's washboard abdomen to be straight. After the press splashed Keifer's sexuality all over the front pages, the letters became more sexual in nature. This last one being the worst, of course."

"And? What're you going to do about it?" Benny asked.

Archer quickly washed his hands and pulled several paper towels out of the dispenser. "I sent them to my boss who had fingerprints run. We came up with nothing. The guy hasn't

been in trouble with the law before. Not much I can do beyond that besides keeping my eyes open."

"If anything happens to Keifer, I'll hold you and the company you work for responsible," Benny growled.

Archer nodded his head and opened the door. "As well you should. I'm good at my job. Let me do it."

"Yeah, I saw how good you were trying to be."

With one last glance over his shoulder, Archer left the restroom. He found Keifer laughing with two of the members of his band, one of them was the new guy, Kog. Archer couldn't help but notice how close Kog was to Keifer. When Archer neared, Keifer held out his arm and tucked him against his side.

"You ready to call it a night?" Keifer asked.

"Been ready," Archer returned, narrowing his eyes at Kog.

Keifer excused them and steered Archer towards the door. "I'm wiped."

Archer had no doubts Keifer was telling the truth. "Then why do you agree to these stupid parties?"

"Comes with the job," Keifer answered simply.

Archer pulled out his phone and let the security personnel know they were on their way out. By the time they reached the exit, the men were ready, although several of them appeared rather bleary-eyed. Archer glanced at his watch. No wonder. It was going on two o'clock in the morning.

Once Keifer was safely on the bus, Archer thanked the men before climbing aboard. "Ready whenever you are," he told the driver.

He turned to find Keifer had stripped off his shirt in preparation for his nightly shower. Archer couldn't take his eyes off the man's body. With his head tipped back, Keifer was guzzling a sports drink. After a good show, he'd noticed the changes in Keifer's body, but tonight those changes were almost irresistible.

Archer licked his lips as the silver hoops swayed back and forth with the movement of the bus. He was so mesmerised, he didn't pull away when Keifer pressed against him. Sandwiched between the counter and Keifer's gorgeous body, Archer melted. He accepted Keifer's offered tongue with enthusiasm.

Keifer ground his erection against him, and Archer's leg automatically lifted to wrap around the man's thigh. The grinding became thrusts as the two of them ate each other's mouths like they were starving.

Archer couldn't remember ever being so fucking turned on. It wasn't until he felt Keifer's hand on his zipper that Archer pulled himself out of the haze of unbridled lust. He broke the kiss and gave Keifer a shove. "I can't."

Keifer already had his cock exposed. He stared at Archer as he pulled the soft leather pants back up around his hips. "Can't or won't?"

Archer shrugged. "Doesn't matter. The outcome is still the same."

Keifer turned towards the back of the bus and ran his fingers through his hair. Archer could tell the man was having a difficult time getting his body under control.

"I'll be in the shower," Keifer said before walking into his bedroom.

Once the bedroom door shut, Archer scrubbed his hands over his face and adjusted the still-hard cock in his jeans. He'd done the right thing, or at least that's what he kept telling himself.

He walked over to the fridge and checked the schedule taped to the front. Only four more cities before they headed south. In less than a week he'd be able to spend at least one night in his own bed. He was even happier to see two nights blocked off for Phoenix. Who knew there were so many Keifer Zane fans in the Phoenix area?

Despite Keifer's whining, Benny had indeed booked him for back to back shows in Vegas. Archer still didn't know why Keifer let his manager get away with shit like that.

As they headed towards Salt Lake City, Archer began to wonder if Benny was holding something over Keifer's head. Surely there was a reason Keifer kept the creep around. Archer knew from talking to Keifer that Benny had spent years trying to get in his bed. Although Keifer denied Benny had ever succeeded, Archer couldn't help but wonder.

Keifer's bedroom door opened. Instead of wearing his customary pyjama bottoms, Keifer was dressed in nothing but a towel. "Archer? Could you come back here, please?"

Going back to Keifer's room was a one way ticket to heartache. He held up his hand. "I don't think it would be a good idea."

Keifer rolled his eyes. "So you don't want to see the spunk someone left on my comforter?"

Archer's eyes narrowed. Keifer hadn't had sex, which only meant one thing. Before going to the bedroom, Archer went up front. "Hey, David, how far are we outside of Portland?"

"Not far. Traffic's a bitch," the driver replied.

"We're gonna need to stop. I need to call the police and file a report."

"Something wrong?" David asked.

"Yeah. Someone left Keifer a present in his bedroom. Were you on the bus the entire time?"

David ran a hand over the back of his neck. "All but about thirty minutes when I ran across the street to get something to eat, but I locked the bus up tight."

"Does anyone else have keys?" Archer asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"Just Keifer, Benny and me," David informed Archer.

Archer nodded. "Head back into town and pull into the nearest well-lit parking lot you can find."

Archer turned away from David to find Keifer sitting on the sofa, still clad only in a towel with his face in his hands. As Archer passed, he couldn't help but reach out and run a hand over Keifer's wet hair. "I'll grab you something to put on."

Keifer looked up. "Thanks. Top drawer of my dresser."

Archer could tell by the glazed look in Keifer's eyes the situation scared him. Squatting down, Archer tried to give Keifer a reassuring smile. "Don't worry. I'll take care of it. You don't happen to know where your keys are, do you?"

"Sure. They're on a hook in that cupboard," Keifer said, gesturing to the small food pantry.

Archer crossed to the cupboard. Opening the pantry door, he saw the empty hook and closed his eyes. *Shit*. "They're gone."

Keifer stood and almost lost his towel. He quickly re-secured the light blue terrycloth around his waist and joined Archer. "I don't understand. I've always kept them there."

"When was the last time you remember seeing them?" Archer refused to let his mind wander to the easily accessible cock mere inches from his hand.

Keifer shrugged. "I dunno. I mean I don't ever use 'em which is why I don't carry them when I'm on the road."

Archer scratched the top of his head. They'd been on the road a week, but the fact the defiling happened while they were in Portland led Archer to believe the keys had been taken recently. Of course it still didn't explain how someone was able to get on the bus to take them in the first place. Now that the sick fuck had them, they'd need to get the locks changed as soon as they hit Reno in the morning.

"Go ahead and sit down while I check out the back," he told Keifer.

Entering Keifer's bedroom, Archer stared down at the obvious stain on the dark brown comforter. The thought of a stranger kneeling on Keifer's bed while jacking off, made Archer both angry and sick to his stomach. Archer's chest tightened as he wondered if it was Mark from Denver. His law enforcement background told him it was a logical progression from the letters being sent.

Archer knew how dangerous obsessions could be. He'd have to keep an even closer eye on Keifer, which could spell trouble for both of them.

Chapter Three

The morning of the Vegas doubleheader, Jimmy woke to the smell of frying bacon. He smiled and stretched his sore muscles. If he'd kept his eyes closed, he might have thought he was back in his boyhood home. His mom had always insisted he have a good breakfast to start the day.

Listening to the subtle sounds of Archer working in the adjoining room, Jimmy let his hands wander down his chest to his morning wood. Although things were still tense between him and Archer, it didn't mean he didn't still fantasise about the man. Archer had put up a serious wall between them, Jimmy didn't blame him really. Life on the road would never be enough for Archer.

It was obvious his attraction to Archer wasn't one sided. He still didn't know much about Archer's past, but he assumed the man had his defences up for a reason. Digging his heels into the mattress, Jimmy thrust up into his own hand, releasing a satisfied grunt as the first splash of warm seed landed on his stomach.

Still on his back, he ran his fingers through the thick cum. He was desperately horny but only for Archer. He'd been propositioned by a number of gorgeous men since the world had discovered his preference for cock, but he was holding out for the one man he truly wanted for more than a night.

He hadn't lied to Archer when he said he'd been hoping for a friend when he'd hired him. His feelings towards Archer had changed when he'd gone home to be with his mom. Although Archer hadn't called often, the few times he had spoken to Archer made all the difference in the world.

It was nice to have someone treat him like Jimmy again. Keeping up with his Keifer persona was a full time job, one he was beginning to hate. If only Archer would see him as Jimmy now instead of Keifer. *It's that fucking wall Archer's built around himself.*

The cell phone on his bedside table rang. He reached over and grabbed it before it could ring again. "Hello?"

"I'm coming by to give you your room key," Benny informed him.

"I'm still in bed."

"Alone?" Benny asked.

"None of your business." Jimmy sat up and yawned. "I'll get dressed."

Without waiting for a reply, Jimmy hung up and dropped the phone on the mattress. He shuffled to the bathroom and quickly cleaned the cum from his stomach and hand. He didn't normally get a hotel room, he simply didn't see the point, but he wanted somewhere to crash between concerts.

The thought of taking a long shower in a room with endless hot water appealed to him more than anything. His bus had been fitted with a small water supply that usually only gave him enough hot water for ten minutes. The luxury of standing under the warm spray for at least thirty minutes between shows, sounded like absolute heaven.

After cleaning up, he pulled on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt before leaving his bedroom. Archer was sitting at the table reading the newspaper, a cup of steaming coffee in his hand. *Damn he's gorgeous.*

"Morning." Jimmy retrieved a mug from the cabinet and poured himself some coffee.

"Morning," Archer returned. "I made you up a couple of breakfast burritos. They should still be hot but if not, just pop them into the microwave."

Jimmy set his coffee cup on the table before sticking the plate of food in the microwave for thirty seconds.

"Salsa's already on the table," Archer said without looking up from his paper.

Plate in hand, Jimmy sat across the table from Archer. "I appreciate this. I'm not sure when I'll find time to eat today."

"Yeah, that's what I figured. What time's your first show?"

"Five. The casino's hoping to get people up and out early. Ya know, get 'em all pumped up with the concert so they'll be ready to gamble away their kid's college funds."

Archer folded the newspaper and set it in front of Jimmy. "Some reporter got wind of the incident in Portland."

Jimmy groaned as he read the front page story about his bed's defilement. "Nice."

"Yeah," Archer agreed with a roll of his eyes. "I asked the police to send a swatch of the bedspread to my boss. Hopefully Seb can get a DNA test run a hell of a lot quicker than the Portland P.D. can."

Jimmy took a bite of his burrito. "Damn this is good."

The corner of Archer's mouth turned up in a rakish grin. "I aim to please."

Archer took a sip of his coffee before leaning his forearms on the table. "I need to ask you something. We'll be in Phoenix tomorrow for a couple days, and I was wondering if you'd mind staying at my place instead of a hotel."

Jimmy swallowed another mouthful of food and shook his head. How many times had he wondered what Archer was like off the road? "That's fine."

"Thanks. Just don't be surprised if my parents show up at some point."

"They live in Phoenix too?" Jimmy asked. Archer talked very little about his personal life. Jimmy was looking forward to getting a glimpse of the man with his folks.

"They live south of Sedona, but the drive is nothing for them. They spend half the year driving the country in an RV Dad bought when he retired." Archer stood and refilled his coffee cup.

"I look forward to meeting them," Jimmy told Archer.

"Okay. I wasn't sure if being around my mom would bother you."

"No. Not at all. I miss my mom like crazy, but I'm glad she went as fast as she did. I don't think I could've handled watching her suffer any longer." Jimmy absently rubbed at the ache in his chest. His mom had been the only true friend he'd ever had. After his dad had split when he was still a baby, his mom made it her mission to give him as normal a life as possible.

Jimmy was glad he'd been able to give his mom a comfortable life after he'd hit it big. There were so many times along the way when he'd wanted to quit, but his mom was always there to give him encouragement. Although she'd never asked for a thing, half of his success was due to his desire to give her a better life.

After finishing his breakfast, Jimmy stood and washed his plate in the sink. "Benny should be here any minute with a key to our room."

Archer put the lid on the salsa and stuck it back into the refrigerator. "I haven't seen Benny around much lately. Is it something I said?"

Archer's soft chuckle was sexy as hell, and Jimmy wanted nothing more than to jump the man's bones at that moment. "He's been working a lot, trying to set up new gigs. Plus I think you intimidate him to a degree. Benny's used to being the man in charge and doesn't like it when I follow your directions over his."

There was a loud knock on the bus door moments before Benny let himself in with his key. *Speak of the devil.*

"Morning," Jimmy greeted his manager.

Benny slapped two key cards on the banquette table. "Suite five-o-six. The cheap bastards wouldn't give up one of the luxury penthouses."

Jimmy shrugged. "Makes sense to me. I'm not even staying the night, just need somewhere to clean up and relax between shows."

"Doesn't matter. I told them we wouldn't be back. Next time we'll take our business to one of the casinos that know how to treat their talent," Benny grumbled.

It was probably the way the casino treated Benny, not him, that had his manager up in arms. It seemed the longer Benny was in the business the more he hated it. Jimmy could definitely relate. He had another two months left on the road before he fulfilled his obligations. Benny had been bugging him lately about adding more dates to the tour, but he needed a break, a long one. He needed time to take stock of his life. With his mom's death some of the sparkle of being on top had faded for him.

Jimmy took a sidelong glance at Archer, who had kept quiet during the exchange with Benny. He wondered if he could convince Archer to take some time off after the tour was over.

"Keifer!" Benny yelled.

Jimmy gave his head a subtle shake and returned his attention to his manager. "Did you say something?"

Benny gave an overly dramatic sigh. "I said you need to be ready for a sound check at three."

Jimmy nodded. "Got it."

Archer cleared his throat. "Is there a back way into the casino?"

"Yes. I've already given David directions on where to pull up. There will be a few security personnel to meet you there." Benny's phone rang. He glanced at the display and headed for the door. "I'll see you inside," he said, before stepping off the bus.

"I'm going to throw a bag together," Jimmy informed Archer before retreating to his room.

