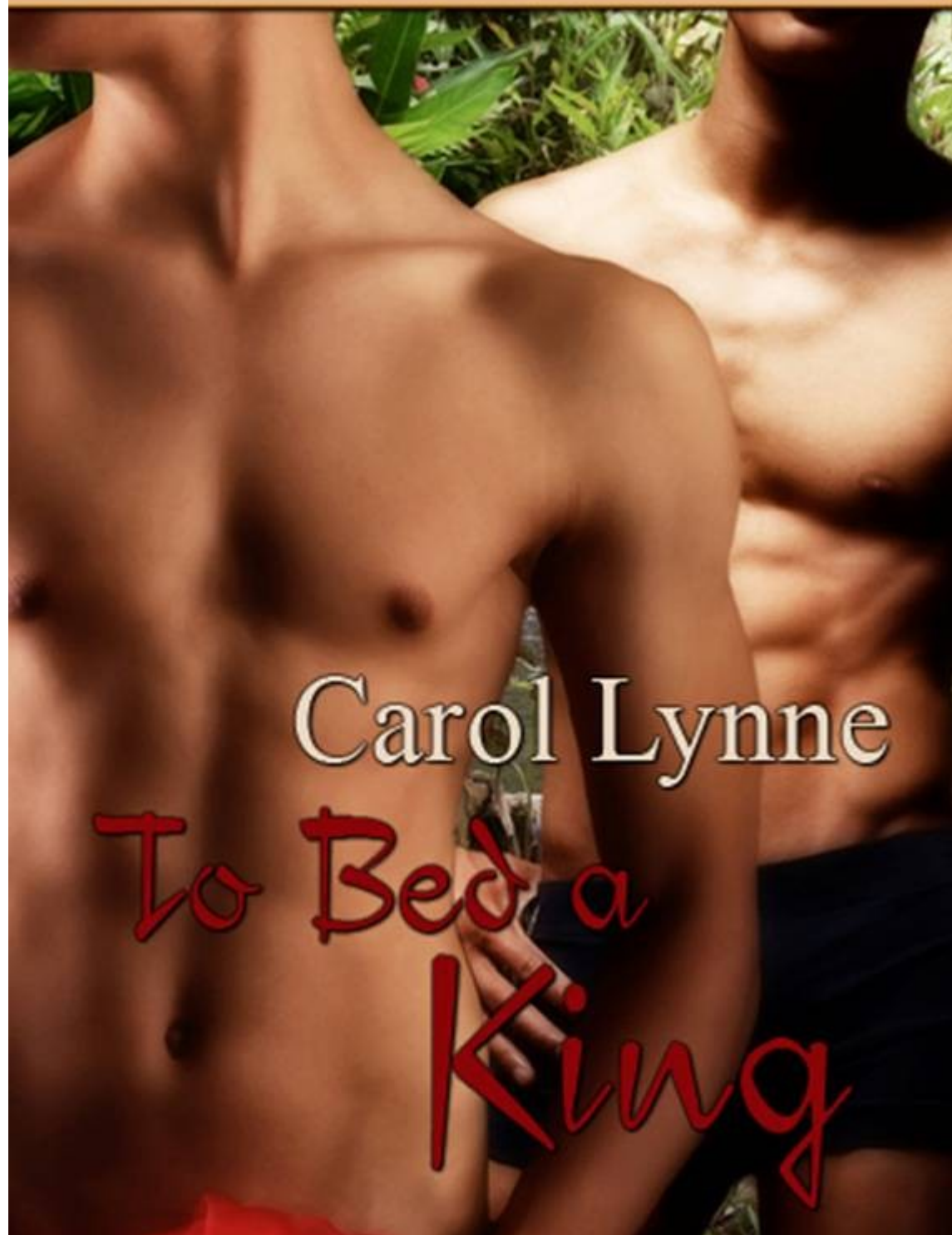




Bodyguards in Love



Carol Lynne

To Bed a
King

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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To Bed a King

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

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Dedication

For Sidney, the champion of Goodreads. Your reviews are well spoken and heartfelt, and whether or not you enjoyed a story, I can always count on you for an honest opinion. Thank you.

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Chapter One

With the sun slowly dipping into the Arabian Sea, bodyguard Raven Stone watched his young charge play soccer on the palace lawn. He noticed a boy of thirteen or fourteen off to the side, watching from the shadows. The boy's skin was much lighter than the other children. Raven wondered if that was what kept the boy away?

Raven readjusted the holstered Glock at his side before walking over to have a word with the young teenager. How many times had Raven felt left out as a boy? Although his adoptive parents and siblings always treated him like one of their own, the stark difference in Raven's skin and hair colour made it impossible to forget he wasn't a real Stone.

"Would you like to play?" Raven asked the boy.

With his eyes averted, the teenager shook his head. The light brown dreadlocks were another stark difference in his appearance from the other boys. "They won't let me."

A wave of indignation fuelled Raven to march onto the makeshift soccer field, disrupting the game. He stood in front of Crown Prince Faris, the twelve-year-old he was hired to protect, and narrowed his eyes.

"That boy over there told me you won't let him play. Why? Because he's obviously not a Jurruan? You think just because he looks different he doesn't deserve to be treated with the same respect you show everyone else?"

Faris glanced over at the boy and shook his head. "That's Nalu. We don't let him play because he cheats and spits when he doesn't get his way."

Raven glanced back at Nalu. "What if I talk to him about playing nice?"

Faris shrugged his shoulders like any twelve-year-old would. "Suit yourself, but it'll be his last chance as far as I'm concerned."

It seemed young Nalu was already labelled a troublemaker. Raven knew what it was like to be fit into an identity at such a young age. "I'll speak to him."

Although Raven's label had changed from wild child to slut as he grew older, the names still hurt and didn't nearly define who he was as a person. Still, it seemed easier for most people to pigeonhole others into categories.

Before he had a chance to get off the field, Nalu turned and began to walk away. Raven started a slow jog. "Wait up."

Nalu eventually stopped and turned to face Raven. "I cannot stay. I have work."

“Work? What kind of work?”

Nalu pointed towards the sea. “A ship is coming. I might be needed to work.”

Raven stared at the luxurious yacht pulling into the harbour. “I’m sure whoever it is already has a full staff onboard.”

Nalu’s big green eyes began to shimmer in the orange glow of the setting sun. “No. They always have something for me to do.”

Before Raven could question Nalu further, the teenager took off towards the harbour at a fast run. Raven watched the retreat until Nalu was out of sight before turning back to the ongoing game.

As he began a survey of the surroundings, Raven couldn’t get the image of Nalu’s watery eyes out of his head. He would have to speak with Ghazi about what kind of work a teenager could pick up on a visiting yacht. His gut told him it wasn’t something Nalu was looking forward to.

* * * *

Freshly showered, Raven finished dressing and surveyed himself in the mirror. Although he thought it was ridiculous to wear a suit to dinner every night, it was a rare occurrence when a client actually requested his presence at the formal dining table.

The black suit, combined with his dark Native American complexion made his white smile even more dazzling. Raven grinned at himself. “You are one good-looking sonofabitch, Raven Stone.”

Raven strode out of the en suite and stopped at the dresser. He extracted the three silver rings he always wore from a shallow dish and placed them comfortably on his fingers, the final ring fitting securely on his right thumb.

After one last adjustment to his expertly knotted necktie, Raven was ready. Every evening Raven dressed to impress, and although he’d attracted the flattering attention of several of the palace staff, he’d yet to gain King Ghazi’s favours. Perhaps he should step up his game?

Descending the staircase, Raven held his head high. He looked like a million bucks and he knew it. He may not be the deadliest agent at Three Partners, but he was certainly the best looking.

Raven knew his charm was legendary around Three Partners. How many men had hired him to follow around their rich wives only to end up fucking Raven on a regular basis? In his opinion, no man was truly straight. A hole was a hole to most of them and given freely

and often, Raven seemed to have a knack turning his clients, at least for a while. It was the happily-ever-after he'd never managed to secure.

He had no illusions of finding a soul mate, but it would've been nice to have at least one of the men he'd given himself to want more than a couple of months of free fucks. It was hard work, dammit, and why shouldn't he be appropriately compensated for keeping a man satisfied?

Stepping into the palace dining room, his gaze strayed to Ghazi. *Fuck*. The man was gorgeous. Ghazi was in mid-conversation with one of his Ministers, allowing Raven an opportunity to study the King.

Even though hidden under the traditional flowing dishdashah, Ghazi's muscular chest and forearms were quite evident. *Yum*. Although never picky about body size, Raven admitted to himself he preferred a well-muscled lover.

Laughing, Ghazi tossed his head back and clapped his Minister of Finance on the shoulder. The movement of Ghazi's shoulder-length black curls swinging with his more than jovial mood mesmerised Raven. *God, I want to bury my fingers in those curls*.

"Raven, come sit by me," Faris said from his position at the table.

Ghazi glanced over at Raven and smiled before addressing his young nephew. "I have something I wish to speak to Raven about, Faris. I'd prefer he joined me at my end of the table."

With a dejected expression, Faris crossed his arms and slumped back in his chair. "Very well."

Ghazi chuckled. "There will be other dinners for you and your bodyguard to gossip at, Faris."

Raven winked at Faris. "I guess our secret is out." The two of them did enjoy a good dose of gossip each evening to wrap up their day together.

Ghazi said something else to the Minister before breaking away and taking his position at the head of the table. He gestured to the chair on his right. "Mr. Stone?"

Raven ground his teeth together. He hated being called by his surname and had told Ghazi on several occasions to please refrain from it. However, it would be considered impolite to correct a king in his own palace.

Taking his seat, Raven unfolded his saffron-coloured napkin and placed it on his lap. He caught Ghazi's continued grin out of the corner of his eye. "What?"

"So polite tonight," Ghazi remarked.

Raven subtly nodded towards the Minister of Finance and two other men he'd seen come and go from Ghazi's private office. "You have guests."

Ghazi nodded. "Aaahh, I see. Yes, we do have guests." Ghazi leant towards Raven and lowered his voice. "Would you like me to introduce you?"

"Not necessary. Unless, of course, you believe they pose a physical threat to either you or Faris," Raven answered. Why did he feel he was being teased?

Ghazi's dark eyes twinkled in apparent amusement. "And if they did? Would you slay our dragons for us, Raven?"

Raven stared into the dark brown pools he knew he could easily get lost in. "You know I would."

"Do I? You've been with me for what, three months? And in all of that time you've yet to truly show me what you can do. Perhaps I would feel better if I could witness a physical demonstration of your...skills."

Was he being flirted with? Raven reached out and lifted his glass of burgundy to his lips. He took a sip before addressing Ghazi's remark. "Give me the right venue, and I'll show you anything you wish to see."

Ghazi's foot came to rest against Raven's ankle. "Careful, Raven, or I may just take you up on that offer."

Raven rested his arms on the edge of the table and leant towards Ghazi, allowing his lips to graze the King's ear as he spoke. Now the King was entering into Raven's territory, one he knew like the back of his hand. "The offer has been on the table since the day we met, and you know it."

Ghazi's nostrils briefly flared as he pulled back to once again sit straight in his chair. Raven continued to stare at the King, silently daring him to follow through with the challenge.

A throat cleared, breaking the moment between them. Ghazi glanced towards Halim, his personal secretary. "Did you need something, Halim?"

"The chef would like to know if you're ready to be served, Your Majesty."

"Yes," Ghazi answered before once again turning his attention to Raven. "I promised Faris I would take him to the beach tomorrow, and I would like for you to accompany us."

Raven immediately went on alert. "Your Majesty, I can't properly protect you at a public beach."

Faris began to laugh. "The cove is as far from public as you can get. Uncle insists on it. I think he's afraid of tempting all the men and women with his nudity."

"Faris! This is not proper conversation for the dinner table," Ghazi reprimanded his nephew. "Please forgive my nephew," he said to the Minister of Finance and members of his staff.

For the rest of dinner, Raven couldn't get the image of the King skinny-dipping out of his head. He found concentrating on the conversation impossible. He ate his meal in silence, well aware of the hard cock pressed against the zipper of his pants. *Damn. I wish it was tomorrow already.*

* * * *

Ghazi lit a cigar and reached for his nightly glass of cognac. The time between dinner and bed was his favourite of the day. Moving from behind his desk to the comfortable chair in front of the window, Ghazi settled in to watch the moonlight caress the dark water of the sea.

Lifting the cigar to his lips, he inhaled just enough to fill his mouth with smoke, swirling it around to enjoy the taste before exhaling, allowing the smallest amount of smoke to escape through his nostrils. There was nothing like the smell of an expensive cigar. Although he didn't allow himself to indulge often, Ghazi savoured every puff.

With the election for Jurru's first ever Prime Minister still a month away, he cherished each uninterrupted moment he was able to steal for himself. Hopefully the two men who had stepped forward to vie for the new position would be able to handle the day to day running of Jurru without his help.

Ghazi had invited Fath, his Minister of Finance, to dinner to try to get a feel for what kind of Prime Minister the man would make. So far, he wasn't impressed. Although Fath appeared to know his business, Ghazi didn't find him much of a conversationalist.

The Prime Minister would be required to handle decisions for Jurru. Ghazi had faith in his Minister of Finance's ability to keep the island financially secure. But the ideal candidate would need charismatic skills when dealing with foreign heads of state. Something Ghazi wasn't convinced Fath was in possession of.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. "Come in," he said, before taking a sip of his cognac.

The door opened and the handsome bodyguard stepped inside. Ghazi schooled his features immediately. He'd almost allowed Raven to get the better of him at dinner in front of Faris and members of the staff, something which was unimaginable.

"Yes?" he prompted, setting his glass on the small side table.

"Faris has settled in for the night." Raven shut the door and leaned back against it.

Ghazi's mouth watered at the picture the stubborn American made. Raven had shed his formal dinner attire in favour of denim and a tight white T-shirt. The thin cotton fabric made it possible for Ghazi to drink in the small, dark brown nipples that graced Raven's leanly muscled chest.

"Very well," he managed to say in an even tone.

Raven's head cocked to the side. "Is there anything else I can do for you?" He finished the question with a teasing grin.

Ghazi smiled. Raven loved to flirt, and he was very good at it, but now was not the time to indulge in the pleasures Raven could no doubt deliver. Perhaps after the election, if Raven was still interested, Ghazi could find the bliss Raven's body offered.

"No," he answered. "I hope to leave for the cove mid-morning. Will you be able to drive us or should I arrange for a car?"

"I'll drive." Raven's expression changed to one of confusion but he didn't voice his questions. He turned and opened the door.

"Raven?" Ghazi called him back.

Raven spun around, hope evident in his eyes. "Yes?"

"Suits will be required for tomorrow. Despite what Faris said, I do not sunbathe nude around my nephew."

"Damn," Raven muttered, the corner of his mouth turning up into a rakish grin. "And I thought I'd finally get a glimpse of what I've been fantasising about all these weeks."

In time. Be patient, my little bird. "Sorry to disappoint."

Raven leaned the side of his head against the door's edge. "I will eventually break you down. You know that, right?"

"Yes. I'm well aware of the mutual attraction between us, but now is not the time."

"I won't give up," Raven added before leaving the office.

"I know that, too," Ghazi whispered to the closing door.

* * * *

As soon as they hit the beach, Faris was off towards the calm, sheltered water of the cove. Raven carried the large rugs Ghazi had insisted on bringing. "Would you like these spread out in the sun or shade?"

Ghazi stopped walking and gazed around the area. "I believe the sun, at least for now."

Raven dropped both rugs on the sand. After rolling one out, he stood back and shook his head. "We could always leave this one here and roll the other out under that shaded area over there."

He almost swallowed his tongue when he glanced over his shoulder at Ghazi, who was in the process of removing his dishdashah. Raven's mouth watered at the King's sculpted muscular build. Although he would have preferred Ghazi in nothing at all, the mid-thigh black swim trunks allowed Raven to gaze upon three-quarters of the man's beautiful body.

"That's fine," Ghazi answered, folding his traditional robe and setting it in the sand on top of his shoes.

"Excuse me?"

Ghazi gestured towards the rug still rolled in a neat package. "Put that one in the shade if you'd like."

With those words spoken, Ghazi pulled a fig out of his small carry bag. He easily tore the fruit into two, somewhat, even pieces. "Would you care for some? They won't keep in this heat."

Raven had grown quite fond of the exotic fruit and quickly shed his clothes, keeping his eyes firmly planted on Ghazi. The King's calm demeanour seemed to falter when Raven stepped out of his jeans to reveal the short, tight, low-rise white trunks he'd put on.

"Are you sure it is a good idea to wear such revealing clothes around my nephew?" Ghazi asked, handing Raven half of the fig.

Raven scraped his teeth across the centre of the sweet fruit. He glanced down and grinned. "My dick's covered, and I've recently waxed. What's the problem?"

"You're barely covered and the outline of your...dick is clearly displayed."

"Perfect. Just the look I was hoping for." Raven sat on the rug and continued to eat his fig, allowing the juices to freely drip from his chin and down his arm. He glanced up and met Ghazi's eyes.

Ghazi grinned and shook his head. "I should have listened to Seb when he was here."

Raven finished off his fig and held up a finger. "Give me a second." He stood and jogged towards the water. Although the sea was quite salty, at least it got the majority of the sticky juices off his skin.

He returned to the rug and made himself comfortable before addressing Ghazi's comment. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know what the King had been told. Flat on his back, Raven settled his mirrored sunglasses into place. "I suppose you're referring to my enthusiastic activities in the bedrooms of some of my former clients."

Ghazi finally joined him on the rug after wiping his hands with a towel. "Do you try to seduce all the men you work for?"

"All? No. I'm not a complete asshole. I do have standards."

"So this is just another game to you. Is that right?"

The remark, hell the entire conversation, hurt for some reason unknown to Raven. He rolled to his side and propped his head up on his hand. "Let's get something straight. If all I wanted was a cock in my ass, I've had plenty of opportunities since I've been on Jurru. For that matter, if I wanted yours badly enough, I'd have already had it."

"You think so?"

Behind the shelter of his sunglasses, Raven raked Ghazi's body. Although Ghazi's swim trunks were much looser than his own, Raven could easily see the interest the conversation had provoked in the King. He leant in and scraped his teeth across the pebbled brown nipple that dared to tempt him.

Ghazi's cock filled even more at the action. Raven decided to make a point. He reached out and circled the abused nipple with the tip of his finger before running it down Ghazi's toned and muscled abdomen. Before Ghazi could protest, Raven had his hand under the waistband of the trunks and wrapped around the large prize he'd been dying to hold.

"Faris," Ghazi reminded him.

"Yes. His presence is the only thing keeping me from sucking this fat cock all the way down my throat." He released Ghazi's erection and leaned back. "I've made no secret of wanting you, but I have also, purposely, given you the space you seem to need. However, I'm tired of jacking off three times a day."

