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Under Pressure

TOP SHELF

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## *Chapter One*

"That was a hell of a light show, huh, Precious?" Sonny steered the new boat out of the bay, watching the waves that would eventually come up to slap the bow, trying to keep the damned boat between the buoys. His adrenaline levels were pretty damned high, so it wasn't easy. Hell, his hands were still shaking. Fuck, he'd just seen someone's motherfucking *head* roll across the bar floor.

It hadn't been a head he knew or nothing, but still. Man. Human heads weren't supposed to do that.

MJ, though, he looked cool as a cucumber in a deep freeze.

"Not bad. Not bad at all." Those binoculars never moved, MJ watching, even though Sonny didn't think the son of a bitch could see a fucking thing, as much C-4 as the bastard'd used. That fucking flash-bang probably echoed off some goddamn satellite in space. Probably interrupted the transmission of a ballgame or something. That thought sort of made him grin.

MJ rolled those inked shoulders, muscles rippling. "Keep going, Sunshine. No slowing down."

"Shit. When have I ever slowed down?" He steered off the center line a bit, trying to get less chop. It would kinda suck to break up their pretty new schooner. "You think we got him?"

"He was on the ship. He was on the deck, though." MJ's lips twisted, just once. The man had liked that boat.

"Good." If they hadn't killed the bastard, they'd at least put the hurt on him. "So, where to, Precious?"

"How do you feel about the Galapagos?"

"We'll have to get gas..." Lord. Galapagos. Turtles. That was all he could think of.

"We can do that in Jamaica. Panama. It'll take a while." MJ shrugged. "There's Trinidad."

So, it didn't matter. MJ in the grip of apathy was a dangerous thing. "Maybe we should just find a cove someplace, anchor. Have some R&R."

Fuck like bunnies.

"As long as it's not obvious, yeah. Yeah." The too-long blond hair just moved in the wind, the full set of Samsonite under MJ's eyes starting to show. The son of a bitch had been going for five days, nonstop. Five days of planning and setting charges and making sure that bastard found them. Five days. Shit.

"You should go lie down, man." Look at him, all mother hen. Of course, he couldn't use his usual MJ sleep aid. Either one of them; the fucking or the drugging. He had to drive.

"I'm fine." MJ's belly looked like he could bounce quarters off it.

"Sure you are. You're fixing to have a psychotic episode. Now, you know I love that, but where are you gonna go, huh? We're on a boat." They got out of the chop, and Sonny gave it some speed, needing to get... somewhere.

"I haven't had a psychotic episode in weeks. You're confusing me with the Brit."

"No, he was just sick as a dog..." The Brit and the little redhead were gone. Thank God. They were pretty, but man, those two cramped their style. There was something about hanging with a mind reader that made him itchy. "You think they're boinking, like right now?"

"Ew. No." MJ shuddered, nose wrinkling. "Rick is... not sexual. God. Ew. I'd just gotten the image of those two out of my brain."

"Yeah, but the blond was pretty." He knew that would get him some heat, but damn it, he needed MJ to do more than stare back toward the ship's wake and be all zombie. Arrr.

He almost got worried, but then that eyebrow went up.

And up.

And up.

Oh, hell yes. Score.

"I didn't think you were into nutcase tea-drinkers, Sunshine."

"Well, maybe not tea. But you know I like crazy blonds." The crazy remark might even get MJ to come hit him.

"I wonder if the boat will move faster if I lose a couple pounds of dead weight..."

Sighing, Sonny turned to a new heading, searching the horizon for landmarks. "That was lame, Precious."

"Lame." He thought he could hear the lenses in the binoculars trying to crack.

"Uh-huh." Turning on his most offensive drawl, he went on, "You aren't even trying. I mean, if you're gonna make a death threat after all this time, it needs to have some oomph."

He heard the sounds of MJ's feet hitting the deck about half a second before MJ tackled him. God damn.

His chin cracked against the wheel casing, his hands scrabbling as MJ's weight sent him crashing down. Sonny grunted, tasting blood, and sent one elbow back in a vicious blow. He could feel the muscles bending, then bouncing back, pushing him away. "Motherfucker."