He quickly stuffed two wardrobe changes, clean underwear, socks and pyjama pants into a small suitcase. While packing up his shaving supplies, he found the small box of condoms he'd purchased while still in Des Moines. Jimmy stared at the box, longing to have

a reason to open it. He ended up tossing the box into the drawer beside his bed. *Wishful thinking..*

* * * *

"What the fuck are religious picketers doing in Sin City?" Archer grouched as they entered the hotel room.

"It's their calling to save lost souls while plopping down money on the blackjack table," Keifer said with a laugh.

Archer set Keifer's suitcase on the floor. He couldn't get over Keifer's optimistic attitude. "It really doesn't bother you to see those hateful signs with your name on them?"

Keifer shrugged. "Gays have been targeted with hate for years, what makes me so different?"

"What?"

Keifer grabbed a bottle of water out of the mini-fridge and sprawled on the couch. "Even with my name on them, how can I take those signs personally? Those people don't *know* me. They only know I'm a fag. That's what their hatred is geared towards, not me. I mean, sure, it bothers me that they hate gays so much they feel the need to shout obscenities wherever I go. Guess I feel sorry for society as a whole, not me personally."

Archer shook his head. Although Keifer had only been out of the closet for a short time, he seemed to handle the bigots better than anyone. Archer wasn't sure if Keifer's attitude should be attributed to his years spent in the limelight, or his formative years. Regardless, it was refreshing.

Archer carried Keifer's suitcase into the adjoining bedroom before joining him on the sofa. He'd wanted to ask Keifer something for days but had put it off. Keifer looked completely relaxed as he sat with one leg tucked under him. Would it be wrong of Archer to disrupt such a peaceful setting?

"What?" Keifer asked.

"You think Benny could've been the one to out you?" There. He'd asked.

"No. I promise you it wasn't Benny." Keifer answered, closing his eyes.

The longer he knew Keifer, the less he thought Keifer was even concerned with who had betrayed his trust. As far as Archer was able to ascertain, the only person who knew of Keifer's sexuality was Benny. It was a puzzle that drove Archer crazy.

"Then who do you think it could've been?" Archer finally asked.

"Me," Keifer admitted, keeping his eyes shut.

Archer sat up straighter. "What?"

Keifer nodded and opened his eyes. "I sent a tip to one of the tabloids." He shrugged. "After the last time Benny tried to get me in his bed, I couldn't continue living the way I was. My mom had just been diagnosed, and I realised how precious life is. This is the only one I get, and I've spent it afraid to live it the way I want."

Keifer sighed and rubbed his hands over his face. "I was sick of trading money for my own happiness."

Although Archer completely understood Keifer's motivations, he couldn't help but wonder why the singer hadn't just announced it. "So why the subterfuge? Why not just come out on your own?"

"Two reasons. Benny would go ape shit, and I was scared." Keifer reached across to put his hand on Archer's where it was stretched along the back of the couch. "Please don't tell Benny."

Archer automatically turned his hand over and threaded his fingers through Keifer's. Once again he got the feeling Benny had something on Keifer. "Now that you're finally being honest with me, will you tell me why you seem to be afraid of your own manager?"

Keifer pulled his hand away and stood. Archer could see Keifer's initial reaction was to argue the point, but eventually Keifer's expression changed to one of shame.

"The record business is hard to break into. Especially for someone who doesn't play today's hip hop shit." Keifer began.

"I would imagine so," Archer agreed.

Keifer's hands began clenching and unclenching as he began to pace around the small room. "Benny saw something in me that no one else did. When he met me, I was performing in a rundown bar in Kansas City for pennies a night. Benny convinced me that he could make me a star if I'd give him the chance. Singing is all I'd ever wanted to do, so I let him."

"And?" Archer prompted when Keifer stopped to stare out the large hotel window.

"Benny had money, from where I don't know, but he used it to bribe the record executives into giving me a contract for my first album. He then greased the palms of several radio station managers sprinkled around the country to give my stuff airtime."

Archer began to get a clearer picture of the relationship between Keifer and his manager. "Is he blackmailing you?"

Keifer braced his hands against the glass and ducked his head. "Once my career started to take off, he made me pay the money back, which I did. But that wasn't enough for him. He told me if I ever tried to replace him, he'd go public with how I'd managed to break into the music industry in such a short time."

Archer stood. He wanted to find Benny and beat him to a bloody pulp for holding something of his own doing over Keifer's head for so long. He took several steps until he stood just behind Keifer. Reaching out, he put his hands on Keifer's shoulders. "No matter how you got your start, you're the one who made your career what it is today. Benny hasn't bribed the thousands of people who flock to hear you sing every fucking night. You did that. Your talent did that. You're solely responsible for bringing classic rock music back to the airwaves."

Keifer turned away from the window to face Archer. "Doesn't matter. If word got out, I'd be ruined. Benny knows it, and I know it."

In that moment, Archer saw the uncertainty in Keifer's eyes. He pulled the man into his arms, wishing he could take away the guilt that had evidently followed Keifer throughout his long career. "I don't think your fans would turn away from you."

"Really? Because a hell of a lot of them did when they found out I'd rather suck cock than eat pussy."

"Maybe some did leave, but you've gained new ones. It'll always be that way. People will come and go, but your talent will always be there."

Keifer hugged Archer back, burying his face against Archer's neck. "I can't take that chance. Please don't tell Benny I told you."

Archer turned his head and kissed Keifer's temple. "I have one more question. Do you want to get away from Benny?"

"He's made me what I am. I know I should just shut up and be grateful, but yeah. I wish I had more say in my own career."

Archer wondered if Seb or Bram could help him out. "Okay. Let me make a few phone calls. Don't worry. I'll come up with a way."

Keifer lifted his head and gazed into Archer's eyes. "I'm sorry I lied to you."

Archer shrugged and took a step back, putting much needed distance between them. Although Keifer had opened up, he was still not a good bet for a lover. "I understand why you did it."

Archer started to turn back towards the couch, but Keifer stopped him with a hand on his upper arm.

"I've been honest with you, so will you show me the same courtesy? I know you're attracted to me. Why haven't you acted on it?" Keifer asked.

Archer decided to give Keifer the truth. "I won't enter into an affair I know has an expiration date."

Keifer's eyes rounded. "Expiration date? What am I, meat?"

Archer shook his head. "I've learned the hard way that long-distance relationships don't work. And since I've never been able to separate my heart from my dick, it's just better to keep my distance."

Keifer nodded. "So that's why you've built a wall around yourself. Who was the guy?"

Archer broke away from Keifer's grip and crossed the room. He didn't like Keifer, or anyone else, trying to analyze him. "I won't discuss my private life. Don't ask again."

The room was quiet for several moments as Archer dug through the mini-bar in search of something to eat. He heard Keifer's bedroom door close and turned to see the room empty. Archer squeezed his eyes shut and slammed the fridge door.

Dammit! Keifer hadn't deserved that. It seemed every time the man started to get too close, Archer responded with anger and cruelty. Neither emotion was normal for Archer, which told him Keifer was starting to really get to him.

* * * *

Immediately following the first show, Keifer stormed off stage. Archer held out the customary towel, but he was waved off.

"I gotta talk to Benny," Keifer growled.

Archer pointed towards the opposite side of the stage. "He's over there."

Instead of going around the back of the stage, Keifer nodded and headed straight across. The fans still in the mood to party began screaming their fool heads off at the glance of their favourite singer. Archer followed as close to Keifer as he dared. It was the first time since meeting the rocker that Archer had seen Keifer truly pissed.

“Benny!” Keifer yelled when he was still about fifteen feet from his manager.

Benny ended his conversation with the new band member and turned to Keifer. “What?”

“What the hell’s the deal with the new ear pieces you bought? Half the fucking time I can’t hear through it and the other half the thing’s giving me nothing but feedback!”

Benny grabbed Keifer’s upper arm and pulled him away from Kog. Archer didn’t miss the narrowed gaze Kog shot Benny as he ushered Keifer to the rear corner of the stage. Archer tried to stay a respectful distance away, but his job was to protect Keifer and if that meant protecting him from his own manager, so be it.

Archer had been around Keifer enough to know the guy wasn’t a prima donna by any stretch of the imagination, but he did tend to be a perfectionist when it came to his music and performances. He assumed Keifer felt Benny was responsible for the faulty ear piece.

Both men were gesturing wildly at each other. Archer noticed the bright red tint of Benny’s face and wondered if the guy was about to stroke out.

Benny started screaming at Keifer, telling him he was the talent, not the brains. When Benny leant over and got right in Keifer’s face, Archer had seen enough. He was on his way over when Keifer reached out and pushed Benny with such force, the big man fell to the floor.

“Fuck you, Benny!” Keifer yelled as he joined Archer. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

* * * *

Between shows, Keifer ordered room service before disappearing into his room.

Archer stretched out on the couch, still kicking himself for his earlier comments. He pulled out his phone and called Seb. If he couldn’t do anything to help the tense situation between him and Keifer, at least he could help solve the problem with Benny.

“Hello?”

"Sorry to call you at home, boss man, but I have a favour to ask." Archer toed off his shoes and let them fall to the floor.

"You're fine. What's up?" Seb asked.

"Well, a situation's come up, and I was wondering if you could do some digging into Benny's background."

"Benny? Why, what am I looking for?"

"Anything that Keifer can use to get out of his contract." Archer went on to tell Seb about Benny bribing the record executives and radio stations.

Seb whistled. "Although I'm sure that kind of shit probably goes on all the time, I agree with Keifer, the news would probably ruin his career or at least cast a very large black mark on it."

"Keifer said Benny had a lot of money to grease the palms in the first place, yet he discovered Keifer while hanging out in a dive in Kansas City. Makes me wonder where Benny got the money in the first place."

"Makes sense. I'll dig up everything I can. I'd ask Bram, but he's got his hands full with the situation in Chicago."

"Black Dog?" Archer asked. Lenny's trial wasn't scheduled to take place for another two months.

"Yeah. But we've relocated Alec to Chicago. The prosecutor insisted both Addy and Alec be on hand while they're putting the finishing touches on the case."

"So what's the problem?" Archer asked.

"I think Alec's become involved with not only Taggert, but Lon as well. I swear to God if my men don't stop fucking around with the clients, I'm gonna go insane."

Archer's entire body tensed. If the fear of getting hurt wasn't deterrent enough to stay away from Keifer, the loss of his job was. "Is someone complaining?"

"No. They all seem to be perfectly happy with their arrangements."

Archer shook his head. He'd known Taggert and Lon for years. "It's hard to believe Taggert and Lon finally got together."

"Oh, they're not together. They're just both sleeping with Alec. That's part of the problem. They're each so concerned with who's spending more time with Alec they aren't doing their jobs the way I think they should be done. I've been considering going up to Chicago to kick both their asses."

There was a knock on the hotel room door, signalling Keifer's dinner had arrived. "I gotta go. There's someone at the door. Call me as soon as you find anything we can use to get Keifer away from Benny."

"I will." Seb cleared his throat. "Please tell me you're not sleeping with Keifer."

"I'm not. Just the one photo shoot I've already told you about."

"Let's try to keep it that way. I don't want the agency to get a bad reputation."

"Yes, boss man." Archer grinned and ended the call. Despite what Seb said, his boss' lover, Jared, could be considered a client. Although Jared hadn't actually paid the agency to be protected, he was given a room in the dorm for just that reason.

Tossing his phone onto the table, Archer opened the door. The uniformed waiter smiled. "Your dinner, sir."

Archer stepped back and the waiter rolled the cart inside. "Just set them on the table," Archer told him.

After the waiter finished, Archer gave the guy a few bucks. "Thanks."

Once the waiter left, Archer crossed to Keifer's door and knocked. "Your dinner's here."

When he received no response, he opened the door. "Keifer?"

Archer heard the shower running and stepped inside the room. The bathroom door was open, and Archer got his first look at Keifer's nude body. Archer stood transfixed as he watched Keifer sprawled in the tiled shower bench stroking his cock.

Archer reached down and brushed a hand over his own filling shaft. *Damn. What a sight to behold.* Even through the water spotted glass shower doors, Keifer was absolutely breathtaking. *Why am I holding myself back from what I really want?*

Maybe he could do sex with no strings.

When Keifer's cock erupted, Archer heard his name on the man's lips plain as day. *Fuck. I am so screwed.*

Chapter Four

After the second show, Archer led Keifer to the bus. How the rock star managed to climb the steps was a mystery to Archer. The man was absolutely exhausted. Archer helped Keifer to the couch and got him a large bottle of his favourite sports drink out of the fridge before going to open the narrow door to the front of the bus.

"We're ready, Dav...who're you?" Archer asked, his body tense.

"Tony. David came down with the flu. He'll be out of commission for a few days. The agency sent me."

Archer's eyes narrowed. "Why didn't someone inform me?"

Tony shrugged. "You can call Mr. Zane's manager if you want. He approved the substitution."

Archer studied the driver for several seconds. The kid looked to be around seventeen. "You old enough to drive?"

Tony chuckled. "I'm twenty-six."

Archer would call Benny, but for the time being, they needed to get the hell out of Vegas. "When we get into Phoenix, drop us at the airport."

Tony's black brows drew together. "You're flying out?"

Something told Archer to watch what he said. "None of your business. Just leave your phone number with Benny and make sure the bus is outside the stadium Thursday night."

When Archer rejoined Keifer, the man was sound asleep with a half-empty drink still in his hand. Archer took the bottle and set it on the counter. "Come on, Keifer, time to get you to bed."

Keifer opened those gorgeous eyes of his and flashed a sleepy smile. "It's about damn time I heard those words come out of your mouth."

Archer shook his head and pulled Keifer to his feet. "Let's go."

Keifer's musk was strong and Archer tried not to get lost in the manly smell. He'd never been one to get off on something like that, so he wondered why even Keifer's sweat had a direct effect on his cock.