Ghazi readjusted his trunks. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that I need to be fucked. Call me a slut, call me anything you want, but I feel at my best with a nice fat dick inside my ass."

"Are you saying this to shock me?" Ghazi asked.

"Not at all. Just putting it out there. I've seen the way Malik looks at me every time he comes into the palace. I'd rather be with you, but I'm tired of waiting for you to make up your mind."

"That horny sod. You stay away from Malik. He'd fuck a goat if it would let him." Ghazi jumped to his feet and strode towards the sea at a fast clip.

Raven grinned and settled back to soak up some of the early afternoon sun. It was only a matter of time before Ghazi started seeing things his way.

* * * *

"We should probably get Faris back," Ghazi said, looking at his sleeping nephew.

"Why? He's obviously enjoying a peaceful nap in the shade. I'd say it's a perfect time to go for a dip." Raven stood and took off towards the sea.

Ghazi studied the two large wings tattooed on Raven's back as he walked away. He'd caught a brief glimpse of them earlier when they were eating their lunch with Faris but hadn't felt he had the right to study them in depth with his nephew there. He sighed when Raven stopped and stepped out of his swim shorts before diving into the water. *Give me more time*, he silently begged.

"Feels good. You comin'?" Raven yelled.

The thought of Malik putting his hands on Raven had bothered him the entire afternoon. Every time he looked at Raven he could imagine the man on his hands and knees with Malik's big body pumping its way in and out of him.

Ghazi continued to fight himself for the next several minutes before rising to join Raven in the cool water. Unlike Raven, Ghazi opted to keep his suit in place. It simply wouldn't do for Faris to wake and find his uncle and his bodyguard fucking, and Ghazi had no doubt that's exactly what would happen if he were to strip his clothes.

The moment Ghazi entered the water, Raven stood. The shallow water hit Raven mid-thigh, exposing his magnificent cock to Ghazi's gaze. *Bloody hell I'm in trouble*. "Must you expose yourself for my nephew to see should he wake?"

Raven grinned and walked towards Ghazi until they stood toe to toe. "I guess you'd better take me out deeper then, but just so you know, I don't swim."

Giving in to temptation, Ghazi wrapped an arm around Raven's waist and pulled the smaller man against him. "You don't or you can't?"

"Same thing. I didn't grow up on an enchanted island." Raven clasped his hands behind Ghazi's neck and pulled his head down for a kiss.

Ghazi moaned as Raven's tongue snaked its way into his mouth. The man was going to burn him alive with just a kiss. He started walking Raven backwards, deeper into the blue water.

The further the water rose on his heated body, the more passionate the kiss became. Ghazi wasn't sure if either of them would have enough spit left by the time they broke apart to swallow, but damn, it felt good to let go. He bent down and grabbed Raven by the back of the legs, pulling him up into his arms.

Raven skilfully wrapped his legs around Ghazi's waist without missing a single tongue thrust down Ghazi's throat. With Raven's ass in his hands, Ghazi began kneading the muscled globes, moving his fingers closer and closer to the hole he was dying to explore.

"Fuck," he groaned, sinking his middle finger into the hilt. "How is it that your body is so accommodating if you've been celibate since being on Jurru?"

Raven wiped spit from his chin as he began to fuck himself on Ghazi's finger. "I sure as hell didn't come empty handed. I'm a man who likes toys, so sue me."

Ghazi inserted another finger, wondering if he could make Raven come without touching his cock at all. Despite the desire to throw the man onto the sand and fuck him senseless, Ghazi's eyes strayed to his sleeping nephew. "We can't do this."

"I think we're doing a pretty good job of it." Raven moaned as he reached between them to massage Ghazi's cock through the thin material of his swim trunks.

"No. I mean. Faris. The election." Ghazi shook his head. "I have other things I should be concentrating on."

Raven stopped moving and stared into Ghazi's eyes. "I'm not asking you to fuck me on your desk during a meeting. You do have to sleep, right?"

"Yes, but I have a million things on my plate right now. I simply think it would be better to wait before jumping into a sexual relationship."

"Says the man with his fingers up my ass," Raven replied in a dry tone.

Ghazi sighed and rested his forehead against Raven's. "You deserve my full attention. Not the scraps left over at the end of my day."

Raven bit his swollen bottom lip, looking both vulnerable and gorgeous. "I'd rather have a small portion of your time than no time."

With regret, Ghazi removed his fingers and placed a gentle kiss on Raven's mouth. It would be so easy to agree with Raven, but he knew better. He'd had lovers in the past who couldn't handle the demands Ghazi's position required. His affairs had always ended badly because of it, and for some reason losing Raven wasn't an option. Since he'd first met the man, he'd known there was something special about him. The more time he spent with Raven, the more sure he became.

"A month. That's all I'm asking for," Ghazi pleaded.

Raven unwound his legs from Ghazi's waist and stood. "At least give me one date a week for the next four and you have yourself a deal."

"A date? As in dinner and dancing or kissing and fucking?"

Raven shrugged. "I'll leave that up to you."

Chapter Two

Raven sat outside Faris' classroom like he did every day. The waiting game didn't usually bother him, but with his first date only two days away, time seemed to crawl. He picked up the book he'd been reading and stared blindly at the pages.

"Shit," he mumbled, dropping the book back down to the floor. He needed to get his mind off Ghazi and back onto his job. Raven glanced up and down the empty halls of Jurru's one and only school. What job? He was a damn babysitter.

There hadn't been any action on Jurru since Faris' mother, Princess Almas and her husband Naji had been arrested for hiring men to assassinate Sheik Ali. Raven thought he'd enjoy the slow-paced lifestyle of Jurru, and he did most days, but he simply didn't feel needed.

He pulled the cell phone out of his pocket and ran his thumb over the keypad. There was an eleven hour difference between Jurru and Sparks, Nevada. A quick check of the time and Raven shoved the phone back into his pocket. As much as his mother loved him, he doubted she'd appreciate a call at one-thirty in the morning. Although, now that Susan Stone had begun dating again, maybe she would be up?

Images of what his mother might be doing if she happened to still be awake sent a violent shiver through Raven's body. No. I'm definitely not going there. He shoved the phone back into his pocket. It had taken his mom almost eight years to get over the sudden loss of her husband enough to take a chance on love again. Raven knew he should be happy for her, but there was a part of him that resented any man who wasn't Sheriff Joshua Stone touching her.

He was saved from himself when the school bell rang, signalling the end of the day. "Thank God."

Raven stood and waited for Faris to come through the door. As soon as the twelve-year-old stepped into the hall, Raven knew something was wrong. "What's up?"

Faris handed Raven his backpack and gestured towards the door. "I need to talk to you but not here."

Raven went on alert. He grabbed Faris' upper arm and pulled him closer to his side as he studied the many faces roaming the hallway. "Are you in danger?"

Faris surprised Raven by punching him in the side. "Look around. Do any of my classmates appear dangerous to you?" Faris shook his head and laughed.

Because of the tourist trade in Jurru, the official language of the island was English, but many Jurruans spoke Arabic in their homes and with their friends. Although Raven understood Arabic, it wasn't an easy language for him and listening to surrounding conversations took concentration, concentration he didn't have at the moment.

He hurried Faris out to the waiting car and climbed into the backseat with him. It would've been easier for Raven to just drive Faris to school, but they had all agreed leaving a vehicle in an unattended parking lot all day was a risk they didn't need to take when the palace had several cars and drivers on hand.

Settled in the seat, Raven gestured to the driver that they were ready. "Now, tell me what's going on?"

"Just a rumour, but I thought you'd like to hear it. Remember that kid, Nalu, who wanted to play soccer with us?"

"Yeah."

"He hasn't been in school all week. I heard a couple of the kids from Sanctuary say he stumbled back to his room a few days ago beat up. Then two big guys came and took him away."

"Sanctuary? What's that?" Raven questioned.

"It's a boarding house of sorts. The yatim live there."

Raven knew yatim was the Arabic word for orphan. Why didn't he know there was an orphanage on Jurru? He wanted to know more about Sanctuary, but first things first. "Did these kids say where the men took Nalu?"

Faris shook his head. "No, just that they carried him back towards the harbour."

"Fuck! I knew something was wrong when Nalu left that evening to meet the incoming yacht." As soon as they pulled up to the palace, Raven quickly ushered Faris inside. "No soccer today. I'm gonna see if I can find the kid."

"I don't think I would do that if I were you," Faris said, taking his backpack from Raven. "The kids at Sanctuary seemed pretty afraid of these guys."

Raven gripped Faris' shoulder. "I'm not a kid, and I'm damn good at my job."

Faris looked uneasy. "Just be careful."

Raven grinned. "Always."

He left Faris and hurried to Ghazi's office. Halim, Ghazi's secretary sat at his desk outside of the King's door. "Is he busy?"

Halim glanced at the phone. "He's ended his call. Would you like me to announce you?"

"No time." Raven knocked once at Ghazi's door before stepping inside the office. "I need to talk to you."

Ghazi was standing at the window with his hands clasped behind his back. He slowly turned to address Raven. "What is it? I have things on my mind."

Raven was momentarily stalled by Ghazi's cold demeanour. "Just thought you'd like to know that one of the boys from Sanctuary has been beaten and taken away by two strange men." He held up his hands. "But hey, if you have more important matters to deal with don't worry about it."

Ghazi's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean, beaten?"

"Beaten, as in bruised. Faris heard other kids from Sanctuary talking about it. And for that matter, why the hell didn't you tell me Jurru had an orphanage?"

"Because we don't. Sanctuary is a privately funded facility. Other than routine inspections by the health authority, the government has no involvement."

"Yeah, well, I'd suggest you get involved." Raven stepped further into the room. Even though he was pissed, Ghazi's body still called to him. "I think he was taken to the yacht that came in last Friday. I'm on my way to get him. I just thought you'd like to know."

"We have a police force that can handle it," Ghazi said. "It would be best if you stayed here."

"I'll handle it. I'll be in and out before the police have time to arrive." Raven shook his head. "You're just like Faris. You hired me because of my skills as a protector, right?"

He waited for several seconds before Ghazi eventually nodded.

"So let me protect. It's better than sitting around here doing nothing." Raven turned to leave but was pulled up short by Ghazi.

Before he knew it, Raven was pulled against the King's chest accepting the tongue that was licking at the seam of his mouth. The kiss was so good, Raven almost lost himself in it. He stroked his tongue against Ghazi's once more before withdrawing. "I need to do this."

Ghazi nodded. "I have a special evening planned for Saturday. Don't do anything to jeopardise your ability to join me."

Raven grinned and scraped his teeth across the heavy black stubble on Ghazi's chin. "Is that your way of telling me to be careful?"

Ghazi ran his lips over Raven's forehead. "I wish that no blood be spilled, yours or theirs."

"Can I bring Nalu back to the palace?" Raven asked.

Ghazi's spine stiffened. "Nalu? Why didn't you tell me it was Nalu who'd been taken?"

Raven shrugged. "I didn't figure you knew the kid by name." He narrowed his eyes. "As a matter of fact, why *do* you know his name?"

"Nalu is a rarity on the island. He just appeared one day. No one knows where he came from, and he has never been forthcoming with the information of his background. When he was twelve he applied for citizenship. It was then that I learned his name."

"And yet you still allowed him to live on his own?" Raven asked.

"Despite what you think, Sanctuary was established for children such as Nalu. I felt he was reasonably happy there."

Reasonably happy? Raven swallowed around the newly formed lump in his throat and took a step back. As much as he wanted to blame Ghazi for his way of thinking, Raven couldn't bring himself to challenge the man's opinion, especially not when Nalu was in trouble.

"May I bring him back to the palace with me?" Raven asked.

Ghazi's head tilted to the side, no doubt wondering at Raven's sudden mood change. "Yes. If it is important to you."

"It is."

Ghazi reached out and ran the back of his hand down Raven's cheek. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, but we have things to discuss when I get back."

"Very well." Ghazi gave Raven a quick, soft kiss. "Return safely."

* * * *

After a quick check with the harbour master, Raven was able to ascertain which yacht had rented a slip Friday evening. The luxurious boat was huge, worth more than Raven could make in two lifetimes.

With his Glock clearly on display, he approached the gangplank. He wasn't surprised to find a large man standing at the top with his arms crossed. On his way to the harbour, Raven had decided against a sneak attack, knowing it would only end in gunfire, something Ghazi had asked him to avoid.

"You speak English?" he asked the guard.

"Who wants to know?" the man asked, a sneer on his pudgy round face.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Raven Stone, personal bodyguard for His Majesty, King Ghazi Zahar. I am here for the boy, Nalu."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Raven settled his hand on the Glock. "Oh, I think you do. You have five minutes to get the boy and bring him to me."

"Or else?" the man questioned.

"Or else, jackass, I'll call the King and his soldiers to come down and rip this fucking boat apart. Unless you release the boy, I'll see to it that everyone on board will be arrested and charged with kidnapping."

The man's eyes narrowed. "Nalu is here working for my boss of his own free will."

"Really? Is that why you went to his room and carried him back onto this ship the other night?" Raven shook his head. "It's not looking good for you. I'd suggest you go get Nalu and bring him up here."

The man turned around to speak into a radio. The action drew Raven's attention to the slight bulge hidden under the man's jacket. *Fuck*. It was Jurru law that all visitors surrender any weapons in their possession upon arrival on the island.

"Stay here," the man said before walking away.

"Like hell I will." Raven pulled out his phone and called Ghazi.

"King Zahar's office," Halim answered.

"It's Raven. Let me speak to Ghazi."

"He's in a meeting."

"Interrupt it. This is important," Raven growled.

"So is his meeting," Halim challenged.

"Get him on the fucking phone or prepare to explain to His Majesty why you did nothing moments before a gunfight broke out in your harbour."

Halim was silent for several heartbeats. "Hold."

With the phone still to his ear, Raven drew his weapon from its holster and stepped onto the yacht. With his back to the bulkhead, he tried to see inside the heavily tinted windows.

"Raven?" Ghazi answered.

"The goon who met me at the gangplank is armed. How is that possible?"

"It shouldn't be. All incoming boats are met by our patrol ships before entering the harbour. It's policy to confiscate all weapons upon arrival. They're given back once they leave port."

"Well then you've got a chink in your armour, because I know what a gun looks like hidden under a coat."

"Retreat. I'll call the authorities."

"You can call them, but I'm not going anywhere without Nalu," Raven informed Ghazi. "Hang on, someone's coming."

"Let me speak to them," Ghazi said.

The goon he'd spoken with earlier approached him. "Mr. Phillips is not happy."

"Too damn bad. Where's the boy?"

"Mr. Phillips said to tell you he made the appropriate payments. He has the right to keep the boy for two more days."

In a flash, Raven had the muzzle of his gun pushed under the goon's chin. He pressed the speaker button on his phone. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes," Ghazi was slow to say. "Halim has informed the police, they should be there momentarily."

"You hear that? You've just run out of chances." Raven felt like spitting in the man's face, but kneed him in the balls instead. Before the man could crumple to the ground, Raven dropped the phone and reached under the goon's jacket for his gun.

When the idiot tried to fight back, Raven easily broke the man's kneecap with a quick, well placed kick. Before the goon had stopped yelling, armed policemen began boarding the yacht.

"Take him," Raven instructed, scooping up the phone. "Are you still there?"

"Yes," Ghazi answered. "What is happening?"

"I'm on my way to find Nalu. I'll leave the phone on, but I need both hands free." With that said, Raven slipped the phone into his shirt pocket. The interior of the yacht was as opulent as the exterior.

As he made his way towards the living quarters, he began calling out for the boy. "Nalu!"

He wasn't sure if it was the gun in his hand or the expression on his face, but the crew he passed along the way quickly made themselves scarce. "Nalu!"

"What is the meaning of this?" an elderly, well-dressed man asked.

"You Phillips?" Raven asked.

One look at the Glock and the man's bravado disappeared. "Yes. As I told Victor, I have paid your fees. I was led to believe we would not be disturbed while in port."

"Who'd you pay?" Raven asked, waving the gun in Phillip's face.

Mr. Phillips appeared confused. "Not a who, a what. The same bank account I've always paid."

"I'll need that bank account number along with Nalu." Raven pulled the phone out of his pocket. "Here. Tell King Ghazi Zahar your sob story while I retrieve the boy. Now, which cabin is he in?"

The man took the phone and gestured to the cabin he'd come out of. Raven pushed the older pig out of the way and entered the room.

Rolled into a ball on the edge of the bed, Nalu flinched when the door opened. "Nalu?" Raven crossed the room to the bed. "Do you remember me?"

Nalu's gaze slowly lifted to meet Raven's. Instead of answering, Nalu gave Raven a subtle nod.

Raven tried to swallow the bile as it rose in his throat. The teenage boy he'd met days earlier was now dressed in a short pink babydoll dress, complete with bows attached to his dreadlocks.

Kneeling beside the bed, Raven held out his hand. "I've come to get you away from this place."

Nalu's light green eyes widened with apparent fear. "No. They'll kill me."

Raven shook his head. "No, they won't. I'll protect you. I'm taking you back to the palace with me."

A look of confusion crossed Nalu's face. "Why would you do that?"

"Because no one else has." He pushed Nalu's light hair off his face. "Do you need a doctor?"

"No." Nalu's tongue ran over the split in his lip. "I don't know where my clothes are," he whispered as if ashamed.

Raven stood and glanced around the room. He flung open the closet and looked at the racks of expensive clothing before pulling out a white, terrycloth robe. "Sorry. Nothing in here will fit you but this."

"That's okay." Nalu held his hand out for the robe.

"Can you do it yourself, or do you need my help?" Raven asked.

"Despite what I look like, I'm not a baby."

"No," Raven answered, turning around to give Nalu some privacy. "I know that."

As he waited for Nalu to remove the little girl's dress from his battered body, he cursed himself. How many times had he felt sorry for himself because of his early childhood? Nothing he had gone through was as bad as what Nalu had just survived. And Raven suspected it hadn't been the first time he'd been abused by visiting rich men.

* * * *

Raven awoke with a start and immediately reached for his weapon.

"It's me," Ghazi whispered, hoping Raven wouldn't shoot him. Although, the way he felt at the moment, it might be an easier end to his day.

"What time is it?" Raven asked, setting his gun back on the table.

"I'm not sure to be honest. Around two, I think. Do you mind if I sit?"

"I can do better than that," Raven said, lifting the covers to expose the free side of the bed.

Although it wasn't what he'd come in for, Ghazi couldn't resist the lure of Raven's companionship. He quickly removed his dishdashah and shoes and joined his new friend in bed. "I didn't know," he said before pulling Raven into his arms.

"I know you didn't. I may've made some bad choices in my life, but I've become an expert at reading people. There was no way you could've faked the expression on your face when I carried Nalu through the palace doors."