Teeth sank into his shoulder, MJ's hands pushing hard at the base of his skull. Fuck. It hurt so bad that it brought tears springing up. It hurt so good that his cock went zero to sixty in record time. Sonny moaned, trying to fight back, but wanting to hump instead. Too damned long...

MJ spun him so fast his back cracked against the deck, that hot mouth landing on his lips. MJ's eyes were huge, staring, fucking awake.

"Shit. MJ..." His hands came right up, clutching at MJ's shoulders. Damn. His head was just spinning.

"Uh-huh." He got himself another kiss, this one hot enough to melt iron. That was it. Just fucking like that.

The boat rocked, starting to turn in a lazy circle, and Sonny broke off, gasping for air. "We need to turn the engine off."

"Then turn it off." MJ slid down his body, tearing at his clothes, nails scoring his skin.

Surging up to his knees, Sonny flipped the key and the engine died, screaming a little because he hadn't throttled down. Then he grabbed MJ and tore the man's shirt right in half. Goddamn.

"They didn't get us." MJ bit his hip, hard.

"No. No, we're right here." Poor Precious. The man had some issues, what with that weird-assed government-type group hunting him. Sonny couldn't blame him. Hell, he admired the man. Tangling his fingers in that too-long hair, he yanked MJ's head up, meeting those bright eyes. "Mine."

"Prove it."

Like he couldn't? Sonny growled, ripping at MJ's thin linen pants, sending them flying overboard with a twist of his wrist. He pulled MJ's mouth to his again, taking a kiss that set off fireworks of pain and beautiful fucking need. MJ's fingers were digging into his scalp, holding him tight, that kiss going on and on until lights flashed behind his eyes.

They broke apart, gulping in great gasps of air before plunging right back in. They rolled, MJ landing hard on his back, Sonny pressing MJ's hands to the slick wood. MJ stared at him, not asleep anymore, not even a little bit cold. Fuck, no. That was pure heat.

"I got you, Precious. Okay? Got you." Rocking his hips, he let MJ feel him, let his cock rub and press and feel like it might explode.

"Sonny." MJ groaned, legs coming up to wrap around him. Jesus, look at that belly roll.

"Yeah." They didn't have anything like lube, so he used spit, holding MJ's wrists with one hand, wetting the fingers of the other. His fingers tasted salty, rough, but he got them wet and pushed them against MJ's hole, just not able to stop. MJ didn't seem to be spending a lot of energy on complaints, either. No, those hips jerked, pushing right onto his fingers as MJ's wrists pulled against his hands.

The wind whipped sea air at them, but he could still smell MJ, the musk and earth scent making him groan. He got his fingers deep inside, got MJ open for him, ready to go.

"Fuck me. Come on." Fuck, nobody needed like his Precious. Nobody ever had.

"Now," he agreed, moving his fingers out of the way and pushing his cock into place. He slipped right in, and MJ pulled him in deep, those legs clamping around him. Sonny moaned, bent to kiss that mouth, needing more contact. MJ's tongue pushed into his mouth and fucked his lips just like the man was starving. Fucking A. Sonny slammed into MJ's body, hips driving hard and fast, feeling the scrape and burn of that hot, tight ass all along his shaft. Jesus fuck. He could hear MJ's moans, harsh, raw noises just pushed into his lips. Their bodies slapped together, their balls swung, his chest hair rasped against MJ's skin. "Precious... Yeah."

"Come on. Come on, Sunshine." MJ's hands squeezed hold of his butt cheeks, grabbing hard and tugging him in deeper.

"Need more..." Damn it, he needed to feel MJ move around him. Needed to hit just there. Right. There.

"Uh..." Fuck, feel that ass squeeze around him, work his prick like a goddamn hand.

"Precious. Yeah. Like that." Goddamn. His whole body felt like it was gonna shake apart. Like a fucking earthquake.

MJ nodded, nipped his bottom lip, hard, muscles rippling something fierce. He reached up, finding MJ's nipples and twisting them before sliding his hand down to stroke that pretty, pretty

cock. Jesus, MJ was hard for him. Needing. Those blue eyes went wide as saucers, MJ looking damn near shocked for a second before heat just poured over his hand.