Archer managed to get Keifer to his bed. He squatted down and pulled off the man's black ankle boots. "I'm not undressing you, so don't bother asking."

Keifer fell back on the bed and ran his hand over his jean-clad cock. "I promise to make it worth your while."

Archer chuckled. It seemed even after their earlier argument Keifer couldn't stay mad at him. The thought that perhaps Keifer really did like him bothered Archer more than anything. He deserved at the very least a punch in the nose for the way he'd shut Keifer down earlier, especially after watching the man jack off in the shower.

"It might be better to pack your bags tonight since it'll only take about four hours to get to Phoenix." Archer carried Keifer's boots to the small closet. He pulled out a wardrobe bag and set it on the bed. "You point, I'll pack."

Keifer took off his shirt and tossed it to the floor before scooting further up the bed to rest his head on a pillow. "Just grab anything."

Archer searched through the closet and came up with three pairs of jeans and three shirts. When he turned back to the bed, Keifer had his jeans unzipped and his hand down his pants. "Why do you do that?"

Keifer grinned. "What?"

"Tempt me when you know I don't want to start something with you," Archer said, his eyes zeroing in on Keifer's groin.

"Because I can't think of anything else when you're around." Keifer pulled his cock free of the confining denim. "Because I want you and only you."

Archer licked his lips as Keifer squeezed the head of his cock, producing a large drop of pre-cum. He was standing on the edge of a cliff. Did he back up and play it safe, or jump and take his chances on the landing?

While Archer stood there with his tongue practically hanging out of his mouth, Keifer reached down and pushed his jeans and underwear off. Completely naked, Keifer continued to stroke himself.

"Top or bottom?" Keifer asked, spreading his legs further apart.

"Both," Archer mumbled before realising he'd answered.

Keifer smiled. "A man after my own heart."

Archer began to undress, stripping off his jeans and shirt in quick order. He climbed onto the bed and leant forward until he was eye level with Keifer's gorgeous cock. Archer

glanced up and met Keifer's gaze. He needed to make one thing clear before they began. "I'm not interested in your heart, just your body."

A clouded expression crossed Keifer's face. Archer was too close to the prize to worry about what it meant. He leant down and swiped the wet head of Keifer's shaft. *Fuck*. Keifer's cock felt like silk against his tongue. *I need to stop*.

Shutting out his own internal warning, Archer opened his mouth and took Keifer's cock as far down as he could. He closed his eyes as the taste of Keifer's pre-cum exploded on his tongue. *I'm in so much trouble*.

Keifer's bare feet began tugging on Archer's cock. He had never been given a foot-job and was surprised at how soft Keifer's feet were. He began thrusting his hips as his head continued to bob up and down on Keifer's heavily-veined shaft. If there was one kink Archer possessed it would be a man with thick, prominent veins, and Keifer had them in spades.

Archer scraped his bottom teeth over the raised line of flesh, taking the time to push against the pumping blood every now and then. *Yeah*. He definitely had a vein fetish.

When he felt his balls begin to draw up tight against his body, Archer released Keifer's cock and sat back on his heels. He ran his fingertips down Keifer's length to his balls, to the prominent vein where Keifer's groin met his thigh. With Keifer's legs still spread wide, Archer had the perfect view of the man's hole. How had he allowed himself to get in this position?

Keifer arched his back and plucked at the silver hoops piercing his nipples. "Please fuck me."

As sexy as his ex-lover Joe had been, no one could hold a candle to Keifer. The man oozed sensuality from every pore of his body. Archer would be a fool not to act on his feelings for the man.

"Is something wrong?" Keifer asked, releasing his nipples.

Archer took a deep breath. "I lied," he admitted.

Keifer rose up to support himself on his forearms. "About?"

Archer's jaws clenched as he ran through dozens of scenarios in his head. No matter how many times he went through them, they all ended with Archer getting hurt. More importantly, Keifer would be hurt as well.

"I can't do this and keep my heart out of it." With his cock still hard, Archer couldn't believe he was even considering walking away.

"I don't want you to keep your heart out of it," Keifer whispered, sounding more like Jimmy than the cocky rock star, Keifer.

Archer moved to stretch out beside Keifer. "This can't possibly work."

Keifer reached over and outlined Archer's lips with a fingertip. "It can if we really want it to."

Archer captured Keifer's finger between his teeth and teased the tip with his tongue before releasing it. "Kiss me."

Keifer grinned and leant in to press his lips against Archer's. Archer opened immediately, accepting Keifer's tongue with enthusiasm. The longer the kiss continued, the hornier and more confused Archer became. He wrapped his arms around Keifer and pulled the slightly larger man on top of him.

Archer groaned at the exquisite feel of Jimmy's body as it rubbed against his own. He realised he'd stopped thinking of Jimmy as Keifer. It was suddenly obvious that Keifer had been Archer's wall. He'd refused to think of Keifer as Jimmy because he couldn't resist the quiet man from Des Moines.

Although Jimmy continued to grind against Archer, he broke their kiss. "You're thinking too much."

Archer realised Jimmy was right. He'd lived his life so afraid of what might happen he'd failed to take chances. It had been over a year since Joe had ended things between them.

Archer ran his hands down Jimmy's sides to land on the muscled cheeks of the man's ass. "Got lube?" he asked, taking a leap of faith.

Jimmy reached to the bedside table. Straddling Archer's hips, he sat up, clutching the condom and lube to his chest. "Promise me you won't run away if we do this?"

Archer smoothed his hands up Jimmy's body, skating his fingers over the silver hoops until he wrapped his hands around the back of Jimmy's neck. With a tug, he brought Jimmy's head down to kiss him. He swept the interior of Jimmy's mouth, trying to give the man his answer without words.

Jimmy pulled out of the kiss and shook his head. Staring Archer in the eyes, he asked again. "Promise me?"

Archer watched as Jimmy's carotid artery began to pulse under the skin. He knew his answer was important to Jimmy, but what he hadn't realised was how important it was to *him*. "I won't run off on you. I promise."

Jimmy handed over the bottle of lube with a satisfied smile. As Archer prepared Jimmy's hole to receive his cock, he tried to let all his worries go. It was too late. He'd known that the moment Keifer became Jimmy to him.

Jimmy moaned as Archer inserted another finger. "Now."

Archer shook his head. "Be patient."

"I've been patient since L.A." The rocker ripped the condom packet open and pulled far enough away to roll it down Archer's cock.

Archer closed his eyes and moaned when Jimmy's tongue gave his balls a bath.

"You like that?" Jimmy chuckled, straddling Archer again.

"You know I do." Archer wrapped one hand around the base of his cock and the other around Jimmy's hip.

Archer moaned at the first kiss of his new lover's hole against the head of his cock. He tried his best to give Jimmy full control over the speed of entry. Once the crown pushed inside, Jimmy stopped.

Archer opened his eyes and stared up at Jimmy. "Just wait until you're comfortable."

Jimmy nodded and slowly began to rock back and forth, taking Archer's cock in inch by inch. Archer released the hold on his erection and pulled Jimmy's head down for a deep kiss. He felt goosebumps break out on his skin as his cock was slowly buried deep in Jimmy's ass.

With his cock fully seated, Archer continued the kiss for several moments. Only when Jimmy started to move, did Archer release the man's tongue. As he gazed up at the stunning man riding his cock, Archer couldn't help but feel lucky. Even if Jimmy hadn't been famous, Archer would have felt he'd made quite a catch. After all, it was Jimmy's fame that had kept them apart.

Jimmy's inner walls continued to massage Archer's cock as he moved. "I've never felt anything like this," his lover panted.

Archer thrust up at the statement, determined to give Jimmy the fucking of his life. "Roll over onto your back."

Jimmy didn't even hesitate. He rolled to his back and hooked his arms under his knees, spreading himself wide.

Archer manoeuvred himself between Jimmy's legs and drove his cock back into the warm sheath. Bracing his weight on his arms, Archer began to pound Jimmy's ass, delighting in the gasps and moans coming from the man under him.

"Touch yourself," Archer said, hoping he could hold back long enough for Jimmy to come.

Jimmy released his hold on one of his legs and draped it over Archer's shoulder. He reached between them and began jacking his cock to the rhythm of Archer's thrusts.

"Yeah. That's it," Archer encouraged.

"Archer!" Jimmy's shoulders came off the bed as the first burst of cum shot from his cock.

Archer's attention was divided between the intensity of Jimmy's expression and the sight of the man's gorgeous cock as it erupted. As soon as his lover collapsed back onto the mattress, Archer resumed his thrusts, giving the man everything he had. He ground his hips and bucked against Jimmy's ass as he came, filling the condom.

The intensity with which Jimmy watched him come would normally make Archer uncomfortable, but it didn't. He wanted Jimmy to know exactly how good he felt, because despite his age, Jimmy had very little experience.

He reached between their bodies and pulled out of Jimmy's body, tying the condom with practiced ease. The satisfied grin on Jimmy's face was absolutely priceless as Archer tossed the rubber into the trash and rose to get a wet washcloth.

Flopping back down on the bed, Archer began to run the warm cloth against Jimmy's abdomen. Jimmy had yet to say a word since calling out Archer's name earlier. "Okay?"

Jimmy nodded, but Archer could tell he was pissed about something. Archer sat up and began to clean the crevice between Jimmy's butt cheeks. "Did I do something to make you mad?"

Jimmy shook his head. "It's not you. This has been one of the best nights of my life."

"So what's the problem?" Archer threw the cloth towards the bathroom and settled next to Jimmy.

"It was a damn good reminder of what I've given up all these years. What the hell was I thinking?" Jimmy swung his arm up to cover his face.

Archer couldn't help but grin at the boyish gesture. He cuddled closer against Jimmy's warm, nude body and wrapped an arm around him. "I'm here now. You can either dwell on what was, or revel in what is."

Jimmy moved his arm to rest on the pillow above his head. "You're right. Today's the first day of the rest of my life."

Archer wondered how far Jimmy would take his new independence. A quick glance at the clock told him they were already halfway to Phoenix. He was glad he'd have Jimmy somewhat to himself for the next two days.

Archer stayed with Jimmy until the tired man fell asleep. He carefully got out of bed and dressed in the same clothes he'd worn earlier. On his way out of the bedroom, he grabbed the big blue tote of newly delivered fan mail and carried it into the main cabin of the bus. If he was going to stay up, he might as well make himself useful.

* * * *

Archer's hands shook as he reread the handwritten letter.

My Dearest Keifer,

Sorry it's been so long since I've written, but I left you a present. Did you enjoy it? I was hoping you'd roll around in it and cover yourself with my smell. I've seen you with that guy hanging all over you. Is he really your boyfriend? He's not nearly hot enough to satisfy a man like you.

Through my letters I've tried to make you understand how perfect we'd be together. I've been to every one of your concerts since your mother passed away just hoping you'd notice me in the crowd. Well, I'm tired of waiting. We are meant to be together and if you can't see it, I'll have to make you see it.

Don't worry, my love, I'll take care of everything.

Yours Forever,

Mark

Archer picked up the envelope and checked the postmark. Reno. *Shit.*

He had no doubt the saliva used to seal the envelope would be a DNA match to the semen they'd found on Jimmy's bedspread. Archer rose and pulled a large plastic zip bag out of the cabinet. He slid the letter inside along with the envelope and shoved it into his duffel. He walked to the front of the bus and opened the door to the driver. Through the windshield, Archer saw the familiar site of the Phoenix skyline in the distance. "My car's in long-term parking east of terminal four once we get to Sky Harbor."

Tony nodded and glanced over his shoulder at Archer. "Where should I go after I drop you off?"

Archer shrugged. "I guess outside the Cricket Pavilion for now. Call Benny later and ask him which hotel he booked. I'll be driving Keifer to the concert tonight and tomorrow night."

Archer realised he didn't have Tony's cell number. "Hang on." He went back to the table and grabbed a pen and piece of paper before rejoining Tony at the front. "Give me a number where I can reach you."

Tony rattled off a number before asking Archer to write down his and Keifer's numbers in case something came up.

"I'll give you mine, but you'll have to ask Keifer for his," Archer informed Tony. He wrote down the number to his untraceable prepaid phone and tucked it above the sun visor.

"I'm going to wake up Keifer," Archer informed Tony.

Stepping into the bedroom, he turned on one of the small wall sconces and quickly finished packing Jimmy's clothes. His work finished, Archer allowed himself a few moments to stare at the beautiful sleeping man.

The sun hadn't even begun to come up, so they should have several hours to enjoy together before real life intruded. He sat on the edge of the bed and ran his hand across Jimmy's perfectly sculpted chest, stopping to pluck at one of the silver hoops.

Still asleep, Jimmy moaned, his hand naturally reaching below the covers towards his groin. Archer smiled. He bent down and took the piercing into his mouth, laving the dark, pebbled nub with his tongue.

"Aaahhh," Jimmy moaned again, threading his fingers through Archer's hair to keep him in place.

Archer bit down gently on the nipple before releasing it. "It's time to wake up."

"Don't wanna. I like this dream," Jimmy mumbled.

"Not a dream. I want to get you back to my place." Archer couldn't wait for Jimmy to see the view from his hillside home in Cave Creek.

Archer kissed his way up Jimmy's chest to the lips he was still afraid he'd never get enough of. He thrust his tongue inside and swept the warm interior. When Archer felt Jimmy's hand rub against his erection, he groaned and pulled back, afraid of starting something they didn't have time to finish. "Let's get to my place."

Archer stood, still holding Jimmy's hand. "Come on, lazy bones."

Jimmy groaned as he got to his feet. "Damn. I'm not as young as I used to be."

Archer pulled Jimmy into his arms. "Don't start looking for retirement homes yet, you've only been asleep for two hours."