Ghazi rubbed his mouth over the top of Raven's head, feeling the short black hairs tickle his lips. "I don't think he's the only one, do you?"

"No. It's too organised for a boy to do on his own," Raven agreed.

Closing his eyes, Ghazi prayed he would wake in the morning and the entire mess would have been a bad dream. "I felt like a hypocrite terminating the Harbour Master from his position."

Raven climbed on top of Ghazi and braced himself on his hands. "Why? It was his job to make sure weapons didn't make their way into Jurru."

"Yes, but if he's to blame for what his people did without his knowledge, I must be blamed for the same thing."

Raven shook his head. "My gut tells me your Harbour Master knew exactly what was going on. Someone's lining his pockets nicely. A check of his bank account proved that."

Ghazi ran his hands down Raven's back. Despite the problems cropping up all around him, or maybe because of them, Ghazi needed an anchor in the storm, he needed Raven. "I know I told you I'd rather wait until the election, but I don't think I can."

Raven reached between them and cupped Ghazi's cock through his underwear. "Then why aren't you hard?"

Instead of answering, Ghazi pushed against Raven's shoulders, silently asking for what he desired. He couldn't allow the stress to reach all aspects of his life. He'd waited too long to fuck Raven to have his cock malfunction now.

Raven chuckled. "Mmmm, does that mean you're in need of a little oral stimulation?"

"Please."

As Raven kissed and licked his way down towards the flaccid cock, Ghazi traced the black wings tattooed on Raven's back. "These are magnificent. Do they hold special meaning?"

Raven dipped his tongue into Ghazi's bellybutton before moving down to lick the tip of Ghazi's cock. "For most of my life, my first name was all I had that linked me to my heritage."

"Because you were adopted?" Ghazi asked, wishing he could take back the question the second it left his mouth.

Raven leaned up on his forearms. "How do you know that?"

Ghazi closed his eyes against the accusing stare. "Halim had you checked out shortly after you moved to Jurru. It wasn't on my orders, you have to believe me."

"Maybe not, but you chose to read what he gave you." Raven sat up and moved to the side of the bed. "My past isn't a secret, but I'd have rather told you myself."

"I'm sorry. Halim is rather protective." Ghazi sighed. "And I'm rather stupid." He shook his head. "I can't explain it, but I wanted to know you, really know you."

"Then you should've asked."

"Okay. I'm asking now. Tell me about Raven Stone."

"Why? You must know everything already," Raven snapped.

"No. Only that you were adopted by a local sheriff when you were three years old. The file contained no information of you before that time." Ghazi reached out for Raven, but the man pulled back.

"Well, then we're pretty even on that score, because I don't remember anything before that. I was told my biological mother was an alcoholic. Someone saw me in a bar, crying while my mother was passed out on the table next to me. They called the sheriff, my adoptive dad, and he came to my rescue. The judge gave my mom a choice, get sober or lose custody." Raven shrugged. "Guess I wasn't worth a bottle of booze to her."

Ghazi swallowed around the lump of emotion that threatened to overwhelm him. He once again reached out to Raven. "She didn't deserve you."

Raven chuckled. "Yeah, well when my dad was killed in the line of duty, I rebelled against everything and everyone. I started searching, trying to find the woman who had given birth to me."

"Did you find her?" Ghazi ran his hand in circles over Raven's thigh.

"Yeah, eventually. She was still a drunk, and goddammit, she still didn't want anything to do with me. But at least I learned my last name had once been Black Wing." Raven gestured to his back. "I was determined to carry her betrayal with me so I had the tattoo done."

Ghazi opened his arms. "Please let me hold you?"

Raven stared down at Ghazi. "I don't need your pity. I've come to terms with who I am."

"Pity and compassion are not the same thing. I wouldn't feel the need to comfort you if I didn't care."

Raven eventually settled against Ghazi's chest. Ghazi wrapped his arms around the man and kissed the top of Raven's head. "Can I hold you, like this, for the rest of the night?"

Raven nodded but said nothing.

Ghazi had no idea what the following days would bring, but at least, for the moment, he felt content with the direction his life was taking.

Chapter Three

Raven woke a few hours later with Ghazi wrapped around him. He began grinding his ass against Ghazi's cock. Although Ghazi was still asleep, his cock began to fill. The conversation several hours earlier had been a big wakeup call for Raven. It wasn't until he laid out his parentage to Ghazi that he realised the two of them could never have more than sex between them.

Raven had spent his entire adult life trying to find a rich husband to take care of him, and when he'd finally found the man he really wanted, he realised he didn't deserve him. Ghazi wasn't an ordinary rich businessman. He was the King of Jurru. The man could probably trace his lineage back a thousand years.

Ghazi's hand slid from Raven's hip down to encircle his cock. "Good morning," he said before kissing one of the tattoos on Raven's back.

Whether Ghazi's earlier inability to get hard had been caused by fatigue or stress, the cock currently sliding against Raven's ass was definitely ready to play. The two of them moved together like they'd been lovers for years, further confusing Raven. How could he feel so comfortable with someone he knew he couldn't have a future with?

Ghazi wrapped his available arm around Raven's upper chest as he bit the side of Raven's neck. "I've wanted this since the day I first set eyes on you."

Raven grinned, thinking of their first meeting. He had been sent to spy on Ghazi by Sheik Ali, who thought Ghazi was the person behind the assassination attempts. "I doubt that. I don't remember you being too happy about getting a new chauffeur."

Ghazi bit Raven harder. "I wasn't happy because the minute I looked into those big brown eyes of yours I could think of nothing else but fucking you. I was still in the closet, and I knew one time with you would never be enough."

"I would've let you fuck me that first day." He glanced over his shoulder at Ghazi. "Or haven't you figured out I'm a slutty sex fiend?"

"So there would have been no need to wine and dine you?" Ghazi teased.

"Nope. I would've dropped my pants for you at any moment. Still would."

Ghazi groaned. His hand released Raven's cock. "I know you have lube in here somewhere."

"Of course I do. One in the bedside drawer and one in the shower," Raven informed him. He rolled onto his back when Ghazi pulled away to dig in the drawer. It was then that he got his first good look at Ghazi's hard cock. *Fuck*. Like him, Ghazi was uncut. The long thick erection was already dripping with pre-cum, begging for Raven's mouth.

One by one, Ghazi kept himself busy studying each of Raven's many toys. Raven used the distraction to scoot over and lick the glistening drops from the head of Ghazi's cock. "Mmmm."

Ghazi set the nipple clamps down and grabbed the bottle of lube and a condom from the drawer. He scooted further up the bed and rested his back against the heavily carved headboard. "Put your mouth on me."

Raven crawled up to lie between Ghazi's legs. As he maintained eye contact, he began stroking Ghazi's foreskin up and over the sensitive head of the shiny cock. "Which do you want more, my mouth or my ass?"

"Why do I have to choose?"

Raven grinned. "You think you're up to both? I'm an expert cocksucker, ya know?"

"Show me," Ghazi ordered.

Still slowly jacking Ghazi's cock, Raven began licking the glistening head with enthusiasm. He swirled his tongue around the crown, stopping to delve into the slit to gather more of the intoxicating essence before swallowing the long thick cock to the root.

"Fuck!" Ghazi howled. He began pulling at Raven's hair, trying to get him off. "You win. I can't last any longer and still bury myself in your ass."

After giving the head another thorough tongue bath, Raven pulled his mouth away and grinned up at Ghazi. "I told you."

Ghazi shook his head and wiped the sweat from his brow. "I'll never question your expertise again."

There was something in the way the King looked at Raven that both disturbed and thrilled him. *Just sex*, he reminded himself. Deciding it best to take emotions back out of the equation, Raven moved to sit back on his heels. "Lie down."

Ghazi slid down the bed until his head hit the pillow. When Raven moved over him in the traditional sixty-nine position, Ghazi smacked him on the ass. "I told you I won't be able to not come with your mouth on me."

"I'm not planning to suck you off. I'm just giving you easier access so you can get me stretched and lubed up," Raven informed the King.

Ghazi grunted several times but soon Raven felt the man's slick fingers begin to probe his hole. Raven played with himself daily, so he knew it would only take a few moments. Still, he allowed Ghazi time to play. Raven found that most men enjoyed this part of it, and his goal was always to please his partner.

"You do have a pretty ass," Ghazi commented, fucking Raven with three fingers.

"I like it," Raven agreed. "I like it even more when it has a nice fat cock buried inside of it."

Another slap landed on Raven's ass. "Okay, I can take a hint." Ghazi removed his fingers and quickly rolled a condom down his length. "Turn around and ride me."

Raven shook his head. "I'd prefer to do it my way."

He moved to squat over Ghazi, facing away from the eyes that seemed to see too much. Raven reached between his legs and guided Ghazi's sheathed cock to his stretched hole. As he lowered himself down on Ghazi's length, Raven knew the only two things for Ghazi to look at were his ass and the tattoo reminding Ghazi exactly where Raven had come from. It was the reminder of who he was that he needed to impress on Ghazi.

Raven's desire was to become the best lover Ghazi had ever had. When he was forced to return to the States, he wanted the King to never forget him. He loved the idea that for the rest of his life, Ghazi would compare all other lovers to Raven.

With his feet firmly planted under him, Raven did what he did best. Men had always sought him out for his ability to provide an open, willing hole, and Raven used his internal muscles to give Ghazi's cock the massage of a lifetime.

As usual, the stimulation drove him wild. He threw his head back and bucked, his hips jerking each time his gland was brushed against. The scrape of Ghazi's short fingernails down his back reminded Raven where he was and who he was with. He glanced over his shoulder and gave his dirtiest grin. "You can stick this lovely dick in me anytime."

"Really? Because I'm starting to get the impression that my cock might as well be a dildo."

"What? No," Raven said, slowing his pace.

"Then turn around and look at me," Ghazi growled.

"But this is the position I prefer."

"Why? So you don't have to look into the eyes of the man who's fucking you?"

The question struck too close to home for Raven's comfort. He rose up, letting Ghazi's cock slip free of his body and bounded off of the bed. "Fuck you!"

"I must say, I'm disappointed," Ghazi answered coldly, stripping off the condom. "I'm not sure what kind of men you've been with in the past, but I want more from you than you're obviously willing to give."

Ghazi swung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his clothes.

Raven rubbed his chest. In that moment he witnessed the real difference between a wealthy man and a king.

Dishdashah in place, Ghazi turned to leave. "Don't come on to me again unless you're prepared to be with *me* and not just my cock."

"Shit," Raven whispered as the door slammed.

Although he'd never been spoken to like that by a lover, Raven found Ghazi's powerful authority more than sexy. *Christ. I want him even more than I did before.*

Raven flopped back onto the bed and reached for one of the larger dildos in the drawer. His hands shook as he lubed the life-like piece of silicone and shoved it as deep into his ass as it would go.

The insult of him being a disappointment stung. Whether it was the aphrodisiac of bedding a king or Ghazi himself, Raven didn't know. What he did know was that he'd do almost anything to witness Ghazi's strength again.

* * * *

For two days Nalu slept, rarely waking long enough to eat. Raven had spent a great deal of time watching the teenager suffer through nightmares. On several occasions he'd tried to help Nalu, but the frightened fourteen-year-old refused to speak. He knew he had to do something to help Nalu deal with what had happened.

At a loss, he pulled out his phone and called the man he not only respected, but who he knew had been through a similar experience.

"Yeah," a groggy voice eventually answered.

"Did I wake you?" Raven asked Jackie. "I thought you were usually up early."

"Raven?" Jackie asked.

"Yeah." Raven heard the unmistakable sounds of sheets rustling. "I really didn't mean to wake you."

"We were out late. Seb threw a big birthday party for Jared."

"Sorry I missed it," Raven mumbled, telling the truth. Although most of the men who worked for Three Partners didn't act like they wanted him around, Raven thought of them as friends.

"It was nice. What can I do for you, Raven?"

"There's this teenager I need to talk to you about," he began.

To Jackie's credit, he didn't jump to conclusions. "Okay."

Raven gave Jackie a rundown of the situation he'd found Nalu in. "I know it wasn't his first time servicing men, but it's like he's completely shut down since I rescued him."

"Maybe he just needs time."

Raven took a deep breath. "Yeah, maybe, but I was kinda hoping I could convince you to bring Brier to Jurru. It could be a nice trip for both of you and maybe Brier could help bring Nalu out of his shell."

"Have you forgotten what happened the last time I was in Jurru?" Jackie asked.

Raven knew Jackie had lost the bottom half of his leg while trying to protect Sheik Ali, but he'd hoped his friend had loved the island as much as Raven did. "Please."

"Why Brier? Jared might be the better man for Nalu to talk to about this."

The answer to Jackie's question was a tricky one. The last thing Raven wanted was to offend either of his friends, but this was about Nalu. "Have you ever known anyone to not like Brier? There's something so sincere and loving about him that people can't resist talking to him. I'm hoping he can relate to Nalu enough to help him."

Jackie sighed. "Have you talked to King Zahar about this?"

"Not yet, but I will. I'm sure he'll be fine with it. He's as worried about Nalu as I am. He's been working himself to exhaustion to try and find out exactly what's going on at Sanctuary."

It was several moments before Jackie answered. "I'll talk to Brier. I can't make any promises. I mean, he's done a good job of putting the past behind him. I'm not sure if he'll be willing to reopen those wounds."

"But if he says yes, you'll come, right?"

"Yeah, if they'll let me off work. I'll give you a call later," Jackie said.

"Cool. Thanks."

"You know I wouldn't do this for just anyone, right?"

Raven snorted. "Yes you would. It's the kind of man you are."

Jackie chuckled. "Good to know I've got at least two people snowed."

"I'll talk to Ghazi and call you back."

"Ghazi?" Jackie questioned. "Sounds like the two of you are getting along pretty well."

"I'm trying, but I keep fucking it up. I'll talk to you when you get here. Maybe you can give me some pointers."

"I doubt that. You're our resident expert on seducing men."

Raven ran his hand over the top of his head. "Yeah, well, this isn't your average seduction, and Ghazi isn't your average man."

Jackie whistled. "Sounds serious."

"No, not really." Raven sighed. He was talking to one of the few people who didn't think he was a piece of shit. "Well, maybe. Hell, I don't know anymore."

"Well Brier's waking up, so I'd better go. Call me after you talk to the King."

"Will do. Bye." Raven hung up the phone and stuffed it back into his pocket. His gaze strayed to the sleeping teenager. "Just hang in there, kid. Hopefully help is on the way."

* * * *

Brier stretched his arms over his head before reaching out to run a hand down Jackie's spine. "Who was that?"

Jackie set the phone on the bedside table and lay down. He rolled over and pulled Brier against his chest. "Raven."

Brier buried his face against his partner's bare chest and inhaled. The scent of sex from the night before combined with the subtle smell of the campfire they'd enjoyed with their friends almost lulled him back to sleep. "Is he okay?"

"Hard to say, but he wants us to take a vacation to Jurru." Jackie ran his fingertips up and down Brier's back. "Would you like that?"

Jurru? The thought of Jackie going back scared him. He wrapped his arms around Jackie and squeezed. "It's dangerous there. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Jackie's fingers moved to thread through Brier's hair, releasing several of the tangles from their earlier romp. "The island isn't dangerous, babe. The people who were responsible for hurting me are no longer there. It's an incredibly beautiful place." He kissed the top of Brier's head. "Before the explosion I dreamt of taking you there. Everything I saw made me think of you. Miss you."

Brier moved to brush his lips over Jackie's nipple, taking the time to flick the sensitive nub with his tongue. "Why does Raven want us to go there?"

Jackie wrapped his arms around Brier and rolled them both over until he was on top. Scooting down until they were face to face, Jackie kissed him.

Brier opened immediately, but quickly noticed there was something different about the kiss. He slid his tongue across Jackie's, wondering what was bothering his love. Pulling back, he stared at Jackie. "What's wrong?"

"There's a boy, well, a teenager, who Raven thinks needs your help."

Surprised, Brier shook his head. "My help? That can't be right. You must have misunderstood him."

Jackie tenderly brushed the hair away from Brier's face. "This teenager, Nalu, has been living in a home for children without families. Evidently he's been sleeping with rich men who come to the island. He does it for money, babe."

Brier's brow wrinkled. "Why would he do that?"

"I don't know. Maybe because he was on his own and felt like he had no other choice. The thing is, Raven said Nalu went missing for a couple of days. He was able to find him, but when he did, Nalu was dressed like a girl and had been beaten up. Raven rescued him from the yacht and took him back to the palace, but Nalu's been having really bad nightmares and he won't talk to anyone about what happened. Raven thinks he might talk to you."

Brier felt his eyes begin to burn. He knew what it felt like to be on your own, no one to trust. He hadn't known at the time that what Rick Sutcliff was doing to him was wrong, but maybe things would have been different if Brier had had a friend to talk to. He thought of his best friend Jared.

The two of them talked a lot about what had happened to them, but they never did it in front of Seb or Jackie. The past Jared and Brier shared seemed to be hard for the two older men to deal with. Still, he doubted he could be of help.

"Maybe Raven should ask Jared instead."

"You don't want to help?" Jackie asked.

"Jared's smarter. He's better than I am at everything. I bet he'd be better at talking to Nalu, too."

Jackie brushed his lips over Brier's mouth. "You don't give yourself enough credit. You, my love, have an unbelievable gift. Everyone who you come into contact with loves you. I think this boy needs someone exactly like you to help him."

Even though Jackie's words made him feel better, Brier still didn't believe in his ability to help. He'd have to think of something. Risking Jackie's faith in him wasn't an option. "Could Jared come with us?"

"Jared?"

"Yeah. I bet he'd like to see Jurru. Neither of us has ever been out of the country. It could be fun."

Jackie seemed to think about it for a few seconds. "Seb won't like it, but maybe Jared can convince him to come along."

Brier had no doubt Jared could convince Seb. Although Seb liked to act all tough, even Brier knew the man would do anything to make Jared happy. "Good. I'll go if Jared goes."

Jackie leaned up on his arms to look down into Brier's eyes. "As long as you want Jared along for the right reasons." Jackie narrowed his eyes. "I believe in you. Don't ever forget that."

Brier pulled the man he loved down on top of him again. "I know. I just don't want to disappoint you."

"Not possible, babe."

Through talking, Brier wrapped his legs around Jackie's waist and wiggled his hips. "Do we have to get out of bed today?"

Jackie reached between them and fit his cock along the crack of Brier's ass. "Nope. We'll have to get you a passport, but all the agencies are closed on Sundays anyway."

"Good. I plan to spend the day showing you all the tricks I learned from that movie I watched the other day."

Jackie's brows rose. "You were watching porn without me?"

"I like to think of them as educational movies."

"Mmmm," Jackie moaned as he slid his cock back and forth across Brier's hole. "Please, feel free to educate me."

With a giggle, Brier smiled. "Okay. Lesson one..."

* * * *

Ghazi turned to his Minister of Housing. "I don't care that a foreign agency is funding Sanctuary. Tell them they have two choices, Jurru will either purchase the property from them or we'll shut it down altogether. From now on, Jurru will take care of its own. I want no outside entities setting their sights on our people or economy."

"But, Your Majesty, I've only recently closed a deal with that American company to operate the helicopter tours of the island," Fath, the Minister of Finance argued.

"Cancel the contract. Pay whatever fees will be required to do so and send my apologies." Ghazi studied the men around the table. "The laws will be changed to reflect my decision before the elections. Rest assured, my concern is for our people and our country."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Fath said.

"Any word on the bank account number Mr. Phillips paid money into?" Ghazi asked.

"It's Grand Cayman. We haven't been able to obtain the name attached to it yet, Your Majesty."

"Keep working. It's not enough that scumbag is sitting in jail. I want everyone involved behind bars."

The expressions on several of the men's faces soured Ghazi on the meeting. "That is all for the day." He rose and walked towards the window, dismissing the gathering of Ministers.

When the door shut on the last of the men, Ghazi exhaled. He was beyond tired, but the changes he'd begun would ensure Jurru's safety. The realisation that his inattention had allowed Sanctuary to become a stable, from which rich men and women were ordering underage companionship, sickened him.

A knock at the door drew him from his thoughts. "Yes?"

The door opened and Raven stepped inside. Since leaving Raven's bed two days earlier, Ghazi had regretted his hasty reaction. It wasn't that he hadn't enjoyed the feel of Raven's ass wrapped around his cock, he simply wanted more from the man than to be shown his back while making love.

"Yes?" Ghazi crossed to his desk and sat down.

"I know you're busy, but I'd like a minute of your time."

Ghazi wanted to scream at the man. Had things gone differently, Ghazi knew he would've happily given Raven all the time in the world. Instead, the two of them had barely spoken. "What can I do for you?"

Raven came further into the room and leant against the front of Ghazi's desk. The position put Raven's delectable cock within reaching distance. Ghazi leaned further back in his chair, putting Raven and his cock out of reach.

"I want to bring two of my friends to Jurru."

Ghazi's first reaction was jealousy. "Two? Is one man no longer enough for you?"

Raven's head snapped back as if he'd been slapped. Within moments the cool mask was back. Raven grinned and ran a hand over the growing bulge in his pants. "Believe me, Ghazi, if I wanted someone other than you in my bed, I sure as hell wouldn't need to bring them all the way from New Mexico."

Unable to look away, Ghazi continued to watch Raven massage his erection for several moments before getting back to the subject at hand. "Who are these friends?"

"Jackie, you remember him, the man who lost half his leg trying to protect your brother? And Brier, Jackie's partner. I think Brier can help with Nalu."

Ghazi moved his hands to his lap, fisting them in an attempt to keep himself from reaching for what he desperately wanted. "How can Jackie's boyfriend help Nalu?"

"It's kind of a long story, but basically, Brier was molested for years while in a psychiatric hospital."

Surprised, Ghazi's jaw dropped. "You want to bring a crazy person to my island?"

"He's not crazy!" Raven barked. "Brier's father bashed his head against a dresser when he was a baby before giving up custody to the state. Brier spent the majority of his life locked away because of it, being tortured by men who were supposed to take care of him. He's out now. And he's a better man than I'll ever hope to be."

Ghazi didn't like the possessiveness in Raven's voice when he spoke of the man. "You speak with much passion for a man that doesn't belong to you."

Raven braced his hands on the desk and leant over into Ghazi's face. "Unlike you, Brier has never judged me for who I am. So hold your words until you meet him."

"Are you sure I'm the one judging you? Seems to me you're doing a damn good job of that yourself."

Raven reared back. "What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

Ghazi had given a lot of thought to the encounter with Raven a few days earlier. The man's reactions helped confirm his suspicions. "Why did you refuse to look at me when I was making love to you?"

"Don't get fucking mixed up with making love, *Your Majesty*."

"If fucking is all you care about, why haven't you wandered into someone else's bed since you've been here?"

Raven blinked several times before quickly changing the subject. "Can I invite Jackie and Brier to Jurru or not?"

Satisfied that he'd made his point, Ghazi stood and walked around the desk to stand in front of Raven. "Send the private plane to pick them up."

"Thank you."

Raven turned to leave, but Ghazi stopped him. He reached down and cupped Raven's balls in a not so gentle grip. "You're mine."

Raven knocked Ghazi's hand away. "I don't belong to anyone, least of all you."

"You may not believe it yet, but you will," Ghazi said before Raven could make it out of the room.

Chapter Four

Seated beside Faris, Raven stared out the window on the drive home from school the following day. The conversation with Ghazi still weighed heavily on his mind. It was obvious the attraction between the two of them was still strong. Hell, from the way Ghazi's eyes had been glued to Raven's burgeoning erection, Raven figured maybe Ghazi wanted him more than ever. The shitty part was Raven felt the same way. What was it about Ghazi's commanding attitude that turned him on so much?

"Why won't Nalu come out of his room?"

"Huh?" Raven asked, and turned to regard Faris.

"Nalu's been in the palace for days, and I've yet to see him. Is something wrong with him?"

Had the two boys been friends prior to Nalu's abduction, Raven would've laid it all out for the Crown Prince, but they hadn't even been friendly towards each other, let alone friends.

"He's been sick. Nalu spends most of the day sleeping," Raven explained. "Why? Does it bother you that Nalu's staying at the palace?"

"Not really. My history teacher was asking about him today. I felt stupid not being able to tell him anything."

"The school has been notified of Nalu's illness. Next time refer questions to your principal."

"Him being there won't keep me from going to Alaska to see Uncle Ali and Gavin next week, will it?"

Shit. Raven couldn't believe he'd forgotten to speak to Faris about the change in plans. "Well, actually, you'll be leaving for Alaska this weekend instead of next. I've already cleared it with the school."

"Why?"

"Because some friends of mine are coming to Jurru. The plane is going to drop you off before flying down to New Mexico to pick them up." He was still uneasy with the idea that Seb was visiting along with Jared, Brier and Jackie, but Jackie had assured him Seb would be on his best behaviour.

"Does that mean I'll get to stay two weeks instead of one?" Faris asked.

"We'll see. Either way, you'll be going back for your December break from school." He winked at the boy. "That is if you want to."

"Want to? Are you crazy? Gavin keeps teasing me with pictures. I can't wait to see a bear with my own two eyes."

"Stay away from the bears," Raven reprimanded.

Faris giggled and rolled his eyes, reminding Raven that although the twelve-year-old would one day be king, he was still a young boy. As far as Raven knew, Faris had only spoken by phone to his mother on a handful of occasions since she'd been sent away. Although he was being raised by Ghazi, Faris appeared to be a typically happy kid.

On their way up the winding driveway, Faris reached out and punched Raven in the arm. "Will you miss me?"

Raven bit the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling at the goofy grin on Faris' face. "Not at all. I'll be glad to be rid of you for a week."

The answer made Faris smile even wider. "Liar. I see right through you, Mr. Tough Bodyguard."

Now it was Raven's turn to roll his eyes. "I'm a complicated man, kid. No one can figure me out."

Faris began to laugh. "You think so? You're in love with my uncle although you're too afraid to admit it. Just so you know, he feels the same way."

"Don't be stupid." The car stopped in front of the palace steps, and Raven waited for Nasim to open the door. The idea that a man like Ghazi could actually love him was absurd. He got out of the limousine with Faris' laughter ringing in his ears.

Stepping into the palace, Raven headed up the staircase towards Nalu's room. He knocked softly on the door. "Nalu?"

"Yes?" a soft voice came from inside.

Raven entered the room. Although Nalu had finally started talking in short sentences, he still refused to speak of his ordeal on the yacht. "How're you feeling today?"

Nalu shrugged his shoulders and returned his gaze to the view outside the window. "When can I go home?"

Raven sat on the end of Nalu's bed. "You're not a prisoner here. I thought you'd prefer the safety the palace can provide."

Nalu's spine stiffened visibly. "My friends are there."

Raven hated to remind Nalu that his friends hadn't done a thing to help him out when he'd been forcibly carried back to the yacht. He exhaled. Still, there was no doubt in his mind that Nalu thought of his friends as family. "Would you like me to take you to visit?"

"Not to visit. To stay." Nalu turned around and crossed his arms in front of his chest. "They're like me."

"Just because you don't have family on Jurru doesn't mean you don't deserve to live in a palace," Raven tried to argue.

Nalu shook his head. "I meant we're all whores. It's how we survive on this island."

Raven leant forward, resting his forearms on his knees. "I know you don't want to talk about this, but we need to know who you work for. Please, give me a name so we can stop this person from sending you into situations like you just came out of."

Right before Raven's eyes, Nalu shut down again. He turned his back on Raven and stared out the window once more. They sat in silence for several minutes before Nalu finally spoke again.

"No. He takes care of us. He loves us."

"That's not true. Don't you see, he's using you?"

"When can I go home? Or must I be punished forever?" Nalu asked.

Punished? Raven couldn't believe Nalu thought that way. "Let me talk to Ghazi."

When Nalu said nothing more, Raven stood and walked out of the room. With everything Nalu had been through, the kid deserved to be happy. If living with his friends brought Nalu peace, so be it. Raven knew if he didn't fight for Nalu, no one else was likely to.

* * * *

"Is King Zahar in his office?" Raven asked Halim.

Ghazi's secretary stopped typing and stared at Raven. "His Majesty is out of the office at the moment."

"I need to speak with him. Would you please tell me where I can find him?"

"He's in the garden, but I do not believe he wishes to be disturbed." Halim returned his attention to the computer screen, silently dismissing Raven.

From months of shadowing Ghazi, Raven knew something heavy must be on the King's mind. Rarely did Ghazi take time out of his busy day to sit beside the reflecting pool. Raven warred with himself for several moments before finally making the decision to seek Ghazi out in the tranquil location.

Stepping through the garden's archway, Raven didn't immediately spot the young king. The stone bench beside the pond was empty as was the one in the rose garden. He stood in the centre of the garden and studied the area. Unlike most gardens, this one had something for everyone. Divided into zones, one could visit the desert, the water, the English formal gardens or the tropical setting that was the natural state of the island, all without leaving the palace.

Raven made his way to the heavily shaded and concealed tropical garden. He'd never known Ghazi to wander into that particular zone, but he'd looked for him everywhere else. If the King was in prayer, the last thing Raven wanted to do was disturb him, so he stepped quietly along the path.

Sensing someone behind him, Ghazi spun around, ready to take on anyone who threatened him. He came face to face with Raven. "Do not sneak up on me again."

Raven held his hands up. "Just trying to be polite. I would've left if you were busy."

Clasping his hands behind his back, Ghazi turned back to the statue of his father. "I was wishing my father was here." It wasn't easy for him to admit his weaknesses, but for some reason, he found it easier with Raven. He glanced over his shoulder. "I'm not enjoying being a king."

Ghazi heard footsteps on the path moments before Raven's hand landed on his shoulder.

"It'll get better once your new Prime Minister is in place," Raven said.

Tilting his head to the side, Ghazi rested his cheek on Raven's hand. "It's not the day to day running of Jurru that has me questioning my future."

"Then what is it?" Raven turned his hand over to cup Ghazi's cheek.

The action was so incredibly honest and welcome. Ghazi couldn't bring himself to speak for several moments. He gestured to the statue. "My father died rather suddenly. There wasn't time to fully train me on how to deal with the pressure of having the lives of so many resting so heavily on my conscience."

Raven removed his hand and turned Ghazi to face him. "Is this about Sanctuary?"

Even the name of what should have been a safe, loving home for those unlucky enough to lose their families, made Ghazi's stomach turn. "We still don't know who's behind it. The bank isn't cooperating and neither are the kids who live at Sanctuary. You would think

seeing the man responsible brought up on charges would convince them to talk, but it seems the opposite is true."

"Speaking of. Nalu wants to go back," Raven said.

"What? Why?" Ghazi couldn't believe it. The palace offered the teenager safety, something Ghazi would think Nalu craved after what had happened.

Raven's hands landed on Ghazi's chest. The gesture felt so right to Ghazi. He longed to pull Raven into his arms and seek the comfort he so desperately needed at that moment. It wasn't easy to hold back, but he knew what he wanted from Raven and it wasn't an emotionless fuck. Still, he reached out and placed his hands on Raven's narrow hips.

"Nalu considers the other kids at Sanctuary his family. He misses them, and he would like to return to them," Raven explained.

When Raven's hands started to roam, Ghazi closed his eyes and rested his forehead against Raven's silky black hair. "Can we still protect him there?"

Raven's lips landed on the heated skin of Ghazi's neck. He answered the question while peppering soft kisses. "We can try our best, but it'll be harder because we don't know who we're protecting him from."

Ghazi's head tilted to the side for several moments before dipping down to capture Raven's mouth in a deep kiss. *Please let me in.*

Raven sucked Ghazi's tongue further into his mouth as their bodies pressed together. Ghazi held the slighter man, hoping to gain some of the strength he'd lost over the last several days. "I need you," he whispered, pulling back.

"Should we go upstairs?" Raven asked.

Ghazi sighed. With Raven, everything seemed to be about sex. How could Ghazi make him understand that he needed Raven's heart and mind, not just his body? "I have another meeting before dinner. I need to hold you. I need to pretend, even for a short while, that I am a normal man spending time with his lover."

Raven studied Ghazi for several moments. "But you're not a normal man, and I can't seem to get past that."

Surprised by the comment, Ghazi's eyebrows lifted before coming back down and drawing together. "So it is the King you don't want?"

Raven tucked his face under Ghazi's chin. "It's the King I don't deserve," he whispered.

Ghazi turned and led Raven to a teak bench. He sat down on one side and tugged Raven's hand, giving him the choice where to sit. Raven didn't disappoint him and straddled his lap. Ghazi pulled his bodyguard closer and rested his hands on Raven's lower back.

He wasn't sure what to say, he simply knew he needed to hold Raven. Several times he started to address Raven's concerns, but even in his head they sounded insufficient.

Raven seemed to pick up on Ghazi's dilemma but with the wrong conclusion. "You know I'm right, don't you?"

"No," Ghazi barked, shaking his head vehemently. "I'm trying to figure out what to say to make you understand that it's not about being good enough." Their earlier attempt at making love suddenly became clearer in his mind. "Do you always make love while facing away from your partner?"

Raven reared back. If it hadn't been for Ghazi's grip, he would have fallen from the bench. "I don't make love. We were fucking, and yeah, usually I prefer the position we were in or all fours. Why? Is that not good enough either?"

"No, it's not," Ghazi said, surprised that he was willing to be so honest about his feelings. "For me, it was making love."

"You don't love me. How could you?" Raven asked.

Ghazi shook his head. "I don't believe you have to be completely in love to make love to someone. It's a step, one of many, a couple must take to fall to the point of giving up one's independence to be with another person."

Reaching up, he ran the back of his hand against Raven's smooth cheek. "I want to take those steps at your side."

"It would be a stairway leading nowhere, Your Majesty."

"Don't. Don't throw that title in my face, not now."

"But it's who you are. You may be able to forget it. Hell, I might even be able to forget it for a while, but eventually we have to face the truth." Raven leant in and gave Ghazi a soft, brief kiss. "There isn't a society in the world that would welcome someone with my background being publicly linked with their king."

"I have no intentions of putting a crown on your head and making you prance around as my queen. Don't you see? That's why your position as my bodyguard is perfect. You can forever be at my side without raising the political repercussions neither of us is ready to deal with."

Tears filled Raven's dark eyes as he untangled himself from Ghazi's lap and started towards the palace. "Don't you have a meeting to get to?" he asked without bothering to wait for Ghazi.

Ghazi wanted to call Raven back. He wanted to ask what he'd said to cause such an emotional reaction in the man. He'd thought the reassurance that the two could be together, regardless of politics, would help ease Raven's mind about their future. Obviously, he'd fucked up yet another aspect of his life.

* * * *

Standing on the tarmac, Raven waited anxiously for his friends to disembark the King's private jet. He doubted he'd ever needed friends as much as he needed them now. The last several days had been pure hell.

Knowing Ghazi wanted to be with him, but only in private was a double-edged sword. Once again he wasn't good enough, not that he'd had illusions otherwise. He'd always known a real relationship between the two of them was impossible, but hearing Ghazi's solution felt like the final nail in the coffin of his dream. *It was a stupid dream anyway.*

The door opened and Seb stepped out of the jet, shielding his eyes against the bright afternoon sun. He pulled a pair of mirrored sunglasses out of his pocket and settled them onto his handsome face.

"Hey," Seb greeted, walking down the steps of the plane.

Raven strode over and shook his boss' hand before turning to greet Jared. "Good flight?"

Jared nodded, his body practically vibrating as he tucked himself against Seb's side. "That was the coolest thing I've ever done," Jared said. "There's even a big bedroom in the back. Seb initiated me..."

"That's enough about that," Seb said, cutting Jared off. "I don't think Raven cares to hear all the details of our trip."

Raven winked at Jared. "You can tell me later." He did it to get a rise out of Seb and it worked. The man actually growled at him.

"Are you two going to peck at each other this entire trip?" Jared asked, slapping Seb's stomach.

Raven decided to let it drop. He glanced up at the jet. "Where's Brier and Jackie?"

"The pilot promised to show Brier the cockpit once we landed," Jared explained.

"So, how're things going with the investigation?" Seb asked.

"Slow. The kids at Sanctuary aren't talking, and the bank in Cayman refuses to give up the name on the account."

"Hey!"

Raven glanced up and grinned at the wildly waving Brier. "There's a happy face," Raven said.

Brier came down the steps slowly with Jackie right behind him. Raven knew what Brier was doing from being around the pair in the past. Although Jackie got around well with his artificial leg, Brier was a worrier. There was no doubt in Raven's mind that Brier was going slow so Jackie would have to take his time.

Once they reached the runway, Raven greeted Brier with a hug. "God, I've missed you."

Brier leant back and smiled at Raven. "I've missed you, too. Thanks for inviting us. Jackie said I could swim in the ocean."

Raven nodded. "I know the perfect place." Raven regarded Jackie. "A private cove with calm waters. Perfect for Brier's first dip."

Jackie nodded. "Sounds good."

Brier stepped aside. Jackie surprised Raven with a quick hug, ending the gesture with a sturdy pound on the back. "You're looking good. Paradise must agree with you."

Raven wanted to point out that paradise wasn't always what it was cracked up to be. How many sunsets had he witnessed alone, longing to have Ghazi's arms wrapped around him? "The palace has a nice gym."