Jimmy gave Archer a short, but intense, kiss. "So how come you're so bright eyed?"

"Because I haven't allowed myself to sleep yet. I've been going through the latest batch of fan mail."

Jimmy shook his head. "Still don't understand why more people don't just email. It would be a hell of a lot easier to answer them, that's for damn sure."

"Because emails can be traced. Most of the letters you get don't even have a return address," Archer informed his new lover. He stole one last kiss before breaking away. "You'd better get dressed."

He'd have to show Jimmy the newest letter from Mark. He hated to put Jimmy on edge before a performance, but Jimmy needed to keep his eyes open. Archer decided to wait until they got into his car before discussing it.

Archer also needed to stop by an express mail store and send the envelope off to Seb. Although Seb had received the DNA report on the bedspread, it didn't do them much good until they had a suspect to test.

After Jimmy was dressed, Archer picked up the wardrobe bag and carried it into the main living area. He set it beside his and went to direct Tony to his car, anxious to spend some time away from the bus. Time he hoped to use to get to know Jimmy even better.

* * * *

Jimmy felt like he was drunk. It was the previous day's double header combined with the lack of sleep, but he wished he was more alert. He folded himself into Archer's low-slung sports car and buckled his seatbelt.

Archer put their bags in the small trunk before climbing in beside him. He then leant over the centre console and gave Jimmy a kiss. "Sorry, but we'll have to backtrack up Interstate Seventeen to get to Cave Creek."

Jimmy rubbed his eyes. "Why didn't we just have the bus drop us off?"

"Because I didn't want Tony to know where I live. It would be too easy for Benny to get the information out of him, and I want you all to myself until the show tonight."

Jimmy reached over and put a hand on Archer's thigh. It felt odd at first. He'd never had someone he could touch at will. Jimmy wondered what it would be like to always have Archer at his side. When they drove up to the payment booth, he started to withdraw his hand, but Archer captured it and placed it back on his thigh.

"Leave it. Feels nice."

Jimmy smiled out the passenger side window as Archer settled up his bill. Phoenix was so different from Des Moines. He couldn't imagine living in a place so dry.

"What're you thinking about?" Archer asked, pulling out of the parking lot.

"Grass," Jimmy admitted.

Archer chuckled. "You won't find much of that here."

"Yeah, I realised that."

"I have something I need to show you," Archer began.

"I was hoping you'd say that."

Archer laughed again, moving Jimmy's hand even higher on his thigh. "You'll see plenty of that in the days to come." Archer pulled a plastic bag out from behind the driver's seat. "This was in with the mail."

Jimmy moved his hand to give Archer's balls a good squeeze before taking the bag. As soon as he saw the single sheet of paper, he knew what it was. "Is it from my favourite admirer?"

At Archer's nod, Jimmy tossed the letter onto the dashboard. "I don't need to read it."

"I think you do," Archer told him. "It gives a clear indication just how unstable this man is. You need to make sure you're at my side whenever we go out in public."

"Don't I already do that?" He leant over and kissed Archer's neck.

"So far you've been pretty good at it, but I also think you should cancel any backstage parties until we catch this guy. According to that letter, Mark's been to every one of your concerts. He's watching you and we don't even know what he looks like."

The uneasiness in Archer's voice scared Jimmy more than anything. Was Archer concerned for his own safety as well? The thought of something happening to Archer because of him gutted him. He glanced at the sheet of paper before returning his attention to the view out the passenger window. "Maybe we should hire more guards."

Jimmy felt the car slow.

"Are you saying you don't trust me to take care of you?"

Jimmy's gaze swung to Archer. "No. That's not what I'm saying. I know you'll be there to watch my back, but who's going to watch yours?"

Archer reached out and cupped Jimmy's cheek, his eyes momentarily moving from the road to his passenger. "I'm good at my job. Trust me, okay?"

"I wasn't questioning your abilities, promise. I'm just worried that something will happen to you." Jimmy was sure he sounded like a freaking teenage girl, but having someone to care about other than his mother was new and exciting. Unfortunately, it also came with worry.

They rode in relative silence until they pulled up to Archer's garage. From the front, the beige stucco house looked fairly small, but fantastically private. "Nice," Jimmy commented as Archer drove into the three-car structure. Other than his sports car, there was only one other vehicle in the garage, a big steel-grey motorcycle. For some reason, Jimmy had never pictured Archer as a cycle enthusiast.

Archer popped the trunk and they both got out of the car. Jimmy stretched his sore muscles before retrieving his luggage. The temperature inside the garage had to be at least twenty degrees cooler than it was outside.

"Welcome to my home," Archer said as he unlocked the door that led into the house.

Jimmy stepped inside and came face to face with a wall of glass. "Wow."

"Fantastic, isn't it?" Archer grabbed Jimmy's hand and pulled him towards a doorway. "The view from the master bedroom is just as good, if not better."

Jimmy stood in awe. Archer hadn't exaggerated. The room's subtle shades of beige, brown and light blue were a perfect complement to the sand and sky outside the wall of glass. Jimmy dropped his bag and made his way over to the window. He hadn't noticed from the view in the living room, but there was evidently a floor below them. Built into the side of a hill, Archer's house not only had breathtaking views, but a pool.

"Growing up, I thought anyone with a pool must be rich. I remember a friend of mine had one of those above ground pools, and his dad was a doctor. I just couldn't imagine anyone having anything fancier than that."

Archer walked up behind Jimmy and wrapped his arms around Jimmy's waist. "I'm sure you could afford the biggest pool they make if you'd ever settle down long enough to buy a house."

Jimmy shrugged. "When I wasn't touring or recording, I used to go back to Des Moines to be with Mom. That was always my home. I'm not sure what I'll do now."

Archer lifted the bottom of Jimmy's T-shirt and ran his hands across Jimmy's chest, pulling at the silver hoops. God, Jimmy loved it when Archer tortured his nipples. He leaned back against Archer and rubbed his ass against the front of Archer's jeans. "Are we going back to bed?"

"That was my plan," Archer answered between licks to the side of Jimmy's neck. "Unless of course you're too tired."

Jimmy turned around and wrapped his arms around Archer. "I'll never be too tired for you. I've got a lot of years to make up for."

Chapter Five

Jimmy was busy cleaning the cum from Archer's cock and abdomen when the cell phone on the bedside table rang. He started to lift his head, but Archer pushed him back down.

"Keep doing what you're doing. I'll let it go to voicemail." Archer spread his legs further apart and sighed. "That's nice."

Jimmy chuckled and dove back in, lapping at the soft wrinkled skin of Archer's sac. He was travelling down to the man's ass when the doorbell rang.

"Oh, you've got to be fucking kidding me," Archer groaned.

"Maybe they'll go away," Jimmy said.

"No chance of that. I'm sure it's my parents. They always call from the driveway in case I'm out back swimming nude."

Jimmy licked his lips. "You swim naked?"

Archer chuckled and sat up. "Remind me to take you for a moonlit dip after your show later."

Jimmy rolled over onto his side and watched Archer as he began pulling on clothes. It was a shame to cover such an unbelievable body. "So what about me? Should I stay here or what?"

Archer stopped in the process of zipping his jeans. "I thought you said you didn't mind meeting my folks?"

"I don't, but will I be meeting them as your employer or your lover?" Jimmy punctuated the statement by stroking his half-hard cock. Their relationship, or affair, or whatever, was so new, he wasn't sure quite where he stood.

"How about both?" Archer walked over and gave Jimmy a deep kiss before heading to the door. "Get some clothes on. We'll be downstairs on the patio."

Jimmy rolled to his back. He stared up at the beamed ceiling and sighed. He was sure it was his lack of experience shining through, but he felt closer to Archer than any other man he'd ever known.

He heard voices in the adjoining room and smiled. *I wonder what Archer is telling them about me.* He wished he could be a fly on the wall.

Although Archer hadn't taken a shower, Jimmy needed to. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood. After a good stretch, he walked to the bathroom. As soon as he started moving, he noticed the dull ache in his ass and grinned. It was a feeling he could definitely get used to.

* * * *

Archer opened the door and smiled. "Hey, you two."

"We tried calling," Nancy, his mother said.

"I know. I was...busy."

His mom's sculpted eyebrow rose but bless her, she didn't ask. Instead she breezed into the house and headed for the kitchen.

Archer turned to his dad, Keith, who was standing patiently on the doorstep. "Hey, Dad."

Keith enveloped Archer in a paternal hug. "Son."

Archer tried to step back, but his dad's arms tightened. "Prepare yourself. Your mother has that magazine article in her purse," Keith said in Archer's ear.

Fuck. "Thanks for the warning."

Archer led his dad into the house. He was surprised his mom hadn't mentioned the article as soon as she walked in the door. "Is she mad?"

Keith shook his head and held up his hands. "I'm not getting into it. I'm sure she'll tell you soon enough."

Archer sighed and entered the kitchen. Nancy stood at the counter, making a pot of coffee. He sat on one of the kitchen island stools, not sure how to proceed. Dealing with his mom had always been a tricky business. Archer was an expert at reading peoples' body language, but he'd never been able to read his mom.

"Should we go down to the patio?" Archer offered.

With the coffee maker gurgling, Nancy turned around and plopped her purse on the island. "In a minute."

Archer held his breath as his mom pulled the *Rolling Stone* out of the tote bag she called a purse.

"Have you seen this?" Nancy asked.

"Nope," Archer answered. His fingers were itching to grab the magazine and run, but he knew he had to stand his ground.

"Nope? Is that any way to speak to your mother?" Nancy admonished.

"Sorry. No, ma'am, I haven't seen it."

Nancy picked up the magazine and went directly to the photo spread. Before showing Archer the pictures, she held the magazine to her chest. "Is he here?"

Archer nodded.

"Have things changed between the two of you since I spoke to you on the phone about this?" Nancy asked, holding up the magazine.

Archer scratched his jaw, the bristles of his morning beard scraping against his fingertips. "Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you for telling me the truth, but I already knew they had." Nancy laid the magazine in front of Archer. "You can't look at those pictures and not know."

Despite his parents being in the room, Archer's cock hardened as he studied the sexy pictures. The photo of him gazing into Jimmy's eyes, while pulling the nipple piercing with his teeth, was damn near pornographic. The picture screamed, "I want to fuck you."

As much as he loved the photos, they were something he'd rather have in a personal album. The thought of his wants and feelings on display for anyone to see bothered him. It was like someone reading his diary.

Archer flipped the page and stared at three more images of the kiss he'd shared with Jimmy before closing the magazine.

"Can I keep this?" His initial reaction was to run out and buy every copy he could get his hands on.

"How do those make you feel?" Nancy asked.

Archer rolled his eyes. His mom was a retired psychologist and never let him forget it. "Exposed, I guess."

"Did you know at the time you were falling in love with him?" she asked.

Archer clenched his teeth. Before looking at the pictures he would have denied his feelings for Jimmy, but there they were in full colour for anyone to see. Instead of answering, he simply shook his head.

"Why don't we take the coffee down to the patio," Keith suggested.

Archer glanced at his dad. Throughout the entire exchange with his mom, his dad had taken care of business, like he'd always done. The coffee had been poured into an insulated carafe and set on a tray along with cups, cream and sugar.

Archer ran a hand over the cover of the Rolling Stone before leading the way towards the staircase that would lead them to the lower level. He'd never done much with it. There was a television room with a few comfortable couches, but the majority of the space was still empty.

He unlocked the sliding glass doors and walked onto the patio. Although it was barely eleven, the day proved to be a hot one. Archer opened the large table umbrella and the temperature dropped immediately.

He took a seat while his dad pushed in his mom's chair. Archer grinned. He loved to watch his parents. They were so different, yet so much in love, even after thirty-eight years of marriage.

Archer took a sip of his coffee and moaned. "I needed this."

The glass door slid open and a hesitant-looking Jimmy stepped out onto the patio. Archer stood and held out his hand. "Mom, Dad, this is Jimmy Cook. Jimmy, my parents, Nancy and Keith Adams."

"Pleased to meet you," Jimmy said, shaking hands.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" Nancy asked as she took her seat once more.

"Yes, please," Jimmy answered, sitting next to Archer.

"Would you mind if I asked you a question?" Nancy asked as she slid a cup of coffee across the table.

Jimmy glanced at Archer before shaking his head. "I don't mind."

Archer held his breath and put a comforting hand on Jimmy's leg. There was absolutely no way of knowing what would come out of his mom's mouth.

"Why rock music?"

Relieved, Archer took a breath.

Jimmy seemed to take the question in stride. He flashed the album-cover smile he was known for. "I grew up listening to it. My mom loved to crank the stereo and dance around the house with me. I was lucky enough to see the power of music first hand. No matter what was going on in her life, my mom always stopped what she was doing and sang at the top of her lungs when a good song came on. I'm gonna miss that."

Jimmy stopped talking. "Sorry, you didn't ask for a walk down Memory Lane."

Nancy reached across the table and squeezed Jimmy's hand. "Nonsense. You told me more in those few sentences than some people do in an hour."

"Huh?" Jimmy asked.

Archer rolled his eyes. His mom was putting her psychologist hat on again. "Mom."

Of course Nancy ignored Archer. She had a one track mind at times. "You're a very interesting man, Jimmy. You talk not only with your mouth, but your eyes as well."

"I do?" Jimmy looked confused.

Nancy nodded her head. "It's obvious you loved your mother a great deal. I bet you started playing to make her happy. Along the way, you were lucky enough to find a true joy in music, but for some reason, I think you're questioning yourself since your mom died."

Archer watched Jimmy's Adam's apple bob a few times and moisture pool in his eyes. He wanted to say something but wasn't sure what.

Jimmy cleared his throat. "You're right. Music doesn't make me as happy as it used to."