Raven gestured to the waiting limousine. "Shall we?"

* * * *

Dressed in a suit, Brier shifted uncomfortably on the bed. "Do I have to wear a tie?"

Jackie came into the room from the en suite. "It's your first-ever dinner with the King of Jurru. I think it's appropriate."

"When you worked here, did you have to wear a tie to dinner?" Brier asked.

"No, but then I worked for Sheik Ali, not the King. Ghazi was away at college when I spent time on Jurru." Jackie held out his hand. "Come on. Just a few more hours and you can get naked with me."

Brier liked that idea very much. He took Jackie's hand and was pulled up and against his lover's chest. "I hope I don't embarrass you at dinner."

"There's no way you could ever embarrass me, babe." Jackie gave Brier a deep kiss. "If you're worried about which fork to use, just follow my lead."

Brier's eyes rounded. "There's going to be more than one fork?" His breathing picked up, and he thought he might be sick. "I can't do this," he said, trying to push his way out of Jackie's arms.

The action threw Jackie off balance and he nearly stumbled to the ground. Brier managed to catch the man he loved in time. "Sorry."

Jackie got both feet under him again and reached out to hold Brier's face in his hands. "I love you. So what if you've never dined in a formal setting. You make the best spaghetti I've ever tasted and your kisses are better than homemade brownies. A couple of dinners aren't going to change the way I feel about you."

Brier couldn't help but smile despite the nerves still swimming around in his stomach. "You like my spaghetti?"

Jackie chuckled and leant in for a deep kiss. Brier opened immediately, sucking Jackie's tongue. Breaking the kiss, Jackie stared into Brier's eyes. "Your spaghetti's excellent, but those kisses are hard to beat."

"Will that boy be at dinner?" Brier asked when Jackie released him and turned him towards the door.

"No. Raven said Nalu went back to Sanctuary a couple of days ago."

"Well how am I supposed to talk to him then?" Brier wondered aloud.

Jackie kissed the side of Brier's head before locking the room door. "It'll work out. You worry too much."

Brier nodded. He knew he did, but this seemed so important to Raven. For some reason Raven actually believed in him, and the last thing Brier wanted to do was let his friend down. Hopefully they would let Jared come with him to the Sanctuary place they were always talking about. Jared was better with words. No one, not even a teenager was going to take Brier's advice, even though he'd lived through years of being used by men who should know better.

"Can Jared come?" he finally asked before they entered the dining room.

"Sure. That's why we invited him along, right?"

"Yeah, right."

When they stepped into the dining room, Brier was struck by all the shiny crystals on the chandelier. *Wow. This country must be rich.*

Jackie gently pushed Brier further into the room with a gentle hand on his lower back. "Let's go introduce ourselves to our host," Jackie whispered in Brier's ear.

Brier would have rather retreated to the opposite side of the room where Jared and Seb were talking in hushed voices. Were they telling secrets? Brier loved secrets. He started to wander towards his friends, but Jackie wrapped an arm around his waist.

"I thought we were going to introduce ourselves?"

"You go. He probably doesn't care about me anyway. I'll go see what Jared and Seb are whispering about."

Jackie shook his head. "That would be rude, and I know you wouldn't want to hurt King Zahar's feelings."

"No," Brier shook his head. "I don't want to hurt anyone. I just thought..." Brier let the sentence hang unfinished. Jackie didn't like it when he talked bad about himself. It was usually the only time they argued. "Okay."

The closer Brier got to the handsome King, the more he wanted to turn and run. *Please help me, God.*

The King stopped talking to the man beside him and smiled. "You must be Brier. It's very nice to meet you."

Before Brier could answer, the King turned to the man at his side. "That'll be all for the evening, Halim."

"Very well, Your Majesty."

Should Brier call him King Zahar or Your Majesty? Jackie hadn't told him about that name. What if he said the wrong thing? "Nice to meet you, King Zahar Your Majesty."

The King's smile finally reached his eyes. "While we're in such an informal setting, feel free to call me Ghazi."

Brier glanced around the room. "This is informal?"

Ghazi laughed. "Not really, but it's the only dining room the palace has to receive guests. I have one in my suite, but I don't normally eat in there."

Jackie released his hold on Brier's waist. "Nice to finally meet you. Your brother used to talk about you often, but I doubted I'd ever get the chance to meet you."

Ghazi glanced down at Jackie's artificial leg and foot. "I was remiss in not extending my condolences at the time of your injury. Please accept my sincerest apologies. I'm grateful my brother had you in his service to protect him."

"Thank you," Jackie dipped his head slightly. "I think highly of Sheik Ali."

"Sorry I'm late," Raven said, striding into the room.

Brier noticed the sad expression that crossed Ghazi's face before quickly being replaced with an indifferent one.

"You're just in time. I was moments away from asking our guests to join me at the table," the King said.

Brier leant over to whisper in Jackie's ear. "How come Raven doesn't have to wear a tie?"

"Because Ghazi insists I eat dinner in here every night, and I'm sick of trying to swallow around a damn necktie," Raven answered with a chuckle in his voice.

"I never said you had to wear a tie," Ghazi said.

"No, but I've heard you reprimand Faris for not showing up properly dressed for dinner." Raven crossed his arms.

Brier couldn't figure out what was going on between the two men. It was almost like they were purposely picking a fight with each other.

"Faris is the Crown Prince, and thus is held to a higher standard," Ghazi said in explanation.

Raven's complexion paled as he took a step back. "Yes. We wouldn't want anyone to know he's a normal twelve-year-old under that crown."

Ghazi started to say something but snapped his mouth shut.

"Shall we sit?" Jackie asked.

"Yes, please," Ghazi answered.

Brier still didn't understand what was going on, but he hoped dinner would be over soon so he could take his dress shoes off and wiggle his toes again.

Chapter Five

"Are you sure you're okay to go without me?" Jackie asked Brier.

"I'll take care of him," Raven reminded his friend. He glanced over his shoulder at Jared, who was obviously trying to reassure Seb of the same thing. "We'll only be gone an hour, two tops. Surely the two of you can find something to keep you occupied."

"I still don't understand why Seb and I can't come," Jackie continued to argue.

"Because these kids are spooked enough as it is. I don't know if you've noticed, but you and Seb aren't average-sized guys."

Brier tried to hide a chuckle behind his hand. When Jackie looked his lover's way, Brier shrugged. "He's right, honey. Sorry. You're just too big and gorgeous to take to Sanctuary."

Jackie sighed. "Fine, but make sure you keep your cell phone on."

Brier pulled his phone out of his pocket. "It's right here. See? I have it on." He leant over and gave Jackie a kiss. "Go lay out by the pool or something. I'll be back before you can miss me."

"Not possible," Jackie grumbled.

Shaking his head, Raven opened the driver's door. "Let's go if we're going," he called to Jared.

Seb gave him a narrow-eyed stare which made Raven laugh. The man was so uber protective, it was a wonder he let Jared go to the bathroom on his own. Brier and Jared neared the car and stopped. With the windows rolled up, Raven couldn't hear what they were talking about, but suddenly they began to play rock, paper, scissors.

Raven rolled his eyes as they obviously played best two out of three. With a big grin on his face, Brier climbed into the front seat as Jared opened the back passenger door.

"I get shotgun on the way home," Jared whined.

"I'll play you for it." Brier leant over and whispered in Raven's ear. "He always does the same things. First rock and then paper, but don't tell him I've caught on."

Raven chuckled as he pulled down the long, winding drive and through the large iron palace gates. "Sanctuary isn't far, but I need to know if Seb and Jackie told you about this place."

"You mean that the people who live there don't have moms and dads?" Brier asked.

Raven nodded. "I'm not sure whether they have them or not, but their parents evidently didn't come to Jurru with them. Although some of them might have lost their families here on the island. I really don't know all their stories."

Brier gathered his long, black hair at the nape of his neck and began tying it back. "I'll try not to say anything that will embarrass you."

Raven reached over the console and patted Brier on the leg. He met Jared's worried expression in the mirror. "I know you won't."

A few minutes later he parked in front of Sanctuary. "Well, this is it." The house was nice, better than nice, actually. While the majority of the homes on Jurru were traditional white stucco, Sanctuary had been built in the West Indies style with a wide wraparound porch. At least whoever was using the kids as playthings for the rich made sure they lived in comfortable surroundings.

Travelling up the front walk, a chill raced down Raven's spine. He knew from talking to Ghazi that nine people lived in the home. So why did the house appear to be abandoned? All the shades were drawn, and despite the gorgeous day, not a sole was out enjoying the swinging hammocks on the porch.

The three of them reached the front door, and Raven turned to regard his friends. "Ready?"

Jared and Brier both nodded, although their hands were clasped together between them. Was he overstepping the bounds of friendship by asking the two men to discuss the things they'd finally managed to overcome?

With a deep breath, Raven knocked before he lost his nerve. It took several moments, but eventually the door opened. Raven's jaw dropped at the large, fresh bruise on Nalu's cheek. "What the hell happened?"

Nalu's gaze went to the floor and he took a step back. "I had a feeling you'd be coming for me. I'm all packed and ready."

Raven looked around Nalu's slight frame to the two large boxes. He gestured to Nalu's face. "Who did that?"

"Doesn't matter. I was told the King wants me back in the palace, so..." Nalu shrugged.

Rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands, Raven tried to remember if Ghazi had said anything about Nalu returning to the palace. "Are you sure it was Ghazi who said that?"

"That's what he told me." Nalu seemed to notice Brier and Jared for the first time. "Who are they?" he whispered.

Raven stepped aside, giving Nalu a better view of the two men. "These are my friends from New Mexico, Brier and Jared. We came to talk to you, but maybe we should wait until we get back to the palace, and I have a chance to speak with Ghazi."

"Whatever," Nalu mumbled. "I just go where they tell me."

Raven glanced over his shoulder at Brier. He hoped his friend noticed the broken state Nalu seemed to be in. Raven had all the hope in the world that Brier and Jared would be able to break through the wall of indifference Nalu had built around himself.

"Come on. Let's load your stuff. The sooner I can get to the bottom of what the hell's going on, the better."

* * * *

Ghazi was in the middle of meeting with the election chairman when he heard a scuffle outside his office door. "Excuse me."

He rose and crossed the room. It was obvious Raven and Halim were arguing about something. Ghazi grinned at the notion of Raven trying to exert his superior strength over Halim. Although not a fighter, Halim had spent years in his position. From the raised voices, Ghazi had an idea the older man was definitely standing his ground.

Opening the door, Ghazi almost ran into Halim. The man had taken up position in front of the office door with his arms crossed over his chest.

"What's going here?" Ghazi asked.

Raven's complexion had taken on a deep red appearance. "Did you order Nalu to return to the palace?"

Ghazi's brows drew together. "What? No."

"He has a fresh bruise on his face. He said the man who did it was acting under your orders to return to the palace," Raven growled.

Ghazi shook his head. "I don't know anything about it."

Raven seemed to visibly relax. "We need to talk."

"As I've told you numerous times, the King is in the middle of a very important meeting. The election is only days away..."

"Save it," Raven said, cutting Halim off. He stared Ghazi in the eyes. "We need to talk."

Although he saw the importance of discussing the situation with Raven, Halim had been right. "I should be finished with my meeting in twenty minutes."

With hands fisted at his sides, Raven narrowed his eyes. "Come find me when you give a shit."

"Mr. Stone!" Halim admonished. "Do not forget whom you are speaking to."

The corner of Raven's mouth turned up in a sneer. "Come find me when you give a shit, *Your Majesty*." Raven stalked off, muttering to himself.

Ghazi turned around and went back into his office without another word. Once again he was thankful his clothes hid his aroused state. An angry Raven was a lot sexier than an indifferent one. Maybe he could wind up his meeting in ten minutes?

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After storming off, Raven went straight to his room. He couldn't go back to Nalu without answers, and he knew there was only one way to calm himself. The second he was in the room, he stripped his clothes and started searching through his toys.

He settled on the large, vibrating, prostate massager and tossed it onto the bed, along with a bottle of lube. *Fuck Ghazi*. He didn't need anyone to get him off. Far too much time lately had been wasted waiting on Ghazi to do the job he should've been doing himself anyway.

After moving the covers aside, Raven crawled into bed. He started off nice and easy with one hand on his chest and the other lazily pulling at his cock. Pushing his problems away with each stroke, Raven was soon ready to really play. Before applying the lube, Raven ran the vibrating wand over his cock and balls, taking time to press the tip against his perineum. "Ohhh," he moaned. God he'd missed this feeling.

His other hand reached blindly for the lube. Unable to pull the vibrator away from his body, Raven aimed the lube in the general direction and dripped the slick substance onto his balls, smiling as the stuff flowed down his crack perfectly. He used the wand to spread the lube over his hole, before slowly introducing the oddly-shaped tip into his welcoming opening.

Raven's body hugged the vibrator as he slid it in and out. A loud knock on the door threatened to interrupt his moment of bliss. "Go away. I'm busy."

"It's me," Ghazi announced.

"I don't care. I told you I was busy. Go back to your meeting." Raven used the deep rumble of Ghazi's voice to further fuel his impending climax as he continued to peg his prostate with the vibrator.

"Dammit! Open this door!" Ghazi bellowed.

The forceful tone of Ghazi's voice sent Raven over the edge. "Yesssss," he howled as he came.

"Open this door or I'll break it down!"

Raven glanced at the door. He wondered what it would do to him to see the handsome man muscle his way into the room. As much as he'd enjoy the show, the thought of Ghazi hurting himself in the process didn't sit well.

He wiped his hands on his stomach as he stumbled towards the demanding voice. He unlocked the door and started back towards the bed. "What? You finally decided to make time for me?"

Ghazi didn't say a word. He barged into the room and began stalking around the large interior, taking time to thoroughly search the bathroom. "Who's in here with you?"

"No one," Raven answered. He didn't bother to hide his smile or his nudity.

"It smells like cum in here," Ghazi said.

"Yep. Nice, isn't it?" Raven stretched and let one leg fall to the side, giving Ghazi a look at what he'd been missing. He eventually took pity on the man and held up the toy. "I don't need anyone else."

Ghazi charged towards the bed, lifting his dishdashah. "A vibrator is no substitute for the real thing. You want fucked, all you had to do was ask."

Raven turned over onto his hands and knees. His body felt like it was on fire with the anger and passion in Ghazi's snarls. "If I remember correctly, you were the one who refused to fuck me."

Ghazi lifted Raven like he weighed nothing at all and turned him around, letting his body flop onto the bed. Before he could question Ghazi's actions, he felt the press of the man's cockhead against his hole.

Putting his hands on Ghazi's chest, Raven tried to stall. "Lube?"

Ghazi reached down and rubbed the crown of his cock back and forth over Raven's hole. "Seems to me there's enough already."

"Condom?" Raven asked.

"Fuck!" Ghazi held his position, stretching his upper body to reach the bedside drawer. "You're totally ruining the moment, you know," he growled.

"Why? Because you'd rather I'd fight you? Fine. Have it your way," with those words, Raven reared back and punched Ghazi in the jaw. Although in his current position it wasn't

his best shot, Ghazi's head snapped back enough to satisfy Raven. It felt damn good, actually. He'd been holding that punch in since the first time Ghazi had stalked out of his bedroom.

Ghazi righted himself and tore the dishdashah from his body, leaving it ripped to shreds at his feet. The King was harder than Raven had ever seen him. "You sonofabitch!"

"You're damn right I am," Raven answered. "And don't you forget it."

Ghazi grabbed Raven by the ankles and spread his legs wide. "You want to be treated like a slut? I can do that. I just wanted more than that." Ghazi shoved his cock deep into Raven's body in one forceful thrust. "You think you aren't worthy, is that it? You have no fucking clue what I want or need in a partner."

As he continued to plough in and out of Raven's body, Ghazi kept yelling at him. "I don't need a showpiece on my arm. I need someone who always has my fucking back. I thought you were that man, but after your accusations earlier, I can see this is all you're good for."

Although Raven's body was completely turned on, the hateful words began to sink in. "I didn't accuse you of anything. I asked you! And who said I was ever interested in more than a couple of fucks? I get paid damn good money to watch your back. That should be enough for you."

"Then you're not a slut. You're a whore. A highly paid whore."

Raven swung, barely missing Ghazi's nose as the King saw it coming and pulled back just in time.

"What's the matter? Does the truth hurt? Well if you don't think of yourself as anything other than a slut, how do you expect anyone else to think of you any different?"

The slap of skin on skin made listening to Ghazi's rants difficult, but Raven heard every syllable.

"Fuck you!" Raven was used to being called names, hell, he'd dealt with it all his life. But coming from Ghazi, the words hurt more than they ever had. The last time he remembered truly breaking down was the day his father had been killed, but as his hands began to shake, Raven knew he was on the verge. He desperately tried to push Ghazi away, unable to play the game any longer.

"Let me up, you piece of shit," he panted, pushing at Ghazi's muscular chest.

Evidently, Ghazi didn't get the memo of Raven's impending breakdown because he chuckled and continued fucking.

Raven felt it coming, and, like a tidal wave landing on the shore, the despair swallowed him whole. "Stop!" he screamed on a sob as the tears began to fall from his eyes.

Ghazi finally got the hint and stopped, pulling out almost immediately. Raven curled in on himself and rolled to his side, burying his face in a pillow. He hated looking and feeling weak, especially in front of someone else. Pride had got him through the rough times throughout his life, so where was the strength when he really needed it?

"Shhh," Ghazi said, wrapping himself around Raven. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Raven shook his head but refused to pull it out of its hiding place in the pillow.

"I know I went too far. I've kept too much bottled up lately, and it just seemed to explode out of my mouth. I didn't mean half of what I said. You're not a whore."

"But I am," Raven uncovered his mouth enough to say. "I've always used my body to get people's attention. It was the only way."

"I don't believe that for a second. Have you ever actually given people the chance to get to know you? You're funny, you're smart. There are plenty of things to love about you besides your body."

"Except for my adoptive family, no one's ever taken the time." He glanced up from his pillow. He knew it was childish of him, but he needed to hear more. "Do you?"

"Do I what?" Ghazi asked, kissing the side of Raven's head.

"Do you love those things about me?"

Ghazi pulled Raven closer to him and rubbed Raven's nude hip. "Of course I do. Although I could do without the challenging stubborn streak."

Raven grinned. "Funny you say that now. A few minutes ago you seemed to be enjoying my challenging, stubborn self."

"Yes, well, I lost my head there for a bit. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I liked the sex, but next time, hold the commentary, especially if it's something that'll rip at old wounds." Raven subtly dried his eyes. "Sorry about that, by the way. I guess you kinda hit a nerve."

"I was angry."

"Yeah, I got that part." Raven threaded his fingers through Ghazi's. "I'd watch your back even if you weren't paying for me."

Ghazi chuckled. "Nice to know." He turned Raven over until they were face to face. "I didn't order Nalu back to the palace."

"I know. I could tell by the expression on your face when I told you." Raven reached between them and started to play with Ghazi's softened cock. He wondered where the condom had gone, but figured they'd find it sooner or later. "I need you to talk to Nalu though. He's really confused."

Ghazi's hand moved behind Raven to travel up and down the crack of his ass. "Why do you suppose someone would tell him that? I mean, what motive could someone have to get Nalu back here?"

Raven shook his head and pushed back against Ghazi's fingers, impaling himself. "Maybe it's not about getting Nalu here. What if it's about getting our attention away from Sanctuary?"

Ghazi leant over Raven and grabbed another condom from the bedside table. "It doesn't make sense to me. We've got to get Nalu to talk. I want to know who's feeding him these lies."

Opening his legs wide, Raven accepted Ghazi's weight as it settled on top of him. He could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times he'd fucked in the missionary position, but for some reason the idea didn't bother him like it usually did. "I'll take care of it," Raven assured Ghazi as his ass was filled with thick cock.

Raven clasped his hands behind Ghazi's neck and pulled him down for a deep kiss. "Do you think we can manage to finish this time?"

"We'd better or else my balls will fall off." Ghazi started moving in and out in slow, controlled thrusts, stopping occasionally to grind against Raven. "There isn't a day that goes by that I haven't thought of this. Damn, Raven, I need you so much."

"I'm here." *For now.* Raven wasn't about to fool himself into believing he actually had a future with the King. His attitudes towards his place in Ghazi's life hadn't changed, despite the tender way Ghazi was making love to him. Words were just words, after all.

It didn't matter how much Raven wanted to whisper the words he'd never before spoken. He simply didn't believe he'd ever be truly happy living the life of a secret lover. Settling down with an equal was, and had always been, his dream. Given Ghazi's position, it simply wasn't possible. But once again, he began to convince himself he could be happy taking all that Ghazi had to give before he was forced to leave Jurru.

The head of his lover's cock brushed the sweet gland that had been buffeted over and over again earlier. Raven moaned, scraping his nails down Ghazi's back. He wondered if the scratches left behind would rub against the King's clothes as he sat regally at the dining table. The idea thrilled him.

Raven reached between them and wrapped his hand around the root of his dick, pulling with each stroke of Ghazi's cock. Ghazi groaned with each thrust and buried his face against Raven's neck.

"I want to mark you as mine," Ghazi said, licking at the sweaty skin.

"Go for it. I've already marked the hell out of your back."

Ghazi chuckled. "I noticed." He latched onto Raven's neck and began sucking, pulling the skin deep into his mouth.

God, the man was part vampire. Raven loved it. He could easily see his entire body covered in Ghazi's bites. He flicked the head of his cock with his finger, soaring with the pleased pain that travelled from his dick to his balls.

When Ghazi finished the hickey with an actual bite, Raven's cock erupted. "Uhhhh," he howled to the ornate ceiling.

Ghazi pulled back and inspected his work with a satisfied smile. He lifted himself off Raven's body by bracing himself on his arms. Staring down at Raven, he mouthed the words Raven longed to hear. *I love you.*

"Say it," Raven begged.

"You're not ready to hear it." Ghazi buried his cock deep in Raven's ass as he came.

With Ghazi collapsed on his chest, Raven tried to protest the statement. "Who says I'm not ready to hear it. I've waited my whole fucking life to hear it."

Ghazi opened his eyes and studied Raven for a few moments before speaking. "I'll say it when you are truly ready to believe it. Until then, they're just words."

Chapter Six

Brier dried his sweaty hands on his shirt before knocking at Nalu's door. He still wasn't sure what to say, but the lost stare in the teenager's big green eyes bothered him. The door opened and Nalu's eyes narrowed.

"Yes?"

"I was wondering if you would like to take a walk outside with me before dinner?" Brier asked.

"I'm not going to dinner." Nalu said. He started to shut the door, but Brier put his hand out, using his superior strength to keep it open.

"You have to go to dinner. You were invited."

"So?"

Brier took a deep breath. Before he'd been rescued by Thor and Bram, he would have said the same thing. Nalu didn't know any better because he didn't have good people around to teach him manners. "Please talk to me."

Nalu stepped back out of the doorway. "Fine, but I'm not leaving my room."

Brier entered the room, much like his own, and sat in one of the chairs in front of the open window. He'd gone back and forth with himself on the best way to get through to Nalu, finally deciding the truth always worked best. "I know you don't know me, but we have several things in common," he began.

"I may be young, but I am not stupid," Nalu fired back.

Closing his eyes, Brier fought to push aside the ugly words. His life seemed so good that sometimes he forgot he was stupid. "You're right, I am different." He opened his eyes and glanced up at Nalu, who was still standing. "My boyfriend, Jackie, doesn't like it when I use the word stupid."

Nalu shuffled his feet for several moments before sitting on the side of the bed. "You have a boyfriend?"

Brier nodded enthusiastically. "He's real smart." Brier smiled. "And good-looking. And he loves me even though some bad men did things to me that he doesn't like to talk about."

"What kind of bad things?" Nalu asked.

Brier shrugged. "At first they just showed me their private parts and asked to see mine. But then they wanted to do stuff to me. Sex stuff. I didn't have anyone to tell me it was wrong to let them do it."

"Did they ever make you dress up like a girl?" Nalu asked. "Did those men like you enough to give you money?"

Brier bit his bottom lip and shook his head. "No. But sex shouldn't be about money."

"Sex doesn't mean anything anyway," Nalu commented.

"See? That's where you're wrong. It does." Brier sighed, thinking of the way Jackie made him feel. "When I make love with my boyfriend, it feels like I'm floating. It's not just about him, ya know, fucking me." Brier rubbed his chest. "It makes me feel good in here. If you're doing sex that doesn't make you feel that way, you should stop. Jackie told me there are a lot of diseases you can get if you aren't careful."

"It's not that easy. The only way I can stay here is to do what the King wants me to." Nalu ducked his head down. "I don't have anywhere else to go."

Brier tried to imagine the man he'd met at dinner the previous night making those kinds of demands. "That doesn't sound right. King Zahar seems like a really nice man, not the kind who would make you have sex if you didn't want to."

Nalu shrugged. "All I know is the Guardian comes to the house and gives me an envelope. There are usually pictures inside with a note, telling me where to go and how to dress. The paper is signed King Zahar."

"It's just a piece of paper? King Zahar has never actually told you to do these things?"

Nalu shook his head. "He's a king. Why would he actually talk to someone like me?"

Brier rubbed his forehead. He was confused. Maybe he wasn't smart enough to figure things out? "Have you told Raven that?"

"No. He works for the King. He probably knows about it."

"No," Brier said with a shake of his head. "Raven's one of my best friends. He's the one who asked me to come here to talk to you. By the way, I really liked that plane ride. Have you ever been on a plane?"

"No, just boats."

Brier knew he was getting sidetracked. Sometimes he did that when he didn't want to think too hard about something. "Do you think after dinner you would talk to Raven? He should hear what you said. Believe me, he wants to help you. I also have another friend,

Jared. He was hurt by the same men who hurt me, only a lot worse. He doesn't like to talk about it, but he told me he would if it would help you."

Brier stood and crossed to the bed. He put a hand on Nalu's shoulder. "See? You may not think you have people who care but you do."

It took several moments for Nalu to say anything. Brier did his best to sit and be quiet while the teenager thought about what Brier had told him.

"I have some friends," Nalu mumbled. "They're like me though. They're scared."

Brier nodded. "Maybe if you can trust Raven enough to tell him who's making you do this stuff, he can help you and your friends. He's a bodyguard." Brier chuckled. "Although he's skinny, Jackie told me he's a good fighter."

"I'll think about it."

"Will you go to dinner with me and Jackie? You can sit by me if you want." It was a strange feeling to be the one reassuring someone else. Usually it was his brothers, friends and Jackie that were trying to reassure him. He liked the feeling. It made him feel like a normal man.

"Okay," Nalu agreed.

* * * *

It was the custom in the palace to gather for a drink before dinner. Usually Raven tried to skip the pre-meal ritual, but Ghazi convinced him to show up early enough for at least one cocktail, or beer in Raven's case.

"Glad you made it," Ghazi said, putting a hand to the small of Raven's back.

Raven was caught off guard. He glanced at Halim before returning his attention to Ghazi. It was the first time Ghazi had shown him any sort of public affection.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty, I have a few last-minute items to attend to," Halim said before leaving the dining room.

"I think you made him uncomfortable," Raven said.

Ghazi's hand slid to Raven's hip, bringing him against his side. "He's old-fashioned, but he'll adapt. Especially because he knows he has no choice in the matter."

Raven stared into Ghazi's dark eyes. "Why are you doing this now?"

Ghazi leant in for a light kiss. "Because you're letting me. I never had plans to deny what you mean to me in my own country."

"Even in Jurru we'll have to be careful. What if pictures of the two of us get out?"

"They will," Ghazi answered with confidence. "But knowing someone is gay and shoving it in their faces are two different things. You'll still be able to travel with me, but I cannot ask foreign Heads of State to accommodate our lifestyle."

Raven wasn't sure how he felt about hiding who he was while Ghazi wined and dined with Presidents, Prime Ministers and even the occasional Dictator.

Ghazi tilted Raven's chin up and closed the distance between their mouths. Although brief, the kiss held passion. Raven accepted the brief taste of Ghazi's tongue before his lover pulled back.

The two of them stared into each other's eyes for a long moment before Ghazi smiled. "I enjoy kissing you."

"I'm becoming rather fond of it myself," Raven agreed. *One day at a time*, he told himself as Ghazi turned to greet his guests entering the room. Raven spotted Brier with Jackie on one side of him and Nalu on the other.

He ran his hand down Ghazi's back to get his attention. "I'll be right back."

Ghazi nodded and returned to his conversation with Seb.

Raven crossed the room. "It's good to see you," he said to Nalu.

"Hey, what about us?" Jackie said, a chuckle in his voice.

"Yeah, yeah, you, too." Raven grinned at Brier before giving him a quick hug. "It's just that it's the first time Nalu's joined us for dinner."

"Ummm, can I talk to you for a second?" Brier asked, rubbing the side of his head.

Raven knew it was a sign of stress on Brier's part. He wondered what was bothering his friend. "Sure."

He led Brier through the open double doors to the grand parlour. "What's up?"

"Nalu needs to talk to you, but he's afraid you'll go running to Ghazi with the information he has."

"What information?" Raven asked. He glanced over his shoulder at Nalu, who was staring off into space.

"He told me he gets a letter when they want him to entertain rich men. A note signed by the King. He hasn't told me who the man is who gives him that stuff, but I think he might tell you." Brier reached out and touched Raven's arm. "He's really scared."

"I know." Raven shook his head. "Something's definitely wrong. There's no way Ghazi knows about this. I'd stake my life on it."

"But Nalu said he saw his signature," Brier argued.

"Yeah, but signatures can be forged." *Fuck!* Raven's gaze automatically went towards Ghazi's office. "Would you do me a favour?"

"Sure," Brier agreed.

"Wait two minutes and then go to the King's office and ask Halim to return to the dining room."

"Okay. Why?"

"I have a theory about who's signing Ghazi's name." Raven held up his fingers. "Give me time to talk to Ghazi, okay?"

Brier nodded, his brows drawn together in obvious confusion. "He won't yell at me for bothering him, will he?"

"No, not if you tell him the King needs him in the dining room."

Raven walked back into the dining room and straight to Ghazi. "I need to talk to you."

Ghazi gestured towards the corner of the room. "What's going on?"

"Nalu told Brier he's received notes about men, with your signature."

"That's impossible," Ghazi started to argue.

"I know. But the fact that someone is signing your name is a huge clue as to who's behind all this."

"How do you figure?"

Raven wrapped his arm around Ghazi's waist. "Just watch Nalu for the next several minutes, and I think you'll see what I'm talking about."

"It's time to sit down at the table," Ghazi said.

"Shhh, trust me."

Ghazi's spine stiffened. "I do. A cold dinner has nothing to do with whether I trust you or not."

Raven took a deep breath. He wondered if the two of them would always misunderstand each other. "I know," he finally said, hoping to set his lover's mind at ease. He returned his attention to the doorway. Right on time, Brier walked into the room followed by Halim. His attention swung back to Nalu. The second the teenager spotted Halim, his face drained of colour as he hurriedly tried to look for an exit.

"Do you see what I see?" he asked Ghazi.

"Yes. What's wrong with him?"

"I believe this is the first time either of us have seen Halim in the same room with Nalu."

"You wished to see me, Your Majesty?" Halim stepped up to Ghazi, completely ignoring Raven.

Thankfully Ghazi was fast on his feet. "I'm finished working for the day. You may go home."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Halim gave Ghazi a slight bow before leaving the room.

Ghazi shook his head. "You don't really think Halim..."

"Yeah, I do. I don't know why. I mean, it could be his way of undermining your position, or just good old-fashioned greed." Raven could tell Ghazi had a hard time coming to terms with the idea that Halim could be behind the prostitution on Jurru. "I'm sorry."

Ghazi continued to shake his head. "It just doesn't make any sense. Halim loves this island. Why would he do something that had the potential to destroy everything my father and grandfather have worked for?"

Raven wrapped both arms around Ghazi. "I wish I knew, but at least we now have a target to zero in on." He glanced at Nalu. "I'd better make sure he's okay. I'm going to take him out into the garden after dinner."

"Should I speak to him?" Ghazi asked.

"Not yet. Let me see if I can get him to open up to me first." He gave Ghazi a quick kiss. "You can go ahead and call everyone to the table now."

Ghazi nodded.

Raven walked towards Nalu, who had apparently calmed down since Halim left the room. "It's okay," he told the teenager. "I think I might have an idea of what's going on. Brier said you'd agreed to talk to me after dinner."

Before Nalu could answer, Ghazi invited his guests to sit. "I'd better do what he asks," Nalu said, gesturing to the table.

"Will you meet me in the garden after dinner?" Raven asked. He needed to lock Nalu into a meeting before he had time to talk himself out of it.

"Can Brier come?"

"Brier and Jared if it would make you feel more comfortable," Raven answered.

Nalu glanced around the room. "Okay."

* * * *

After a pleasant dinner, Raven, Brier, Jared and Nalu disappeared out into the garden, and Ghazi invited Jackie and Seb to join him on the balcony just off his private study. "Cigar?"

Seb grinned and took one. He held it up to his nose and sighed. He took the cutter Ghazi offered and snipped the end off before handing it back. "It's been a long time since I've smoked one of these."

Jackie shook his head. "No thanks."

Ghazi selected one of the cigars and returned the humidor to his study. He handed the lighter to Seb before cutting the end off of the expensive cigar.

"Did you choose this location on purpose?" Jackie asked.

Ghazi took a seat and smiled at the small group of men in the garden below. "Raven has told me many times what a jealous man Seb is. I assumed it would be the best way to reassure Seb his partner is safe."

Seb took a puff of his cigar and grunted. "People blow my jealous tendencies out of proportion all the time."

"Yeah, right," Jackie countered. "You don't want Raven anywhere near Jared and you know it."

"Why?" Ghazi asked. He had to admit to himself that his own jealousy was starting to rear its ugly head. "Has he tried to get close to Jared before?"

"Yes," Seb answered.

"No," Jackie said at the same time. Jackie shook his head. "We both know the only reason he offered to drive Jared back and forth to work was because he knew it would make you get off your stubborn ass and claim Jared as yours."

"Don't kid yourself. Raven didn't get his reputation for nothing," Seb growled.

Jackie cleared his throat. "So," he started, turning to regard Ghazi. "The two of you looked rather cosy at dinner."

Ghazi didn't know either man well, but he resented any implication that he was one of many in Raven's life. Announcing his feelings to the two men went against his sense of privacy, but he intended to make damn sure they knew his feelings for Raven. "I'm in love with him."

Jackie whistled. "I bet he's in hog heaven."

Confused by the statement, Ghazi's head tilted to the side. "Hog heaven?"

"Happy. I bet Raven's happy," Jackie quickly clarified.

"Actually, I don't think he believes me. He keeps trying to remind me that he was adopted. I'm not sure why that would make him any less a man in his eyes, but it seems to weigh heavily on his shoulders."

Jackie and Seb looked at each other. Ghazi couldn't read their twin expressions. "What?" he asked.

"We didn't know he was adopted. He's never talked much about his past. I mean, I'm sure Mac and Bram know, they're the ones who hired him, but I'm his boss and I didn't know. Did his biological folks die?" Seb asked.

"No. I mean, I don't know anything about his father, but his mother couldn't be bothered to stop drinking, so they took Raven away from her."

Seb stared at the end of his smouldering cigar. "Maybe we have more in common than I thought."

"You were adopted?" Ghazi asked.

"No. I wasn't that lucky, but you never completely get over the fact that you weren't worth hanging onto." Seb set the cigar in the ashtray and stared over the balcony to the men below. "From experience, I can tell you the only way to convince Raven that you'll stay is to wake up every morning beside him. Words won't do it."

"Do you really think Jared would ever leave you?" Jackie asked.

"Of course. I keep thinking someday he'll wake up, take a look at me and wonder why the hell he's tied himself down to a grouchy sonofabitch like me."

Ghazi had seen the two men together over the last two days. They couldn't keep their hands off each other. If Seb still felt the way he did, would loving Raven be a constant battle of reassurances?

"You're wrong," Jackie said. "You're that man's entire world."

Seb nodded, never taking his eyes off Jared. "That's what he tells me." He blinked several times before looking at Jackie. "I love him more than my own life. I'm not foolish enough to push him away, but I guess I realise what a gift every day with him is."

Seb eventually turned his attention to Ghazi. "If you love Raven, tell him, often. But sticking by his side no matter what will do more for his sense of worth than anything."

"And when he tries to push me away?" Ghazi asked, remembering the arguments they'd had lately.

"He's testing you, in his own way. He may not even realise it, but he is."

"Testing me?"

"He's probably still working through the reasons behind his mother's indifference. Maybe he's trying to see how far he can go before you leave him." Seb stood and stretched his arms over his head. "I'm gonna get another beer. Anyone else?"

"Sure," Jackie said, handing Seb an empty bottle.

"I'm fine," Ghazi answered. He had a lot to think about.

* * * *

Once all four of them were settled on the benches beside the reflecting pond, Raven turned to Nalu. "Can you tell me everything from the beginning? I think I already know who the Guardian is by your reaction at dinner, but I'd like to hear it from you."

"Where do I start?" Nalu asked.

"How did you originally come to live on Jurru?"

"My mother sold me to a man because she couldn't afford to feed me," he whispered.

"And this man brought you to Jurru? Then what?"