Nancy gave Jimmy a reassuring smile and a pat on the hand. "I don't think that's it. It's not the music that you're unhappy with. You haven't given yourself time to grieve your loss."

Several tears trickled down Jimmy's handsome face. "Please, excuse me for a moment."

Before Archer could say anything, Jimmy was out of his chair and disappearing into the house. Archer looked at his mom. "Gee, thanks, Mom."

Nancy shook her finger at Archer. "Don't start with me."

"I'm going to make sure he's okay," Archer informed his parents before slipping into the house. He deserved to have his ass kicked for not seeing the signs. He'd chalked up Jimmy's odd remarks about the tour to unease about the man currently stalking him.

"Jimmy?" he called once he was inside.

A toilet flushing caught his attention. He knocked on the bathroom door. "You okay?"

The door opened and Jimmy leant against the doorjamb. "Sorry about that. I'm not usually such a sap."

Archer took a step forward and pressed his body against Jimmy's. He held his tongue, waiting for Jimmy to give him an indication of what he needed.

"Do you think she's right?" Jimmy asked, resting his cheek against Archer's.

"Whether she's right or wrong, she shouldn't have said that to you. Sometimes she doesn't know when to keep her opinions to herself."

"I miss her. She isn't suffering anymore, and I should be happy about that, right? So why can't I say goodbye?"

Archer placed a soft kiss on Jimmy's neck. "She's only been gone a month, babe. Give yourself a break."

"Is everything okay in here?" Nancy asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Adams. We'll be out in a minute." Jimmy turned his head and kissed Archer. "I'm okay. Let's go back outside."

Archer hated to sound like a girl, but Jimmy needed to know. "I'm here for you, ya know? If you need to talk."

Jimmy stared at Archer for several moments. "I'm not much of a talker when it comes to stuff like that, but I'm starting to get used to you holding me."

"Good." Archer kissed Jimmy once more. "Let's go visit and get them out of here."

* * * *

During the sound check, Archer couldn't keep his eyes off Jimmy. Instead of sitting backstage, Archer was standing in front. He had a full view of his lover's sexy body as Jimmy moved around the stage. *Fuck he makes me horny.*

As soon as the song ended, Jimmy walked to the edge of the stage and held out his hand. Archer climbed up with Jimmy's help and melted against him.

"Need you," Archer whispered in Jimmy's ear.

Jimmy reached down and squeezed Archer's ass. "Gonna let me fuck you?"

Archer nodded pushing his butt against Jimmy's hands. "I brought stuff."

Jimmy grinned. "Let's go."

With their arms wrapped around each other they walked towards Jimmy's dressing room. It wasn't a big room, but it had a nice couch that would be perfect. Archer leant over and licked the side of Jimmy's neck. "Wanna feel you."

"You will," Jimmy groaned.

"I need to go over these new dates I've added with you," Benny said, coming at them.

Jimmy stopped and narrowed his eyes. "What new dates? I told you I wouldn't do more shows this tour."

"I know you did, but you were mad at the time. Anyway, I got us some sweet deals," Benny started to continue.

"No." Jimmy shook his head. "Absolutely not. Cancel them."

"I will not." Benny took a step forward. "You listen here..."

"Back off," Archer said, cutting Benny off.

"Stay out of this," Benny spat.

Archer wanted to rip the man's head off, but a finger began pressing against the seam on the back of his jeans.

"We'll talk about this later," Jimmy told Benny.

Red-faced, Benny huffed several times before finally turning to stomp off.

Jimmy slapped Archer's ass. "Let's lock ourselves in the dressing room before he changes his mind and comes back."

Something needed to be done with Jimmy's manager, but Archer doubted he could convince Jimmy to fire the ass.

Once inside the dressing room, Jimmy locked the door and started stripping. Archer enjoyed the view immeasurably. He reached down and unzipped his jeans, pushing his hand inside his underwear to squeeze and stroke his cock as he watched the show. "As sexy as you are onstage, it doesn't hold a candle to you behind closed doors."

"Good." Completely naked, Jimmy took a seat on the couch and spread his legs. "Are you gonna get nekkid for me?"

Archer nodded his head and started peeling off his clothes. "Gonna ride you."

Jimmy had one hand on his cock and one pulling at his piercings. "Where's the stuff?"

Without taking his eyes off Jimmy, Archer toed off his shoes and pushed his jeans down, catching his socks in the process. When he stood, now completely nude, his cock

slapped against his stomach. The flare of Jimmy's nostrils at the action fuelled Archer's lust even further. He reached down and hit his cock back and forth several times.

Jimmy smacked his lips together. "Bring that thing of beauty over here."

Before joining Jimmy on the couch, Archer crossed the room and pulled the lube and a condom out of the garment bag.

"How could someone so strong and so tough have such a cute, tiny ass?" Jimmy asked with a chuckle.

Archer grinned as he took his time, walking to the couch, stopping occasionally to turn around and flex his butt muscles one at a time, making them appear to dance. He'd never thought of himself as fun, especially in bed, but he found he really enjoyed making Jimmy laugh.

"Would you stop teasing me with that and bring it closer?" Jimmy asked, his arms stretched out in front of him.

Archer stepped into Jimmy's arm and was immediately pulled onto his lover's lap. "You make me happy," he confessed, leaning in to give Jimmy a kiss.

Jimmy opened at once, sucking his tongue inside. Archer moaned and ground his erection against the hard, muscled abdomen of his lover. "Touch me," he pleaded, handing Jimmy the lube.

Breaking the kiss, Jimmy stared into Archer's eyes. "Do you have any idea how long I've waited for you to ask me that?"

Silliness over, Archer bit his bottom lip. It wasn't that he was a dishonest person, but he rarely opened himself, preferring to keep his private thoughts to himself. What he was about to divulge was something he'd never admitted to another soul. "Do you have any idea how afraid I am?"

"Of me?" Jimmy asked. "I won't hurt you. I finally have you right where I want you."

"I'm not good at the long distance thing. I'll probably let you down."

Jimmy rested his head on the back of the couch and stared up at the ceiling. "In other words, I'm going to lose you to your next good-looking client."

Archer was surprised Jimmy's mind had gone in that direction. "What? No. I'm no cheater."

"Then how're you going to let me down?" Jimmy's slicked fingers began running up and down the crack of Archer's ass.

Archer leaned forward to lean against Jimmy's chest, opening himself for his lover's touch. "Feels good," he moaned. He buried his face against Jimmy's neck. Ruining the moment by laying his heart on the table wasn't what he'd had in mind when he'd undressed. "No more talking."

Jimmy's lubed finger breached Archer's hole, and thanks to their earlier coupling he was ready within moments. "Need you." Archer tore the packet open with his teeth and handed it to Jimmy.

Archer lowered himself on Jimmy's cock, moaning with each incredible inch. They'd had the intense against-the-sliding-glass-door sex earlier, but this was completely different. Jimmy was lazily stroking Archer's cock as the slow fuck began.

As Archer moved up and down on the thick cock, he kissed his way up Jimmy's neck to his mouth. He captured his lover's plump bottom lip between his teeth and grinned. Releasing Jimmy's lip, he soothed the soft skin with his tongue.

Jimmy's taste brought back memories of the photo shoot. It wasn't often a couple had their first moments captured and laid out in a magazine. Archer braced his hands on Jimmy's shoulders and increased his pace. Even now, thinking of that first kiss made Archer horny. He chuckled. He had a cock up his ass but thinking of a kiss sent him over the edge.

"Jimmy!" Archer's hips snapped forward as the first string of seed landed on Jimmy's stomach.

Archer was still riding the high of his orgasm when Jimmy lifted him enough to power in and out of his ass. With a series of grunts and moans, Jimmy signalled his own climax.

Wrapped in each other's arms, Archer rested his head on top of Jimmy's shoulder. Neither of them spoke, there was no need. For the moment they were two ordinary men, not a rock star and his bodyguard.

* * * *

Archer covered his yawn with a hand as Jimmy started the show. He chose to leave the earplugs in his pocket for this performance. With the open-aired venue, he hoped it would be easier to handle. Besides, after discovering why Jimmy loved rock music so much, Archer felt he owed it to his new lover.

The first song was loud and upbeat, typical for a concert opening. The warm-up act had done a good job of getting the crowd pumped up. In typical Keifer Zane fashion, Jimmy strutted around the stage. Had Jimmy's movements always been so sexual?

Several songs into his set, the lights dimmed, and Jimmy started one of his famous ballads, *Going Down*. The throaty sound of the love song went straight to Archer's cock. No wonder the song was such a global hit. A person didn't even need to know English to understand the song was about making love. The moans and gasps between the verse and chorus could only be construed one way. *Damn*.

Archer realised why the song sounded so different than it had in the past. He'd heard those same moans from Jimmy earlier in the day. If he closed his eyes, he'd see Jimmy's naked body writhing under him.

Archer was shocked when Jimmy turned to stare straight at him. Evidently, he wasn't the only one thinking about their earlier coupling. Meeting Jimmy's gaze, Archer held his breath as his lover once again moaned and gasped through the refrain.

Oh fuck. Archer glanced around before reaching between his legs to adjust his trapped erection. He was glad the song ended when it did. Coming in his jeans wasn't a scenario he cared to explore.

The lights rose and the band started *Smoke on the Water*, a classic cover Jimmy had brought back to life. Archer took a deep breath as his cock deflated. *Crisis averted*.

Prickles started on the back of his neck and Archer surveyed the area. Other than Kog rubbing himself against Jimmy, which was an entirely different matter he'd have to deal with, Archer didn't see anything on stage to cause his uneasy feeling. He'd learned long ago to trust his instincts.

His attention went to the sea of fans, thrusting their fists into the air. *Where is he?* Archer scanned the crowd, never stopping on one individual for more than a second. *There*. Eyes filled with loathing stared straight at Archer. *Fuck!* It was the twink he'd stood up to at the party several nights earlier.

Archer broke eye contact and returned his attention to the stage. He needed to get down into the crowd. After several moments, he pretended to get a call on his cell. If the twink was still watching, he'd think Archer stepped further backstage to take the call.

Once out of sight, Archer found a security guard. "There's a guy in the audience I need to speak with, but he may not come with me of his own volition."

Aware of the security threats involving Keifer, the guard nodded. He spoke into his radio as Archer led the way down the stairs to the mass of screaming fans. *Shit*. At eye level it was harder to spot the twink he suspected was Mark.

Archer turned towards the stage to get his bearings. From where he stood, he didn't see his stool. With one eye on the stage and one on the crowd, he made his way further into the mass of bodies flanked by two security guards.

Reaching the right spot, Archer slowly spun around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the man he was after. "Come on. Come on."

Earlier, the twink had been standing towards the front. If he was still there, he had to be close. Archer wished he were a few inches taller. He subtly wove his way through the crowd, before turning back to one of the guards. He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

Archer continued the search for another ten minutes before giving up. *Fuck! I was so close.*

The action on stage grabbed his attention. In the middle of a song, Kog set his base down, stepped behind Jimmy and began grinding against him. The crowd went nuts, which seemed to spur Kog to go even further.

Archer's hands fisted at his sides as he stalked towards the stage. He'd just decided to kill them both, when Jimmy glanced over his shoulder, shook his head and took a step forward, breaking the connection with Kog.

Kog seemed to take the move as a personal challenge and once again wrapped an arm around Jimmy's waist.

At the front of the stage, Archer flashed his backstage credentials and yelled in a guard's ear. "Get me up there."

The guy nodded and helped Archer onto the stage. Archer didn't give a fuck where he was, no way was he letting Kog molest his lover in front of an arena full of screaming fans.

Although Kog was at least four inches taller and thirty pounds heavier, it took Archer two seconds to bring the man to his knees. He stared down at Kog, his eyes promising further retribution if he attempted to touch Jimmy again.

Ending the song, Jimmy reached out and grabbed Archer's arm. "Have you all met my partner, Archer?" he asked the crowd.

Always the professional, Jimmy tried to diffuse the tense situation. Archer waved to the fans and allowed Jimmy to pull him into a deep kiss. What the hell had he been thinking to let his jealousy get the best of him during the middle of a fucking show?

Archer broke the kiss and stared into Jimmy's dark blue eyes. "I'm sorry," he mouthed.

Jimmy smiled and kissed him once more. The second kiss was shorter, but just as hot. Jimmy held up his arm to signal the band. Archer stepped towards his stool as the concert resumed.

Benny's red face and crossed arms didn't bode well for the conversation Archer knew was inevitable. Luckily, he'd received a call from Seb minutes before Jimmy took the stage.

"What the hell was that?" Benny screamed.

Archer leant in until he was face to face with Jimmy's manager. He wanted to confront Benny with what he'd discovered, but he needed to talk to Jimmy first. "You'd better keep Kog on a fucking leash."

"Or what? Who do you think you are?" Benny spat.

Archer narrowed his eyes. "I'm the man who'd like to kick his ass and yours. Don't fucking push me, bastard."

The song ended and Jimmy said goodnight to his fans. Archer tore his attention away from the sweaty, red-faced manager when Jimmy's hand landed on the small of his back.

Archer stood and turned towards Jimmy. He knew his lover needed to go back out for the two-song encore, but first Archer needed to make sure Jimmy wasn't upset with him. He opened his mouth to apologise when Jimmy leant in and thrust his tongue inside.

After several moments of tongue-fucking Archer's mouth, Jimmy broke away and grinned. Archer breathed a sigh of relief. The rest of the night may have gone to shit, but at least he and Jimmy were okay.

Jimmy gave Archer's ass a squeeze before taking the stage once more.

* * * *

As soon as the lights went down for the last time, Jimmy saw Kog throw down his guitar and head towards Archer. Oh fuck. Kog had no idea who Archer really was, and Jimmy knew Archer could do some serious damage to the bass player.

Jimmy ran for the side of the stage, barely reaching Kog in time. "Stop!"

Kog turned, his nostrils flaring. "I'm not going to let your little toy get away with that shit. He humiliated me out there."

"Like you tried to do to me?" Jimmy asked.

"I was feeling the moment, dude. The crowd loved it," Kog explained, trying to defend his actions.

"Don't you ever put your hands on me again. Understand?" Jimmy reached out and stopped Archer before he could pounce on Kog.

"You're lucky I didn't break your fucking arm," Archer hurled at Kog as Jimmy wrapped his arms around him.

Jimmy stared into Archer's eyes. "Let's just go, okay?"

Archer looked from Jimmy to Kog and back again. "Okay."

When they reached the back gate, Archer gestured to the waiting security. "Stay here while I bring my car around."

The heightened security was becoming a huge pain in the ass. Although he understood the need to play it safe, he was tired of walking around flanked by guards all the time. "Hurry. I want to get out of here."

Archer grinned. "Ready to go skinny-dipping?"

"Something like that," Jimmy answered.

Archer walked out the door, and Jimmy leant back against the wall. He couldn't wait to get Archer all wet and slippery in the pool.

The sound of two gunshots reverberated in Jimmy's ears. "Archer!"

Chapter Six

As soon as Archer started for the parking lot, the hair on the back of his neck prickled. He stopped walking and surveyed the area. Voices could be heard as concert goers left the open air amphitheatre.

After several moments, he continued towards his car. He'd parked in a secured lot close to the venue so he didn't need to fight the crowd. The security guard looked at his credentials before opening the gate. "Thanks, man."

"Have a good evening, sir."

Archer was in the process of pulling his keys out of his pocket when he was knocked forward by a blow to his arm. The keys flew out of his hand by the force of the impact, clattering to the pavement under his car. It wasn't until a split second after the impact that he heard the shot. Archer's cheek caught the side mirror on his way down.

Within a matter of seconds he was struggling to reach his keys. He needed to get to his gun. He should've known better than to leave it in the car, but it made Jimmy uncomfortable. Now he was shot and in an open parking lot without a way to defend himself.

He heard the sounds of running feet and gestured with his good arm. "It came from over there!"

The security guards, most of them off-duty cops, ran towards the opposite end of the parking lot. Archer managed to grab his keys. He hit the key fob just in time for another group of security guards to surround him.

"Sit down, sir. We've got an ambulance on the way."

"Where's Jimmy? Is he still safe?" Archer asked, applying as much pressure to the gunshot wound as he dared.

"Who?" one of the guards asked.

"Jimmy! Keifer Zane! Is he safe?" Archer asked again.

"He's still inside the building although the guys are having a hard time keeping him there."

Archer gestured to the guard's radio. "Get him on there for me."

"You should lie down," the guard said, pulling the radio from his belt. "Hey, Gary? Hand Keifer Zane your radio."

Archer could hear sirens coming towards them, but he needed to make sure Jimmy was taken care of first.

"Archer?" Jimmy sounded panicked. "Are you hurt?"

"Just a nick to my arm. I'll be okay, but I have to go to the hospital. Listen, babe, I need you to call Tony and have him pick you up in the bus. I programmed his number into your phone. Do me a favour and ask him to take you to the nearest police department parking lot. Stay there and wait for me."

"No," Jimmy started to argue. "I'm going with you."

"You can't. It's not safe." Archer squeezed his eyes shut. What if Jimmy had been with him in the parking lot? "I need you to be safe, love. Please."

Several police cars and an ambulance roared through the open gate. The noise was deafening. "I got to go, but promise me you'll do as I said."

"Let me talk to someone else," Jimmy said.

"They'll tell you the same thing. Let me do my job. I've already fucked up twice this evening. I don't want you to suffer for my incompetence."

"Don't even say something like that," Jimmy scolded. "Give your cell phone to one of the policemen. I'll use it to call your folks."

Archer started to argue, but Jimmy was right. If his parents found out he'd been injured and not called, he'd never hear the end of it. "Okay, but make sure you tell them I'm fine."

Archer allowed the paramedics to load him onto a stretcher. "I need to go, but I'll see you soon."

The security guard took his radio back. The expression on the man's face was grim. Archer was positive he looked worse than he felt. He'd suffered worse and managed to live through it. "Get my phone out of my front pocket and give it to Keifer."

The paramedic gave him a disgusted look but did as asked. "You need to keep still, sir."

"Just trying to do my job," he mumbled, kicking himself for not apprehending Mark during the concert.

* * * *

With shaking hands, Jimmy hit speed dial. He hated himself for sitting in the fucking bus while Archer could be fighting for his life.

"Seb."

"It's Jimmy. Archer's been shot," he managed to get out.

"What? How bad is he?" Seb asked.

"I don't know. He made me promise not to go to the hospital. I know he was shot in the arm but that's it. I just got off the phone with his parents. They're on their way down."

"You're in Phoenix, right?"

"Yeah. My driver's taking me to the police station. Archer told me to park the bus there and wait for him."

"I agree with him. Sit tight and I'll head to the airport. Once I'm in Phoenix, I'll take you to Archer if he hasn't been released."

Jimmy sighed. "Thanks."

"Try not to worry. Archer's a tough little bastard."

Jimmy smiled, remembering the way Archer had taken on Kog earlier. "Yeah, I know."

Seb hung up, and Jimmy immediately called Benny.

"Benny."

"I need you to cancel my shows until further notice."

"Not possible."

"Well, make it possible. Archer's been shot." Jimmy stood and began pacing back and forth.

"Unless he's dead, I'm not cancelling."

Jimmy pulled the phone away from his ear and stared at it. Had he heard Benny correctly? "What the fuck? I'm not asking your permission, you callous sonofabitch. I'm telling you. Cancel the damn shows or do them yourself."

Jimmy ended the call before Benny could say anything more. As he expected, his phone immediately started to ring. He turned the phone to vibrate and stuck it in his pocket. He would have turned the damn thing off, but Archer's parents had promised to call when they had news for him.

He opened the fridge and reached inside for a drink, surprised to see only one bottle on the shelf. Jimmy lifted the half-empty bottle and shook his head. He reminded himself to scold Archer when he saw him.

Jimmy unscrewed the cap and took a big gulp before carrying the bottle over to the couch. He wondered if he should call one of the members of the band. Although after what happened earlier, he doubted he could get any of them to talk to him. Things between him and his old bandmates had been strained since the world learned of his sexuality. There was no doubt the situation would be even worse after Kog's little performance onstage.

He finished his drink and tossed the empty bottle into the recycle bin before pulling the phone out of his pocket once again. How long had it been since he'd spoken to Archer's mom? And why weren't they at the police station yet?

Jimmy tried to get up to ask Tony, but fell back onto the sofa as his vision blurred. He shook his head, trying to clear his eyesight. *Fuck*. He managed to get his phone out of his pocket and dialled.

"9-1-1 operator. What is the nature of your emergency?"

Those were the last words Jimmy heard before his world went black.

* * * *

With fourteen stitches to close his cheek and gauze dressing wrapped around his arm, Archer reached for his clothes.

"What're you doing?" his mom asked.

"I promised Jimmy I'd meet him at the police station," Archer answered as he struggled to untie the hospital gown.

"You've been shot, son. I think you should just lie back and take it easy until the doctor releases you," Keith said.

Archer looked up at his dad. "I'm fine. Really. The doctor said it's a clean wound, and other than coming back in a couple of days to have it checked for infection and stitched, I should be fine."

Archer had just dropped the gown when Seb walked into the small room.

"Sorry." Seb turned around, giving Archer privacy. "I went by the police department closest to the Cricket Pavilion and no bus. I tried to call Jimmy but no one answered."

With the use of only one arm, Archer was getting frustrated. "Mom, would you help me?" he asked before addressing Seb. "Did you try my phone?"

Seb nodded. "No answer."

"You can turn around," Archer told his boss once his jeans were in place. "I've got Tony's number in my wallet."

"Who's Tony?" Seb asked.

"Temporary driver that joined us in Vegas." Archer glanced around. "Mom, do you know where my wallet is?"

Nancy bent over and pulled the plastic bag out from under the emergency room bed. She handed Archer his wallet and started putting his socks on him.

Archer handed the wallet to Seb. "Should be right there tucked in the front."

Seb pulled out a slip of paper and his phone before handing the billfold back.

Archer held his breath as Seb started punching in the number. "Three zero three? Where's that area code from?" Seb asked.

"I don't know. If he answers, though, give me the phone."

Seb's head jerked back. "Seb. Hold on." Seb held the phone out to Archer. "Belligerent sonofabitch."

That didn't sound like Tony at all. Archer took the phone. "Tony?"

"I prefer the name Mark," Tony said.

Archer's blood ran cold. "What's going on? Where's Jimmy?"

"Keifer's fine. I just left him sleeping in our bed."

Archer's eyes closed as he tried to rein in his anger. Yelling at Mark wasn't going to do Jimmy any good. "Please don't hurt him," he begged.

"Hurt him? Why would I do that? I love him, and someday he'll love me, too. I just know it."

Archer breathed a small sigh of relief. Mark may be delusional, but at least he wasn't violent. Of course everything could change if Mark thought someone was going to take Jimmy away from him. "Will you let me talk to Keifer? I'd like to say goodbye to him."

"No. I told you he was sleeping. Besides, I'd have to stop the bus, and we've got a long way to go."

It was on the tip of Archer's tongue to ask where they were going, but he didn't want to spook Mark. He could track them, he'd just need the right equipment. "Will you ask him to call me when he wakes up, and you get where you're going?"

"I'll ask, but don't be surprised if he doesn't want to talk to you. We're trying to start our new life together. I'll convince him to let go of the past so we can move forward. There's really nothing left to say," Mark explained before the call ended.

Archer pulled the phone away from his ear. "It's Tony...Mark." Archer shook his head. "The guy I've been after all this time has been right under my fucking nose since we left Vegas."

"Calm down," Nancy warned. "You're not going to help anyone if you start bleeding again."

Archer held out his hand. "Where's my shirt?"

"In the garbage," Keith told him.

Archer got to his feet. "Fine. I have to go home anyway." He glanced at Seb. "Will you drive me to my place? Jimmy's got my phone which means I can track him, but I need to get to my computer."

"You just gonna walk out of here?" Seb asked.

"Damn straight. I'll keep my follow-up appointment, but there's nothing else they can do for me now anyway." Archer turned to his parents. "Sorry for worrying you, but I'm fine."

Nancy shook her head and pursed her lips in that motherly way Archer always hated. Nothing she could say would change his mind and she obviously knew it. "Call us when you find him."

"Will do." He leant in and gave his mom a quick kiss on the cheek. "Positive thoughts."

Nancy smiled.

It was something she'd always said to him when he was growing up, and he still repeated the words when he felt overwhelmed. They were never needed more than that moment.

* * * *

One handed, Archer punched his cell phone number into the computer program. "It won't be exact, of course, but it should give us a good idea where Mark's headed."

Seb acknowledged Archer's statement as he continued to talk to Mac.

"Come on. Come on." Archer tapped his fingers on the desk as he waited for the triangulation of his cell phone signal. "Bingo!"

Archer pointed towards his computer screen. "He's on I-40 just east of Gallup. Tell Mac he's headed that way."

As Seb relayed the message, Archer stood and went to find a shirt. He settled on a button-down and carried it to the kitchen to cut off the sleeves. Seb appeared at Archer's side as he was attempting to get the sling off.

"Need some help?" Seb asked, taking over.

"Thanks. Is Mac sending a team?"

"Yeah. He's also calling in the highway patrol and taking over your cell phone tracking."

Archer shook his head. "If they go after Mark with sirens blaring, it's going to freak him out."

"Let Mac handle it. He's been in this business a long time." Seb helped Archer put his shirt on.

He noticed Seb's expression as he buttoned Archer's shirt. "What?"

Seb's gaze bore into him. "You've done it, haven't you?"

"What?"

"You're falling for your client," Seb clarified. "I saw the magazine."

"I'm not completely there, but yeah," Archer admitted.

"What about Jimmy?" Seb asked.

"I can tell he feels something for me, how much, I still don't know. I was hoping we'd have plenty of time to figure things out." Archer glanced at the clock on the wall. He couldn't believe it was only four in the morning. It seemed like days since he'd kissed Jimmy in front of a crowd of fans.

Archer sighed. It didn't have anything to do with how long their physical relationship had existed. Archer began to fall before Jimmy ever left to go home and help his mom. Fuck! He'd wasted so much time being a hard-headed sonofabitch. Time he could've spent in Jimmy's arms.

"Earth to Archer." Seb waved his hand in front of Archer's face.

"What?"

"There's a flight to Albuquerque at six." Seb snapped his phone shut and shoved it in his back pocket.

"Then let's get there." Archer started towards the door but stopped. "If you're going to yell at me for falling for Jimmy, do it after I have him back."

Seb shook his head. "I'm not gonna yell, although I have a feeling I'll be losing one of my best employees."

Archer started to deny Seb's conclusion, but he stopped himself. Although he couldn't imagine life on the road, he also couldn't imagine a life without Jimmy. *Damn. I've got it bad.*

* * * *

Pain, like nothing he'd ever experienced, shot through Jimmy's shoulder as he struggled to free his cuffed hands from the built-in headboard. Tears rushed to his eyes and down his cheeks as he tried to pop his dislocated shoulder back into place.

"Mark!" he screamed again.

The bus lurched to the right, indicating Mark heard him. Jimmy tried again. "Please! I'm hurt!"

When he'd first regained consciousness, Tony had somehow managed to drag him into the back of the bus and onto the bed. It was there Jimmy found out his driver, Tony was really his stalker, Mark.