Nalu shrugged. "He found someone else."

"And just left you here on your own?" Raven asked, appalled that someone could do such a thing.

Nalu shook his head. "He took me to Sanctuary. I didn't know why at the time, but it was a nice place, and I got to go to school."

"And that's when you started working for the Guardian?" Jared asked.

"No. It wasn't until I filled out a piece of paper asking the King if he would let me become a citizen. He said yes, but I would have to do my part as a res...responsible citizen if I wanted to stay."

Raven sat back and scrubbed his face with his hands. He knew from talking to Ghazi that Nalu had become a citizen while Ghazi's father, King Jaleel Zahar was in power. How could he possibly tell Ghazi his father had started the prostitution services on Jurru?

"And Halim? What part does he play?" he forced himself to ask. Raven felt eyes on him and looked around the garden before finally glancing up. He met Ghazi's stare and took a deep breath. Although he would have to break his lover's heart, the heat in Ghazi's dark eyes made him want.

"He calls himself the Guardian, but we call him the Hammer," Nalu confessed. "He gives us our assignments, pays for the house." Nalu shrugged. "I guess we'd all be out on the street without him so I shouldn't say too much."

The statement brought Raven back to the situation at hand. "That's bullshit, ya know? There's a quote that I read in a book that has stuck with me since the day I said it aloud to myself. If you have to crawl to live, stand and die."

"That sounds pretty. What does it mean?"

"Well, it might be different for someone else, but to me it means if you're unhappy with your life, stand up and fight for yourself. You're the only one with the power to change who you are and where you're headed."

Raven leant forward and gazed into Nalu's eyes. "So, do you want a different life, Nalu?"

Nalu began to finger the light brown dreadlocks that clung to his shoulders. "I like my friends, and I love living on Jurru."

"Okay, that's a start. So what would you change if you could?" Raven asked.

"You know." Nalu shook his head before turning to look at Brier. "He told me sex was different with someone you cared about."

Raven thought back to the way Ghazi's tenderness made him feel. "Yes. It can be very different, better."

"I guess I want that."

"And I'm sure you'll get it someday, but for now, you deserve the life of a teenager." Brier stood and knelt in front of Nalu. "I never had that. I didn't get to go to high school. I wish I could have gone to one of those dances I see on television, but it's too late for me."

Brier took Nalu's hands in his. "I want those things for you."

Raven wiped the moisture from his eyes at the simple plea. He noticed he wasn't the only one affected by Brier's honesty. Both Nalu and Jared were also teary-eyed.

Nalu wiped his face with his arm. "How would I get money to live? I don't know how to do anything else."

"You're only fourteen," Raven reminded Nalu. "Now is the time for others to help take care of you. I'll make sure you get the education you need so you can become anything you want to." He knew in that moment he would do anything to give Nalu a chance to thrive.

Raven swallowed around the lump in his throat. He wondered if his dad felt the same way when he'd scooped Raven off the chair in the bar so long ago. "Deal?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Instead of shaking his hand, Nalu leant over and hugged Raven. Fighting his emotions, Raven enveloped the teenager in a hug. *It's a start.*

* * * *

"What're you doing out here all by yourself?" Seb asked, sitting in the chair next to Raven's.

"I told Ghazi about his father and Halim, and he said he needed to be alone. What're you doing out here?" Raven asked.

Seb shrugged. "Jared's playing pool with Nalu, Jackie and Brier. I noticed you were missing, so I thought I'd look for you."

Raven chuckled. "Did you think I was lost?"

"Aren't you?" Seb asked, no trace of humour in his expression.

The question surprised him, but before answering, Raven took the time to really think about it. "No. Actually, I think for the first time in my life I might be where I'm supposed to be." He glanced at Seb. "So how do I convince Ghazi I'm worthy?"

"You don't."

"Gee, thanks." Raven sighed.

"What I meant was that you don't have to convince him, he's already convinced. He loves you, Raven."

"Yeah. He loves me so much he prefers to deal with the news on his own."

"This isn't about you. The man's just found out his father, the man he's looked up to his entire life, was no better than a pimp. Give him a fucking break, dude."

"But I thought people in love were supposed to lean on each other when things went wrong."

"They are, usually. Some things a man has to work out on his own though. Doesn't mean he loves his partner any less."

Seb made a lot of sense, but Raven still couldn't get over the fact that the man was actually there sitting next to him. "Why're you talking to me? You never do that." A thought occurred to him. "Are you feeling sorry for me or something?"

"Sorry for you? Please. You've got a freaking King in love with you. I just thought you might need someone to talk to. I actually like you, ya know."

"Really?" he asked in a sarcastic tone. "That's why you won't let Jared within fifty feet of me without growling. You know, I may have a reputation for being a slut, but I wouldn't do anything to hurt Jared."

"I know. And it's never been your reputation I've worried about."

"Could've fooled me," Raven mumbled.

"Obviously I did. The reason I didn't want Jared around you in the beginning was because I wanted him. I knew if he spent much time with you, you'd win him over. You're like that, you know?"

"Like what?" Raven asked.

"Likeable. No matter what was going on, you'd always show up with that damn goofy smile on your face. It's sickening to someone like me." Seb scowled.

"Yeah, well, didn't your mother ever teach you not to judge a book by its cover?"

"No, actually she didn't. She was a drug addict. She was so busy trying to find her next fix that she had little time to raise two boys." Seb stared at Raven. "I grew up in foster care."

Raven blinked. How could he have known Seb for so long and not known that. "I didn't know you had a brother."

"He died when he was young." Seb shook his head. "I don't talk about it."

Raven nodded. "Understood."

Jared's soft voice called Seb's name through the darkness.

"I think you're being summoned," Raven said.

"To bed, I hope. It's been a hell of a long day." Seb slapped Raven on the thigh as he stood. "I'm sure Ghazi'll need you once he's done sorting through his feelings. Do yourself a favour and be there for him."

Before Seb could walk away, Raven had one more question for his boss, his new friend. "Seb?"

"Yeah?" the man stopped and glanced over his shoulder at Raven.

"I wanna have a New Years dance for Brier and Jared. Can you come back for that?"

Seb scowled. "I don't dance."

"It's not about you," Raven said, throwing Seb's words back at him.

Chapter Seven

"What time is it?" Raven mumbled.

"Well into the morning. Go back to sleep, love" Ghazi said, pulling Raven against his chest. As much as he wanted to seek comfort in the depths of Raven's body, Ghazi knew if his lover woke fully, he'd have questions. More than likely, they would be the same questions Ghazi had spent hours asking himself, questions he still didn't have answers to.

Raven's face rooted around on Ghazi's chest for several moments before he finally brushed his lips across Ghazi's nipple.

Ghazi tried to soothe the man to sleep by slowly petting his back.

"I love you," Raven whispered.

Holding his breath, Ghazi closed his eyes. How many nights had he dreamt of hearing those words from Raven? Although part of him feared the words were simply meant to make him feel better after the news of his father, Ghazi knew he might not ever get a chance to hear them again.

"Thank you," he finally whispered back. A tongue swiped over his nipple several times before Raven rolled on top of him. Ghazi accepted Raven's attentive kisses with a welcoming fervour.

Once Raven had worked his way up to Ghazi's mouth, he frowned. He traced Ghazi's eyebrows with his finger. "Don't be sad."

"I cannot help it," Ghazi confessed. "Everything I thought to be true about my father has turned out to be a lie."

"You don't know that for sure. I've been thinking, and I believe I've come up with a way to trap Halim."

"Why do we have to trap him? Why can't we just ask him?" Ghazi asked, running his hands down Raven's back.

"Because he'll just deny it. He'll point the finger at Nalu and his friends as liars." Raven shook his head. "Those kids have been through enough already. It's time we grown-ups show them we can be trusted."

Wrapping his arms around Raven's lean waist, Ghazi rolled them both over until he lay on top. "Can we discuss your plan in the morning?"

"Why? You have something else in mind?" Raven asked with a wide grin on his face.

Ghazi's cock began to respond to Raven's constant wiggling. "I'm sure something will come up."

Ghazi started to move, rubbing his filling length against Raven's. "Thank you for being here."

Raven cupped Ghazi's face in his hands. "You're not your father. What he did or didn't do should have no bearing on who you are."

"And you're not your mother," Ghazi reminded Raven.

"It's not the same thing. You're royalty, regardless of your father's actions. I'm the bastard son of a drunk."

"No. You're the adopted son of the Stone family. And from what you've told me about your mom and dad, you should be proud of them, proud of yourself. A man is not measured by his birth, but his aspirations."

Raven chuckled. "See? You even talk like a king."

"Good thing since I am one, right?" Ghazi leant down for a kiss. He swept the interior of Raven's mouth with his tongue for several moments before pulling back. "I need you."

"Yeah, I can feel that."

Ghazi shook his head. "No. I mean, I need you here with me, beside me. I made a promise to my father to take his place when the time arose, but that promise doesn't mean as much to me as you do. If you truly cannot live with a king, I'll hand over the crown to Faris."

"Faris is too young, and you know it. Besides, you didn't make the promise to your father, you made it to your people. It's about time Jurru had a king who looked out for them, and I have no doubt you'll do that."

"But will you stay?" Ghazi asked.

"As what? I've been here for months and not once have you needed a bodyguard. I need to feel useful."

"What would you like to do?" Inside, Ghazi was jumping up and down. It sounded like Raven was serious about staying with him on Jurru. Ghazi would give the man the world if he asked for it.

Raven wrapped his legs around Ghazi's waist. "You'll need someone trustworthy to run Sanctuary."

"You don't think it should be shut down?"

"Not at all. Nalu was willing to prostitute himself for the privilege of living in a home with people who cared about him. Let's teach those kids what a real home feels like."

Ghazi nodded. "We'll have to set it up before the newly elected Prime Minister takes office, but I know both men and there shouldn't be a problem." He kissed Raven's neck, anxious to make love to the man. "Anything else?"

"Just two things, but they can keep 'til morning."

"Good." Ghazi squirted lube onto his fingers before reaching for a condom. "My only request is to do away with these awful things."

"I'm sure we can work something out."

* * * *

The following morning, Raven hung up his phone and returned to his seat at the breakfast table. "Bram'll make the arrangements. He'll have Amir make the call. We figured since Amir speaks Farsi it'll be less of a red flag."

Ghazi nodded. "What time do I need to be ready?"

Raven reached under the table and put a hand on Ghazi's knee. "You know you don't have to do this, right? I'll be at Sanctuary anyway to make sure the kids are safe."

"I can go with you," Seb offered.

Ghazi shook his head. "I need to be there. I want to look into Halim's eyes and ask him why."

Raven understood Ghazi's position, but it would make things harder. "Okay. Can you call Fath and set up a meeting for this afternoon? You trust him, right?"

"Definitely," Ghazi answered.

"Once Fath is enclosed in your office, you can use the escape passage to meet me. We should be at Sanctuary in plenty of time to avoid Halim's detection." Raven hoped Ghazi was right to trust his Minister of Finance. "Until then, keep Halim busy so he doesn't have a chance to slip away and deliver the packet of information to Sanctuary."

"Do you still want Johara to answer the door?" Nalu asked.

"Yes. Amir will request a young girl with long hair. Johara would be Halim's best choice." Raven scratched the side of his head. "Have I forgotten anything?"

"What do you want us to do?" Jackie asked.

"Nothing. Just make sure you're seen milling around the palace. It's imperative that Halim doesn't become suspicious." Raven popped the last bite of toast into his mouth. He noticed Ghazi had barely touched his breakfast and scowled. "Are you finished?"

Ghazi nodded. "I need to get to my office and call Fath before Halim arrives."

"Mind if I come?" Raven asked.

"Of course not." Ghazi stood and regarded the rest of his guests. "I do hope you'll have a chance to enjoy the pool and the gardens today. If all goes well, tomorrow I will make time to show you the beautiful island of Jurru."

Raven wiped his mouth with his napkin and followed Ghazi from the room. "Are you okay?" he asked when Ghazi threaded his fingers through Raven's.

"Of course." He led Raven into his office and shut the door. He leant against the edge of the desk and pulled Raven between his legs. "I called Ali. I felt he had a right to know what was going on."

"And?"

"He's coming to Jurru. Ali said I shouldn't have to deal with this on my own. I informed him I wasn't alone, and, hopefully, I'd never again be on my own."

Raven wrapped his arms around Ghazi's waist and buried his face against the spice-smelling skin of his lover's neck. "I love you."

Ghazi tilted Raven's head up and gave him a deep kiss. "I love you, too."

Even though Raven knew the King loved him, it was the first time Ghazi had spoken the words aloud. He grinned. "I like hearing you say that."

"Prepare yourself because I'll be saying it a lot." Ghazi kissed him again, kneading Raven's ass as they tangled tongues.

Raven was about to ask for his first favour when they heard a knock at the door. *Shit*. He pulled out of the kiss as Ghazi's hands moved up to rest on his hips.

"Halim," Ghazi whispered against Raven's lips. "Just a moment," he called out.

"I'll go out and distract him while you call Fath." Raven dug into his pocket and removed his cell phone. "Call him on this."

Ghazi took the phone before brushing his knuckles over the obvious erection pressing against Raven's zipper.

"Should I hide that from Halim?" he asked, with his hands poised to untuck his shirt.

"No. I no longer care what Halim deems proper in the palace." Ghazi gave Raven a quick kiss. "It makes me happy to see the way my touch affects your body."

Raven reached down and ran his hand down the length of Ghazi's erection, hidden behind the yard of fabric. "I could say the same."

“Good, then we agree. No more hiding while on Jurru.”

“I don’t plan on hiding, but I’m not sure Jurru is ready for PDAs between its King and his bodyguard.”

Ghazi cupped the side of Raven’s face. “You’re so much more to me than my bodyguard. My people are intelligent. They’ll recognise true love when they see it.”

* * * *

Slipping unnoticed into Sanctuary, Raven and Ghazi joined Seb, Nalu and Johara in the living room. For having no on-site adult supervision, the house was surprisingly clean. Ghazi was ashamed of himself for never taking a greater interest in the teenagers that lived at Sanctuary.

“Is there anything you need here?” he asked Nalu.

Nalu’s brows drew together. “I don’t understand.”

Ghazi gestured around the room. The white paint was starting to peel on the open rafters. Despite being clean, the room, and he suspected the entire house, was in need of basic repairs. “Sanctuary is now being run and maintained by the Zahar family. If you or someone could make a list of improvements that need to be made or items you have been doing without, we’ll see they are taken care of.” He put a hand on Raven’s shoulder. “Raven’s asked to take an active role in running Sanctuary. Our goal isn’t to come in and takeover. We simply want to put programmes in place that will make your lives easier.”

Nalu and Johara traded suspicious glances.

“At some point, you’re gonna have to learn to trust adults. You might as well take King Zahar up on his offer,” Raven pointed out.

“We’ll talk to the others,” Nalu finally conceded.

The sound of knocking on the side of the house interrupted their conversation. They had one of the teens out front on the porch to alert them to Halim’s arrival.

Drawing his weapon, Raven jumped up and went to stand just inside the kitchen while Ghazi and Seb stood out of sight in the hall.

Ghazi heard the sound of someone coming up the front porch and prayed no one would be hurt. Ghazi heard the front door open. Halim obviously believed he was too important to knock.

“What’re you doing here?” Halim asked.

“Just visiting,” Nalu said.

"I told you the King wants you at the palace where I can keep an eye on you. Do I need to remind you again what happens when you don't follow my orders?"

"No, Guardian."

Ghazi heard paper rattle as Halim evidently held the envelope out to Johara. "He'll be here tonight. He'll expect you to be in bungalow B11 by the time he arrives."

"Yes, Guardian," Johara mumbled.

The handing over of the envelope was all they had been waiting for. Seb made sure Ghazi was safely behind him before they stepped out into the living room.

"What's this?" Halim asked.

Ghazi's attention went to Raven. The Glock Raven normally carried was pressed to Halim's head.

"Don't fucking move," Raven growled.

Johara walked over to Ghazi and handed him the envelope. With his free hand, Ghazi cupped the frightened girl's cheek. "You did well. Thank you."

"What is the meaning of this?" Halim demanded.

Ghazi opened the file and took a quick glance inside. "I think the bigger question is what's the meaning of *this*?" he asked, holding up the envelope. "How could you do this?"

Despite being held at gunpoint, Halim squared his shoulders. "Following orders, Your Majesty."

"Whose? My father's? Unless you missed it, he's dead. I'm the King now."

"Without me you wouldn't have an island to rule," Halim snapped.

Ghazi took several steps until he stood nose to nose with Halim. "You'd better start talking."

Halim glanced nervously around the room. "Not here among the mongrels. What I have to tell you is...sensitive."

Raven reared back ready to hit Halim with his Glock, but taking pity on the older man, Ghazi raised his hand. "Wait," he told Raven.

"Make him apologise," Raven said with an expression of disgust.

Ghazi looked at Halim. "You heard the man."

"I won't," Halim answered.

Raven's answer was to press the Glock harder against his skull. "Try again."

"Forgive me." Not only was Halim's voice without remorse but his face showed not an ounce of shame for his comment.

Ghazi almost let the entire room loose on him, but the lure of further information kept him from allowing Raven and the teenagers from Sanctuary from pummeling the dour-faced man.

"Very well." Ghazi held out his hand. "Will you loan me your gun?" he asked Raven.

"If you think I'm leaving you alone with this snake you're crazy," Raven said, shaking his head.

"Are you going to let a servant speak to you like that?" Halim asked.

"No, but Raven's my partner, not my servant." Ghazi leant forward until he was nose to nose with Halim. "You, on the other hand, are a mere servant in my eyes. So watch your tongue, or I will have it cut from your mouth."

The threat didn't seem to faze Halim. "What I need to show you is at the palace." He looked around the living room in disgust. "Not in a place like this."

"You fucker!" Nalu yelled, lurching towards Halim.

Raven chuckled and stepped between Nalu and his intended target. He grinned at Halim. "One more word and I'll serve your balls on a silver platter to this young man."

As much as Ghazi enjoyed seeing Nalu finally stand up for himself, he needed to get the ugly business taken care of before the elections. "Raven, would you mind escorting our prisoner back to the palace?"

"I would love to," Raven said, pushing Halim towards the door.

Ghazi waited until Halim was out of the house before turning to address the teenagers who had gathered during the commotion. "You have my word that Halim will suffer the full extent of the laws he has broken. Nalu and Johara will fill you in on the changes to be made at Sanctuary."

* * * *

"Speak," Ghazi demanded, walking into the palace's tropical garden.

"Alone," Halim said.

"No," Ghazi and Raven said at the same time. Raven glanced at Ghazi and smiled. He still couldn't believe Ghazi had called him his partner earlier. *Partner*. Raven doubted he'd ever tire of the word.