Jimmy had kicked out at his kidnapper when Mark had tried to touch him in an intimate way.

Mark had merely smiled and said, "I know you must be angry, but you'll see, we'll be good together."

That was the moment Jimmy knew how unstable Mark really was. As soon as Mark stepped out of the room, Jimmy had begun to work on freeing himself from the headboard. He'd made good progress until he'd dislocated his shoulder.

"Mark!" he tried yelling again.

* * * *

The moment they stepped off the plane, Seb checked his messages. He reached out and grabbed Archer's good arm, pulling him to a stop.

"The highway patrol forced the bus off the road about twenty miles west of here."

"Is Jimmy okay?" Archer asked, his heart racing at the news.

Seb shook his head and punched a few numbers into his phone. "There's a stand-off." He punched in more numbers and then held the phone to his ear. "Mac, tell me what's going on."

Archer started walking towards the parking lot while Seb continued his call. Outside, he looked at Seb for directions.

Seb pointed to the right and headed that way. "Okay, we'll be there in about twenty."

"What'd he say?" Archer asked.

Seb unlocked the passenger door on his El Camino SS and helped Archer into the seat. Archer didn't bother with his seatbelt although he knew Seb was likely to give him a hard time about it.

When Seb got behind the wheel and pulled out of the parking space without a word, Archer knew something was wrong. "What aren't you telling me?"

Seb looked both ways before pulling out of the parking lot. "The highway patrol used stop sticks. At the speed the bus was travelling, it flipped over onto its side when it hit them."

"Fuck!" Archer spat. "They should've known better."

"They haven't heard anything, but they know the driver managed to make it into the back of the bus." Seb glanced at Archer. "They're going on the assumption Mark has a gun."

Archer nodded and gestured to his arm. "He does unless he did this with a pea shooter."

With his eyes still on the road, Seb reached over and squeezed Archer's thigh. "We'll get him out of there."

"They haven't heard anything from inside the bus?" Archer couldn't imagine what Jimmy must be going through.

Seb released Archer's leg and put both hands back on the wheel. "Nothing. Nicco's been trying to talk to Mark using a bullhorn, but so far no answer."

"The longer Mark's in there, the more desperate he'll become. They should go in."

"Can't. The bus landed on its right side. The only way in is through the driver's door but it's locked. Busting the window will alert Mark."

Archer reached into his pocket and produced his keys, jangling them for Seb's benefit. "I'll go in."

"The hell you will. You've only got use of one arm," Seb argued.

"Would you let that stop you from rescuing Jared?" Archer asked. He'd been there when they'd found Jared locked in the cab of his kidnapper's semi-truck.

"No. I'm sure I'd be as bull-headed as you about it, but I'd hope a friend would help me see the error of my ways. The main objective is to get Jimmy out of there alive. The two of you can swear your undying love for each other once he's safe."

Knowing Seb was right, and admitting it were two different things. Archer remained quiet until they pulled up to the roadblock.

Seb rolled down his window and pulled out his credentials. "This is Keifer Zane's bodyguard," Seb told the patrolmen.

The patrolmen nodded and motioned to one of the cars. It backed up, opening a gap for Seb to get through. "Thanks."

It was only another half a mile before Archer spotted the bus. It looked like a big black beached whale lying on its side. There had to be at least eight police cars along with numerous others, some of them belonging to Three Partners Protection.

Seb pulled behind an unmarked car and they both got out. Archer resettled his sling as they made their way towards the gathered group of men.

"I've got keys," Archer told Mac.

"Toss 'em to Michael," Mac replied, indicating a man in a bulletproof vest, the words FBI written in gold across his dark blue baseball cap.

Archer did as instructed. "You going in?"

Michael nodded.

"I'll owe you my life if you bring Jimmy out of there alive." Archer reached out with his good arm to shake the man's hand.

"I'll do my best, sir," Michael answered.

Archer indicated the key that would unlock the driver's door as well as the door to the main part of the bus. "When I spoke to Mark earlier, he said Jimmy was in bed. That's at the rear of the bus."

"Got it."

Archer gave Michael a short nod before walking back to stand beside Mac, Nicco and Seb.

"How're you doing?" Nicco asked, staring at the bandage on Archer's cheek.

"Fine." Archer shielded his eyes from the morning sun. His friends meant well, but Archer didn't want to talk.

He'd made occasional mistakes throughout his career, but he'd never fucked up the way he had with Jimmy. Archer knew his actions would haunt him forever.

Nicco began speaking to Mark through the bullhorn, trying to make as much noise as possible. Archer held his breath as Michael slowly lowered himself into the front of the bus.

"Please be okay," he mumbled to himself over and over until he heard a single shot split the cool morning air.

Several moments later, Michael popped his head out of the driver's window. "I need a couple of medics."

Everyone seemed to move at once. The paramedics, who had been standing by, rushed towards the overturned bus.

"Someone bring me a punch for one of these windows!" Michael yelled.

Archer walked towards the bus as one of the patrolmen tossed a glass punch up to Michael. "How's Jimmy?"

Michael stopped in the process of crawling along the side of the bus, which was currently the top, to stare down at Archer. "He's alive."

Archer couldn't read the expression on Michael's face. *He's alive* could mean a number of things, so which was it? Was Jimmy okay? Was he hurt? Was he bleeding? Archer began to pace. Everything in him screamed to climb up the side of the bus and check on Jimmy for himself, but he knew he couldn't do shit with one arm.

With the large picture window in the main area of the bus in pieces, the paramedics climbed through the much bigger opening with a portable stretcher.

Archer's gaze focused on the stretcher. Did they need that for Mark or Jimmy? Or both? Within minutes the bus was swarmed by agents, emergency workers and patrolmen. Archer thought he heard Jimmy call his name.

"Jimmy!" Archer yelled, hoping his lover could hear him. He waited several seconds, listening for a reply. The only thing he heard was the front windshield break out. Archer ran

to the front of the bus to see what was going on. A moaning body was being carried on a stretcher through the door that separated the main living area from the driver.

"Jimmy?"

"Archer."

Although garbled, Archer knew he'd heard his name. A hand on his back was the first indication he wasn't alone. He glanced at Seb. "That's him. They're bringing him out."

Michael, along with one of the paramedics, climbed through the broken windshield, still holding onto the stretcher.

Archer stepped forward, but not enough to get in the way. His first look of Jimmy knocked the wind out of him. He struggled to get a breath as he stared at the writhing, crying man.

"I'm here," Archer told Jimmy.

Jimmy turned his head and stared at Archer briefly before moaning again.

"What's wrong with him?" Archer asked one of the paramedics.

"He was cuffed to the headboard. He's got the worst shoulder dislocation I've ever seen."

"Can't you just pop it back into place?" Archer asked.

The paramedic shook his head. "He's got more damage than a dislocation. He'll need surgery."

Once Jimmy was free of the bus, Archer brushed a hand over Jimmy's cheek. "I wish I could take your pain away, love."

"Stay with me," Jimmy said around a groan.

"I will. I'll be right here by your side."

Chapter Seven

"Well good morning, sleepy head." Archer reached out and brushed the dark hair from Jimmy's forehead. "How're you feeling?"

Jimmy ached all over, but he didn't want to whine, especially when Archer had been shot. "Sore, but okay."

"Benny was here last night," Archer informed him.

Jimmy closed his eyes and nodded. "No doubt to see when I'd be ready to go back on the road."

"Actually, I think he was truly concerned."

Jimmy opened his eyes and stared at his lover questioningly.

"Okay, he did ask how long it would take you to heal, but before that he seemed genuine."

Dealing with Benny was something Jimmy was in no way looking forward to. He'd decided the previous day something would have to change. Now it was time to figure out what. "Did you find out where Benny got his bribe money?"

Archer leant his forearms on the mattress and dove in for a quick, but deep, kiss. "There. I feel a hell of a lot better now."

Jimmy grinned. He felt better, too, but why was Archer avoiding his question. "Benny?"

Archer sighed. "We're sure he didn't earn it. He was known around Kansas City as a pool hustler among other things. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any one thing we can bargain with."

"Oh." Jimmy bit his bottom lip. He'd hoped...

"You can still tell him to take a hike, ya know? You had the guts to out yourself to millions of fans. Don't you think you've earned the right to live life on your terms for a change?"

It was definitely something he needed to think about. "The problem is he's a good manager, he really is. And I don't want to deal with the everyday crap that happens. I just want a say."

Archer cupped Jimmy's cheek. "Then tell him that. Renegotiate the contract you have with him or something. If he doesn't like it, fire him."

"I hate touring, going from city to city, living out of a bus. It sucks. But with all the piracy shit going on, it's the only way I make money."

"Well you won't be able to even think about going back on tour for at least two to three months. That gives us plenty of time to figure it out."

Jimmy nodded. When the bus crashed his already dislocated shoulder bore the brunt of his full weight until he was able to get his feet under him. Never could he have imagined such pain existed. He could still hear his own screams echoing through the bus as he felt his tendons and ligaments tear.

Mark had actually helped by releasing him from the handcuffs. Unfortunately, Jimmy had been in so much pain, he hadn't been able to overpower his captor. Instead he accepted the offered support from Mark.

"I know Mark was sick, but I really think he was trying to protect me there at the end." Although he was happy to be away from Mark, he wished the delusional man hadn't been killed.

"Mark had a gun," Archer said. "When the gun was pointed at Michael, he had no choice but to fire."

"I know." Jimmy nodded. "I just wish it hadn't come to that."

Archer leant in and kissed Jimmy again. "Whether he was crazy or not, Mark had been planning it for a long time. He was a smart man who knew how to manipulate people into giving him what he wanted. I talked to the company that sent him to fill in for David."

Shit. That reminded him. "How's David?"

"He'll be fine. He suffered a mysterious case of severe food poisoning. The agency thought it was lucky one of the substitute drivers was so close and could take over. Little did everyone know Mark had planned the whole thing."

Studying the perfectly sculpted features of the man in front of him, Jimmy tried to muster a smile. "Are you okay? You look really tired."

"I am. We've had a pretty rough couple of days. I got a room down the street, but I couldn't sleep. I realised I'd rather be with you, even if it meant sitting in an uncomfortable chair all night."

"When do you think they'll let me leave? That big bed of yours sounds really nice."

"Could be as early as today. Course you'll be ordered to bed for a few days. Seb's offered us a room at his house until you're up to travelling."

Jimmy pursed his lips. "Really? So I could be in a bed with you in as little as a few hours?"

Archer chuckled. "Don't get any sexy ideas. You probably won't be up for a good romp for at least a week."

"Is that a challenge?" Jimmy asked.

The door opened and Seb came into the room. "Speak of the devil," Archer greeted his boss. "I just told Jimmy you were nice enough to offer us a room."

Seb grinned and turned a subtle shade of red. "It's not strictly for selfless reasons. Jared's excited to meet you. We live outside of town, though, and it's real peaceful, just what the doctor ordered."

Jimmy thought it would be nice to relax in the country for a few days, especially with Archer at his side. He glanced at his lover. "You're on leave, right?"

Archer's gaze shot to Seb before looking back at Jimmy. "Yes."

Jimmy wondered what Archer wasn't telling him, but he didn't want to get into it in front of Seb. He still had Benny to deal with. "Would you do me a favour and call Benny? I'd like to talk to him before I leave."

"Are you sure you're up to it?" Archer asked.

"No, but I wanna get it over with."

Ignoring Seb's presence, Archer leant in and kissed Jimmy, thrusting his tongue deep. "I'll be right here with you if you want me to be."

"Always," Jimmy answered.

* * * *

Jimmy glanced at the man beside him. Even though Archer had run off to the home office with Seb, Jimmy really enjoyed Jared's company. "I'll be sorry to leave this place."

Jared glanced around the sunroom and nodded. "It's nice, isn't it? I never in a million years dreamt I'd live in a place like this."

Jimmy's gut clenched. Archer had filled him in on Jared's past and how Seb had been the one to bring Jared out of his shell. The house Seb and Jared had moved into was nice, but

that wasn't what Jimmy had been talking about. It was comfortable, like his boyhood home. He liked Archer's house, but it didn't really feel lived in. He wondered if it had anything to do with Archer always travelling for work. What would it be like if the two of them settled down together? Would Archer even be willing to leave his job?

"Penny for your thoughts?"

Jimmy smiled at Jared. "Just thinking about how comfortable I feel in this house. Wondering if I'll ever have a place that feels like home to me."

Jared's eyebrows drew together. "Um, excuse me for asking, but you have money, right?"

"Yeah, I've got quite a bit of it," Jimmy answered truthfully.

"So buy a house."

"I've been thinking about it."

Jared had lived with Seb for several months, so maybe he'd be a good person to pump for information.

"Do you know how long Archer's usual jobs last?" Jimmy asked.

Jared scratched the top of his head. "No, not really. I would imagine it depends on the job though. Some, like yours, are until the imminent threat passes, while others can be a lot shorter. I think they do a lot of guarding important people from out of the country while they're here."

Jimmy was taking it all in, when Jared reached across the couch and put a hand on his arm.

"Do you want to be with Archer?" Jared asked.

"Of course I do. But our lives are so different. I don't know how it would be possible."

Jared shrugged. "I guess you just have to decide what's really important to you."

* * * *

Archer held his breath as he waited for Mac to let him have it. He'd expected Mac to call the meeting earlier, but evidently his boss wanted to wait until he was headed out of town. All morning he'd wondered if unemployment was in his immediate future.

"So what now?" Mac asked as he took a seat behind his desk.

Archer gestured to his arm. "I'm on leave for another two weeks. I thought I'd take Jimmy back to Phoenix with me."

Mac nodded and leant his forearms on the desk, putting him even closer to Archer. "Then what?"

That was the million dollar question. Archer still didn't know. He decided to be completely honest. "I don't know."

"Are you going to follow him when he goes back on tour?" Mac asked.

"I don't know. Things haven't gotten to that point yet."

The corner of Mac's mouth tilted up in a sexy lopsided grin. "Are you trying to tell me you don't know what your feelings are for Jimmy?"

Archer knew how he felt about Jimmy, but they'd yet to discuss a future together. "I..." Archer took a deep breath before continuing. It wasn't easy for him to admit a weakness, especially to the man who signed his paycheque. "I don't know how he feels about me."

Mac sat back in his chair and pulled open his top desk drawer. He tossed the copy of Rolling Stone on the desk and crossed his arms with a smug grin on his face.

Archer didn't even open the magazine. "Yeah, I know. My mom told me my feelings were right there for everyone to see."

Mac picked up the magazine and turned it to the photo spread. "I wasn't looking at your expression as much as Jimmy's." Mac held out the magazine.

Archer took the Rolling Stone and tried to concentrate on Jimmy's face. He'd been so embarrassed by his own obvious emotions when his mom had shown the pictures to him, he hadn't taken the time to look at Jimmy.

Archer cocked his head to the side as he stared at Jimmy's face. He could definitely see lust. Jimmy looked like he was about to come in his pants, but something deeper than lust? No. He set the magazine back on the desk. "Sorry. I don't see anything but a man experiencing the touch of another man for the first time in fifteen years."

Mac's jaw clenched. "Maybe you can't see it because you won't allow yourself to believe it."

* * * *

With a ball cap pulled low on his head and two days worth of stubble on his cheeks, Jimmy managed to get through the airport without anyone spotting him. The tabloids were having a field day with the kidnapping and subsequent death of his stalker.

Archer glanced at his lover as he tried to get comfortable in the small coach seat. He'd argued with Jimmy over the available seating. Jimmy could probably get bumped to first class if he informed the airline who he really was, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"Is your shoulder okay?" he asked.

Jimmy grinned. "I hate planes. Why do you think I take a bus all over the country?"

"We could've rented a car and drove back," Archer said.

"Naw. I'd rather suffer through the hour and fifteen minutes flight." Jimmy pulled down the window shade and closed his eyes. "Maybe if I take a nap it won't bother me so much."

Archer threaded his finger through Jimmy's. He glanced around them, surprised to see no one paying them attention. It would be a completely different story if they knew who Jimmy was, but for the moment, they were two ordinary queers flying to Phoenix.

By the time the plane took off, Jimmy was softly snoring, his head resting against Archer's shoulder. Archer would have liked to rip the ball cap off so at least he could watch his lover's sleeping face for the next hour. Instead when he looked down he was treated to the bill of a navy cap.

As the flight wore on, Archer's thoughts travelled back to his meeting with Mac. It was surprising his boss hadn't been angry. Archer figured it had a lot to do with Mac's own personal happiness.

Maybe Mac was right, maybe he was afraid to believe someone like Jimmy could love him. His relationship with Joe had been so incredibly different from the one he'd had with Jimmy. It wasn't that he hadn't loved Joe, he had. Archer simply hadn't pined for his lover when they weren't together. It was a fault of his, he knew, but for him it was out of sight, out of mind, at least where it concerned his relationship with Joe.

Archer wondered if it would be different with Jimmy. Since rejoining the tour, he hadn't spent a full day away from Jimmy. Maybe that's why he thought he was so in love with the man, he was always in front of him.

Archer shook his head and rolled his eyes at his reasoning. The one night he should have been able to spend away from Jimmy, he'd chosen to sit in a vinyl chair at his bedside instead.

The plane hit an air pocket and bounced. The movement jostled Jimmy's shoulder and he sat up with a groan. "Please tell me we're almost there?"

Archer used the opportunity to take Jimmy's hat off and toss it into his lover's lap. "Sorry. We still have at least thirty-five minutes or so."

"I enjoyed myself at Seb's. I think I'd like to buy a house in the country. Someplace where I could just be Jimmy and the locals don't give a flying flip about what I do for a living."

"They have real estate for sale on Mars?" Archer joked, but he'd seen the way Jimmy had flourished at Seb's.

"Maybe Iowa or Kansas, hell, even Nebraska if I get desperate." Jimmy snorted a laugh. "Sorry, just a little Iowan humour."

Iowa? Archer would never have pictured himself moving to Iowa. "It snows there, right?"

Jimmy nodded. "Four seasons, just the way God intended."

Archer bit his tongue before he could ask if they could still spend winters in Phoenix. He knew it was too early in their relationship to think of the future. It would serve him well to appreciate each day he had with Jimmy and not dream about what might happen.

* * * *

"Thanks, Seb." Jimmy hung up and dropped the phone on the table. For two weeks he'd been living in a state of bliss only to have it come crashing down around him. It had only been three days since he'd talked to Archer about continuing his bodyguard services when the tour started up again. Other than to say, "We'll see," Archer hadn't given him any indication he didn't want to be with him.

Jimmy stood and walked downstairs to the patio where Archer was sunning himself. He took a seat and stared at Archer. The term gorgeous didn't begin to do Archer's body justice. The man was nothing but sinewy muscles and bronzed skin.

It took Archer several moments, but he eventually took his nose out of the book he was reading. "Hey, baby."

Jimmy bit the inside of his cheek. "I just got off the phone with Seb."

"Yeah?" Archer asked casually.

Jimmy nodded. "He called to tell me I'd have to find another bodyguard because you quit."

Archer rolled to his side to face Jimmy. He braced his head on his hand and nodded. "I quit, but you don't need to find another bodyguard, and Seb knows it. He's just being an ass."

"Really? Because he said he was sending someone by the name of Raven to Phoenix to meet with me."

"Over my dead body." Archer didn't give Jimmy the chance to say anything more before he grabbed his phone and began punching numbers.

"What the hell are you playing at, Seb?" Archer barked into the phone.

Jimmy couldn't understand the other end of the conversation, but he definitely heard snatches of it. It seemed Seb was as fired up as Archer. What the hell was going on between those two?

"That's none of your fucking business," Archer told Seb. "You let me worry about me, okay?"

Jimmy tried to concentrate on the few words he picked up from Seb's end, but chicken shit and motherfucker weren't much to go on. *Why is it that men always cuss louder than they talk?*

"I swear if you even joke about sending Raven to guard Jimmy again, I'll fly back to Albuquerque and kick your ass."

Jimmy wondered what Raven had done to make Archer hate him so much. He stood and sat on the bottom of Archer's lounge chair.

"Okay. I'll talk to you next week. Give Jared our love." Archer hung up and stared at Jimmy.

"What the hell was that about?" Jimmy asked.

"Raven's a slut, and I don't want him anywhere near you," Archer practically growled.

"All right. So if you quit your job, what am I supposed to do about a bodyguard?"

Archer reached out and tugged on Jimmy's hand until he got the hint and lay down beside him. "We haven't discussed it, but I wanted to ask if I could stay with you as a boyfriend, not a bodyguard. The benefit is I'm also perfectly capable of protecting you should the occasion arise. Unless of course you think I did such a shitty job before you don't want me."

"Shut up," Jimmy told the babbling man in front of him. He gave Archer a deep kiss, reaching out to thread his fingers through his lover's hair. Although it had been two and a half weeks since his surgery, his shoulder still wasn't healed enough to hold Archer the way he wanted. He settled on kissing the man with all the passion he felt. His tongue danced across Archer's as their hands started to wander.

Jimmy reached under the elastic band at Archer's waist to encircle his cock.

"Mmmm," Archer groaned, breaking the kiss.

They gazed into each other's eyes for several moments before Archer grinned. It was the sweetest smile Jimmy had ever seen.

"I love you," Archer whispered.

Jimmy suddenly felt warm and fuzzy. "I love you, too."

Archer leant in and gave Jimmy a soft kiss. "Let's go upstairs."

Jimmy got to his feet and held out his hand to help the man who loved him. *Someone loves me.* The love starved man inside of him wanted to pump his fists into the air in victory, but the cool rocker prevailed. He rested his hand on the small of Archer's back as they walked into the house.

"You know there's no reason you shouldn't get paid for guarding me," Jimmy said.

"No. I've got enough money. I've worked my ass off. Maybe I want to think of nothing more than travelling around the country in a tricked out bus with the man I love."

Jimmy bumped his hip against Archer's. "What're you going to do the other ten months of the year? Because I made it clear to Benny I'd do a summer tour only."

Archer shed his shorts the moment they entered the bedroom and started working on Jimmy's clothes. "I was thinking about taking a woodworking class. I've always wished I knew how to build something."

"Woodworking? Are you crazy? That's too dangerous. I once knew a guy who cut his freaking finger off in shop class."

Archer pulled Jimmy's jeans off and tossed them to the side. "I bet it's safer than getting shot at."

Jimmy let himself be pushed back onto the bed. He lifted his feet to rest on the edge of the mattress, opening himself to his lover's eyes. "Good point."

Archer knelt on the floor and pressed his face against the wrinkled skin of Jimmy's balls.

Jimmy grinned as he heard the unmistakable sound of Archer inhaling. "Lube?"

"In a minute. Just want to enjoy you." Archer climbed on the bed and rested his head on Jimmy's lower stomach. "Do you still want a house in the country?"

"Yeah. Don't get me wrong, this is a nice place, but it's not really my taste."

Archer lifted his head and glanced around the room. "Really? What's your taste?"

Jimmy's legs were starting to cramp so he manoeuvred to the middle of the bed and rested his head on a pillow. Archer quickly followed.

"You're not trying to get out of telling me what's wrong with my house, are you?"

Jimmy laughed. That's exactly what he'd been trying to do. "There's nothing wrong with your house, but that's part of the problem. I've spent years living in hotel rooms. They're too perfect. Everything's too matchy. I grew up in a house with mismatched furniture. We had a few of my grandma's hand-me-downs, some garage sale finds and even a couple of things I found sitting beside the road on trash day..."

"I am not sitting on a discarded sofa," Archer interjected.

"Oh my God. You're a snob," Jimmy sat up and stared down at Archer.

"No I'm not. I just happen to have enough money to buy new mismatched furniture if I need to."

Jimmy chuckled and pulled Archer down beside him. "You understand what I'm saying though, right?"

"You wanna be able to put your feet on the couch and scratch your balls like every other man in America."

Jimmy sat up and straddled Archer's lap. "I'd much rather you scratched my balls."

Archer reached down and cupped Jimmy's sac. "Enough talk."

"My thoughts exactly." Jimmy lay against Archer's chest and kissed him. Jimmy moaned as Archer's finger pressed against his hole.

He pushed back against his lover's hand, wanting...no...needing to be filled. Every time he and Archer made love it brought them closer. Jimmy retrieved the lube from under the pillow and held it up. "Want some?"

Archer lifted his head and latched onto Jimmy's neck, sucking the flesh between his teeth until Jimmy knew he'd been marked. He smiled to himself as he poured the slick onto Archer's hand. By the time he went back on tour, Jimmy had a feeling he'd be marked from head to toe.

The smooth slide of Archer's finger as it entered him sent a bolt of pleasure through Jimmy's entire body. "Yessss."

"Does that feel good, love?" Archer asked, adding another finger.

"You know it does. You always make me feel good. I think you know my body better than I do." A rub to his prostate made Jimmy jerk, hissing as he tried not to come. "I'm ready."

Archer chuckled. "I know. I'm just playing with ya now."

"Well, stop playing and start fucking."

Archer removed his fingers. "All yours, babe."

Jimmy grinned. He was so happy they'd agreed to get tested and dump the condoms, or torture chambers, as Archer had started calling them.

Jimmy planted his feet on either side of Archer's hips and rose. His loving partner reached between them and held the base of his cock as Jimmy slowly lowered himself. "Oh, yeah. That's what I needed."

As he rode his favourite cock, he reached down and ran his hands over Archer's washboard abs. "So sexy," he whispered.

"Hope you always think so," Archer said as he wrapped a hand around Jimmy's bouncing erection.

"I told Benny to hire only straight musicians from now on. No more guys like Kog, promise."

The statement earned Jimmy a rapid succession of thrusts from his amazing bodyguard. It didn't matter what title they gave Archer. The only one Jimmy was concerned with was partner.

"Love you," he mouthed, staring into Archer's eyes.

Archer's thumb pressed against the slit on the crown of Jimmy's cock, setting him off in a flash. "Oh, fuck!" Jimmy howled as he painted Archer's chest with thick ropes of cum.

Even as he was coming, Jimmy worked his muscles, squeezing Archer's cock as tight as he could. It didn't take long for Archer to follow Jimmy over the edge, pulling Jimmy down against his chest.

Jimmy tilted his chin up and nipped at the short whiskers of Archer's soul patch. "I want you to go with me to order my new bus."

"Why, you evidently don't like my taste in decorating anyway," Archer pouted, obviously still smarting from Jimmy's earlier comment.

"Don't be an ass. I want your opinion on configuration. You know what worked in the old bus and what didn't." Jimmy kissed his way to Archer's lips and pushed his tongue inside for a savoury taste.

Archer broke the kiss and squeezed Jimmy's ass. "I guess I'd better go keep an eye on you. Otherwise you'll tell them to fill it with thrift store furniture."

Jimmy bit the side of Archer's neck. "Just watch. Once I find our house in the country, we'll just see who knows a thing or two about making a house a home."

Archer chased Jimmy's lips until he captured them with his own. After another tongue battle, he gazed into Jimmy's eyes. "If home is where the heart is, I've no doubt you can make anything my home, even a damn tour bus."

Jimmy snuggled further against Archer. He would be perfectly content to spend the rest of his life in his lover's arms. Archer was right. Together they could make a home anywhere.

About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles between being a full-time mother and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find Carol either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favourite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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