"Do you really want your *lover* to hear Jurru's most guarded secret?" Halim asked.

"I thought sitting on red diamonds was Jurru's most guarded secret." Ghazi crossed his arms. "So tell me. I can't wait to hear how you're going to justify your disgusting activities."

"I'm not going to tell you. Your father is," Halim said smugly.

"And how is that possible?" Ghazi asked.

Halim gestured to the statue of King Jaleel Zahar. "May I?"

Ghazi nodded and stepped to the side, indicating to Raven to allow Halim some space to move.

Raven narrowed his eyes. "Twitch in the wrong direction, and I'll blow your head off."

Halim clicked his tongue and glanced at Ghazi. "Really? You could have any gay man in the world and you chose this one?"

"I chose the right man for me and Jurru," Ghazi snarled as his hands fisted at his sides.

Halim rolled his eyes and reached into his pocket, pulling out a small ring of keys. He fit one of the keys into a small hole at the base of the bronze statue. Before turning the key, Halim looked over his shoulder at Ghazi. "Are you sure you want the truth?"

"I do," Ghazi answered.

The plaque on the front of the statue sprang open, revealing a hidden compartment. Halim reached in with a smile on his face. Raven saw the glint of steel a split second before Halim whirled around, his arm lifting in preparation to throw the dagger towards Ghazi.

A round from the Glock in Raven's hand penetrated the centre of Halim's forehead. It wasn't until Halim's vacant eyes met Raven's that he realised he'd just killed a man. He watched Halim fall to the ground face first.

Raven's hands started to shake as he continued to stare at the first person he'd ever killed. *Could I have stopped him without killing him?*

"Thank you," Ghazi said, taking the gun out of Raven's hand.

Ghazi's arm wrapped around his waist, drawing Raven's attention away from the body. "I couldn't let him kill you," he whispered.

"I know, and he would have." Ghazi kissed Raven's forehead. "You did the right thing."

"Did I?" Raven looked deep into Ghazi's eyes. "Why would he do that knowing I held a gun?"

Ghazi pulled Raven against his chest, shielding Raven's view of Halim. "Men like Halim, like my father, don't believe in giving up a fight until the enemy is dead."

* * * *

"We should burn these two," Ghazi said, handing two of the hidden journals to Raven.

Raven nodded. "Do you think these were what the CIA was on Jurru looking for?"

"I doubt the Director of the CIA would appreciate his taste for underage girls to become public knowledge. After my father's death, the Director must have worried the information would pass to his sons." Ghazi took a deep breath. "I will place a call informing him that the journals have been destroyed."

"Do you think he'll believe you?"

"He has little choice." Ghazi opened his father's personal journal once more. It was hard to believe Jurru had been on the verge of bankruptcy before Halim came up with the idea of granting wealthy men their every desire. Jaleel had tried to justify prostituting young teenagers by claiming it was the only way to save tourism once the war in the gulf started.

"Why didn't he harvest some of the diamonds if things were so bad?" Raven asked, evidently reading Ghazi's thoughts.

"It's not that easy. If he were to mine the diamonds, Jurru would never again be safe from invasion. The rest of the world thinks we're nothing but an island resort. I refuse to justify what my father did, but I have no doubt he thought he was doing what was best." Ghazi shook his head. "The big question is how do we provide for the future generations of Jurruans?"

"There has to be a way of harvesting enough of the diamonds to insure Jurru's future without giving away the location of where they came from."

"How? Who would do that for us?"

Raven shook his head. "I think you're trying to make it harder than it is. Have someone you trust like...Jackie or Seb be the middle man. He can find a good broker who'll sell the diamonds for you. The broker doesn't have to know where they came from. Hell, if anything the mystery behind their origin will make the diamonds more appealing."

Ghazi sighed, shutting the journal. He ran his fingers over the embossed Z on the leather cover. "Burn this as well."

"You don't want that," Raven argued.

"No, but I also don't want evidence of my father's misguided attempts to save Jurru to get into the wrong hands someday." Ghazi shook his head. "Better that I remember the father I was proud of."

He thought about the diamonds Ali had put in the safety deposit box in Albuquerque. If they found the right buyer, the diamonds already in their possession would see Jurru comfortably through the upheaval in the Middle East. "I'll talk to Seb. See if he's willing to find a broker for the Dragon Eyes."

Raven took the journal from Ghazi's hands. He set it on top of the others before climbing into Ghazi's lap.

Ghazi welcomed the action with open arms. "I'll be glad when this is taken care of so we can go back to a normal life."

Raven snorted. "You're a king. Our lives will never be normal."

Pulling Raven in for a kiss, Ghazi stopped just short of his partner's lips. Raven was right. Even if they were discreet with their relationship outside of Jurru, the world would soon be talking about the gay king and his lover. "You're right. I can't give you normal, but I can give you my heart."

"I thought you'd already given me your heart."

"I have. The question is will you accept it?"

"I already have."

Ghazi ran the tip of his tongue across the seam of Raven's lips. "Thank you. And in return, I'll do everything in my power to make you happy."

"Really? Because there are still those two items we've yet to address."

Ghazi chuckled. "Yes, we can have a dance for Brier and the others."

"Not a fancy ball. I want a real high school dance for them, complete with balloons and streamers."

"Consider it done. Now, what is the other request? You've yet to tell me."

Raven ground his erection against Ghazi. "I'm saving the last one as a secret, but it'll be a good one, I promise."

Epilogue

Brier's nerves were getting the better of him. He would be attending his first high school dance. What if the dances Bram showed him were old-fashioned? He chuckled, remembering his brother going on and on about what a stud he used to be in New York. How he'd go out to the clubs every night and dance his way into the hottest guy in the place's bed.

It didn't get past Brier that Bram talked about that stuff when Declan wasn't around. Brier wondered how much of what his twin said was the truth and how much was wishful thinking.

He shook his head. It didn't matter. Raven and King Ghazi had gone to a lot of trouble to come to Albuquerque and set up the dance. Even if Bram's dances were outdated, they were still better than anything Brier could've come up with on his own.

A knock at the bedroom door alerted Brier that his date was ready for the dance. He tried once again to straighten his tie before crossing the room. Opening the door, he gasped. Had Jackie ever looked so handsome? "Wow!"

"Wow yourself." Jackie stepped into their bedroom dressed in dress slacks, a white shirt and a red and white high school letterman's jacket. He held out a small plastic box. "This is for you."

Brier took the box. "A flower?"

"It's a boutonniere. All kids wear 'em to dances."

"Did you?" Brier asked, opening the box.

Jackie reached for the red rose and started to pin it to the lapel on Brier's new dark grey suit. "I never went to a dance in school. I knew better than to take who I wanted, so I just went out drinking with my other bachelor buddies."

After settling the rose, Jackie leant in for a soft kiss. "But even if I had gone to the dance with who I'd wanted, he would've paled in comparison to my date tonight."

Brier smiled and gestured to his silly happy-face tie. "Even if your date can't seem to get this knot right?"

Jackie took the plastic box and tossed it onto the dresser. He pulled Brier against his chest and nodded. "Your tie looks fine and you look handsome as hell."

"So do you," Brier said, running his palms up the front of the letterman's jacket.

Jackie glanced down and chuckled. "I can't believe this thing still fits. I dug it out of the attic. Other than needing a good cleaning, its fine."

Brier fingered the little symbol of the football along with a shoe with wings and a basketball. "You were good at sports, huh?"

"Yeah, pretty good."

"Sometimes I wonder if..." Brier swallowed around the lump in his throat. Thinking about the life he could have had if only he hadn't become stupid, always messed with his emotions. "I'm pretty fast."

"You are." Jackie wrapped his arms tighter around Brier and squeezed.

Burying his face against Jackie's neck, Brier tried to get himself together. He had a good life, no, a great life. Jackie made sure each day was important just by opening his eyes in the morning.

"I love you," Brier whispered.

"Love you, too, babe. Now we'd better get going or Raven's going to think all his hard work isn't appreciated."

"I'm glad Raven and King Zahar said we could have the dance here. I liked Jurru, but that was a really long plane ride."

Jackie chuckled and steered Brier towards the door. "Raven had to come back anyway to get his stuff from the dorm. Besides, even though I doubt he'd ever say it, I think he missed his friends and wanted to say goodbye."

"We'll see him again though, right?" Brier asked, grabbing the keys to his jeep off the table.

"Definitely." Jackie kissed the side of Brier's head. "By the way, you won't need those. I rented us something special to take to the dance."

"Huh? Like a limousine? I saw on TV that a lot of kids are doing that now."

"Better than a limo." Jackie opened the front door.

A shiny red Pontiac Trans Am sat in the driveway. "Wow. Where'd you get it?"

"A friend loaned it to me. I had one like it in high school only mine didn't have the T-tops and it was Royal blue." Brier started to reach for the door handle, but Jackie stopped him. "Allow me."

Brier grinned. "You're really taking this seriously, aren't you?"

Jackie blushed and shrugged his wide shoulders. "You're not the only one who's going to his first dance."

* * * *

Raven handed the high school janitor a hundred dollar bill. Although the school had been happy to accept Ghazi's generous donation in return for the gym rental, they had insisted a janitor be on the premises for insurance reasons. "So, I'll call you when we're finished for the evening, right?"

"Yep," the janitor said, stuffing the bill in his shirt pocket. "I'll take care of what I need to at the other end of the building then catch the game on the TV in the library."

"Perfect." Raven gave the man a friendly slap on the back before returning to the gym. The decorations were perfect. The party planner he'd hired to give the gym an authentic late eighties-style, had done a fantastic job.

He spotted Ghazi across the room talking to Jimmy, who had happily agreed to provide a portion of the night's entertainment. Unbuttoning his sports coat, Raven walked towards the man he loved who was completely drool-worthy in his expensive tuxedo. He couldn't keep the smile off his face. Evidently Ghazi was used to an entirely different kind of dance than the ones Raven had been to growing up.

"All set," he informed them.

Ghazi's brows rose at the sheer white T-shirt under Raven's jacket. He brushed his hand over Raven's chest, stopping to pluck at the pebbled nipples. "I wasn't sure why you didn't want the janitor around, but I'm starting to figure it out."

"You guys aren't planning to like, fuck around us or anything, right?" Archer asked.

Raven glanced at his co-worker. Archer might act disgusted, but the hard cock trapped in his black leather pants told a different story. "I wasn't planning on doing it right there on the dance floor, but I was hoping to blow my man in a bathroom stall."

"Experienced at that are you?"

Raven was, but no way would he tell Archer. The man already thought he was a slut. If he knew Raven had blown half nearly every unattached bodyguard that worked for Three Partners he'd never hear the end of it.

Instead of answering, Raven tugged on Ghazi's hand when he saw Brier and Jackie enter the gym. "Come on. Let's go welcome our friends."

As they walked off, Raven heard Jimmy reprimanding Archer. "Why do you have to say stuff like that to him?"

"I don't know. Habit, I guess," Archer answered.

"Well, time for a change in habits," Jimmy informed his partner.

"Yes, babe."

Raven continued walking. Thank God Archer found a man who loved him despite his faults. Maybe they'd all get lucky and Jimmy would mellow Archer enough that he could actually be in the same room with Raven without calling him names. He sighed. A guy could hope.

The sound of the programmed music started, filling the gym with a song from the past. Raven pressed himself against Ghazi's side. "You ready to shake your groove thang?"

"I thought I'd already done that today, twice."

Without missing a step, Raven reached down and palmed Ghazi's cock through his tuxedo pants. "It's not my fault. You're the one who made me pack up all my toys. You know how I get when I'm nervous and excited about something."

"Yes, believe me, I know. As a matter of fact, I'm planning to keep you on edge for the next fifty years or so."

Raven's ass clenched at the idea of riding Ghazi's cock for the next half-century. He stopped in front of Brier and Jackie and held out his hand. He'd usually hug Brier, but with his cock painfully hard, Raven didn't think it was a good idea. "What do you think?"

Brier's big brown eyes were huge as he continued to stare at the Christmas lights and streamers draped from the tall ceiling. "It's beautiful. Even better than the dance on Footloose and that was awesome."

The comparison made Raven smile. "I'm glad you like it. Why don't the two of you grab something to eat? There's also some beer or pop in the cooler beside the food table. I have something Ghazi needs to take care of in the bathroom."

"Huh?" Brier asked, his brows drawn together.

Jackie leant over and whispered in Brier's ear. Brier's jaw dropped. "Really? Do you think we could try that later?"

Jackie chuckled. "Of course. What would a high school dance be without some fooling around in the bathroom or the janitor's closet?"

"The closet?" Brier shook his head in apparent wonder. "I think I would've loved high school."

* * * *

The sounds of eighties rock filtered through the door as Ghazi licked Raven's nipple through the white shirt, rendering the fabric completely transparent. "This is so sexy."

"Glad you like it." Raven moaned and started unfastening Ghazi's pants. "Want you."

"Not yet." Ghazi lifted Raven and sat him on the edge of the sink and knelt between Raven's legs. "This is your special evening, and to honour such, I will pleasure you first."

Raven reached down and threaded his fingers through Ghazi's black curls. "You pleasure me daily. What I desire is for you to fuck me from behind."

With Raven's cockhead poised at his lips, Ghazi stopped. "From behind? I thought we'd grown beyond that phase of your life?" He ran his tongue over the dark bronzed head, stopping to gather the generous drops of pre-cum.

"Sometimes we must face our pasts." Raven ran his finger around Ghazi's lips as they stretched over the girth of Raven's cock. "It's important to me," he whispered.

Ghazi released the cock in his mouth and stood. Cupping Raven's face, he leant in until his cheek rested against Raven's. He didn't fully understand Raven's request, but anything that meant that much to the man he loved would be met with love and vigour. "Take off your pants."

Within moments Raven was completely naked with his hands braced on the edge of the sink and his ass pushed out. "Leave your tux on," Raven instructed, handing Ghazi a small tube of lube.

Before opening the lube, Ghazi reached down and pushed his pants down. "I'll leave my top-half clothed, but I don't relish the thought of going through the entire night with lube spots on my trousers."

Raven glanced over his shoulder and rolled his eyes. "You're so prissy sometimes. Seriously? With an ass like this on display the only thing you can think of is messing up your pants?"

Ghazi knew Raven was poking him on purpose. It was a known fact between them that their love-making took on an entirely different level when they argued. Ghazi wrapped an arm around Raven's waist and slammed his cock against the crease of Raven's ass. "I'll show you who's prissy."

"Show me," Raven challenged, reaching for his cock.

Ghazi opened the tube and dripped lube down Raven's crack, making it easier to slide his cock up and down the crevice. "How many times have you been bent over a sink?" he growled. He hated the thought of another man fucking Raven.

"Too many to count," Raven admitted. "But never by someone interested in more than a night of manic fucking."

Ghazi lifted one of Raven's legs to rest on the edge of the sink before sinking three fingers deep within his partner. "From now on, mine is the only cock that'll be buried in your ass."

"You think you're up to the job? I like a lot of sex."

Removing his fingers, Ghazi applied lube to the length of his cock before pressing it against Raven's stretched hole. "I will make a pallet for you under my desk. You need only to reach between my legs to have me at your bidding."

Raven shoved back, impaling himself fully on Ghazi's cock. "I like the sound of that."

"I thought you would." Ghazi withdrew his length before surging back inside. Once they had come to an agreement, Ghazi gripped Raven's hips and began a hard, fast pace in and out of his lover.

The position allowed a clear view of Raven's tattoo, reminding Ghazi of his partner's past. Raven's words came back to him. Ghazi's rhythm stuttered as he realised why the position was so important to Raven.

Ghazi bent and kissed the tip of each wing. Raven needed to make sure Ghazi accepted him as he was. "I love you."

Raven's back muscles flexed as he began fucking himself on Ghazi's cock. The action made the wings appear to move, almost as if Raven was readying himself to take flight. "I love you, too," Raven ground out between clenched jaws.

Ghazi moved one hand to Raven's shoulder, holding him in place as his pace began to increase. "Listen."

The acoustics in the restroom amplified the sound of slapping skin. It was probably the most erotic sound Ghazi had ever heard. With each slap of his balls against Raven's skin, Ghazi slipped closer to the edge.

"I...can't...hold...off," Raven panted as his body began to jerk with the force of his orgasm.

The squeeze of Raven's ass as he rode out his climax pushed Ghazi over the edge. He pressed against Raven's lower back as he shot deep within his lover. Despite it being their third fuck of the day, Ghazi's sac continued to pump seed in Raven's hole.

The intense orgasm left Ghazi feeling completely drained of energy. He slumped against Raven's back and struggled to regain his breath.

"You can fuck me in the restroom anytime."

"I'll remember that," Ghazi mumbled.

* * * *

After dancing the Electric Slide with Brier, Jared and several others, Raven wiped the sweat from his neck and joined Ghazi and his friends at the table.

Ghazi threaded his fingers through Raven's as soon as he sat down. "Amir has found a broker for the diamonds. Seb is due to meet with him next week."

"That's good news," Raven regarded Amir, Mac and Nicco. "Thanks."

"Our pleasure," Mac answered.

The music from the CD player kicked off and the sound of Jimmy's acoustic guitar filled the room. It was the song he'd written for Archer, a current number one hit across the nation.

"Dance with me," Raven whispered against Ghazi's lips.

"Only if you lead. I haven't danced since I was a boy."

Raven climbed off his partner's lap and pulled Ghazi to his feet. As they came together on the dance floor, they were joined by every couple in the room. A few of the bodyguards stood around, looking awkward in their single status. Raven thanked God he was no longer living in the land of bachelorhood. He hummed to the song as he danced, cherished in his lover's strong arms.

He glanced around them, happy to see his friends enjoying the sentimental love song. The way Jared and Seb clung to each other nearly brought tears to Raven's eyes. He obviously knew something Seb hadn't figured out. *I could stand naked in front of Jared and he wouldn't even notice me.* The slight, kind-hearted Jared would forever only have eyes for the big jackass, Seb.

Raven chuckled.

Ghazi leant back. "What's funny?"

"Nothing much. I'm just realising how much I'm going to miss these guys."

Ghazi looked around at the various couples. "Are you going to change your mind about coming home with me?"

"No. Oh, God, no. Don't even think that."

"Then I shall fly your friends to Jurru whenever you need them."

Raven wrapped his arms around Ghazi's neck. Under the glow of the twinkle lights, he gazed into the loving eyes of his partner. "You're the only person I will ever *need*." He looked over his shoulder at his friends. "They've all finally found love, just as I have. It'll make me happy enough to catch up with them a few times a year."

Ghazi brushed his lips against Raven's. "Whatever you want, know that I will give it freely and with love."

"I know." Although he'd always thought his life would be complete if he found a rich man who loved him, Raven had no idea he would gain so much more than money if he found a man to love in return.

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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