Sonny's teeth snapped together, the damned edges closing close enough to the inside of his lip that he tasted blood. His cock swelled impossibly, and Sonny shot so hard he couldn't breathe, filled MJ deep.

MJ rode it out with him, holding on tight like he'd jump ship or something.

Wrapping around MJ, Sonny rolled them to their sides and held right back. "I got you, Precious. Just me. No one else."

"Just you." MJ melted for him, cuddled in, eyes closed.

Thank fuck the man was relaxing. MJ in work mode was a little unnerving after the second or third day. He liked happily dangerous better.

"You'll keep watch?" It said something, that MJ'd let him watch over.

"I will. Crash a bit, huh?" They'd go, find someplace far enough away to anchor and swim and relax. Maybe ride a nice little buzz for a couple of days.

"Yeah." MJ kissed his jaw, nodded. "You poke me if you need me."

"I will. With something you enjoy." Kissing MJ's chin, Sonny hoisted himself up, hauled MJ to the little bench seat. "You hang out here."

"Mmrph." He figured that was a yes. 'Course, MJ was already sound asleep.

Sonny smiled, kissing that sweaty forehead before going back to start the boat, getting them going again. They needed a place to hole up and remember how to be them, no hostages, no work, no evil ex-bosses.

Just them. They were always best that way.

## *Chapter Two*

He still wasn't sure if this was a good idea or not. He just wasn't. Still, if he didn't get a drink and get Sonny off the motherfucking boat, there might be a catastrophic incident. MJ did his best to avoid catastrophic incidents.

Usually.

Well, sometimes.

Okay, lately.

At least today.

"You want the cabin in the back or on the end?" he asked Sonny, forcing himself to look calm, settled. Fucking easy in his fucking skin.

Goddamn islands.

Goddamn people building things and ruining the water table and native animal habitat...

"The back. It sits far enough away that we won't have to worry." Sonny was jittering like the man always accused him of doing, tapping one leg over and over.

"You stay out of the stash, man, or I'm knocking you out." He headed over to Joie, her smile shining in her dark face. "Dans le dos, s'il te plait."

"Oui. Oui." She held up two fingers. "Deux lit?"

He shrugged. One or two beds worked for them. Sonny wandered, just visible from the corner of his eye. The man looked like he might explode. Joie handed him the keys, giving Sonny a nervous glance or two.

"Il sera bon. Just fine. Don't worry." He handed over enough money to keep her quiet, but not so much she'd think on them. She smiled again for him, nodding and slipping away with the money, back up to her own little cabin. Sonny was bouncing on the balls of his feet, growling a little.



"In the back. Now." He grabbed the bags, growling right back. They needed a bed.

A bathtub.

Hopefully a lizard-free bathtub.

Putting his feet down hard, Sonny headed on back, schlepping one of the big duffels. The man was sore as a lion with a thorn in its damned paw, and MJ was getting a little sick of it. He watched Sonny walk, trying to decide if a coconut to the back of the head would help or hurt. Of course, he'd have to climb a tree to get a coconut, because there was no deadfall, and that would be way more effort than slamming Sonny's head against the cabin door a few times.

"You're not listening, are you?" Sonny growled, snapping him out of his pleasant daydream.

"Nope. I was admiring your backside."

"No. You were looking a lot higher. You try to hit me, and I'll tear your ass up and not in the good way." Those big hands opened and closed, Sonny staring at him, daring him.

"One, how the fuck would you know? Two, you won't tear my ass up, you enjoy it too much." He put the bags down. "And three, if you want to fight, you stubborn fucking redneck, quit being a pussy and bring it on."

"Pussy." The word was barely audible. The sound of Sonny's fist connecting with his chin was much louder.

At least they could finally get on with their day now.

MJ dropped down, swept Sonny's legs out from under him, the tall asshole going down with a very satisfying thud. Sonny fought dirty, though, kicking out at him, spinning so one booted foot connected with his knee. Fuck, that stung. He went down, elbow connecting with Sonny's stomach, sinking in a second before the abs contracted and pushed back. Really, they needed to eat before fighting.

Grunting, Sonny went absolutely limp, arms and legs flopping like a rag doll's. The man didn't even cuss. There was no way his blow had damaged Sonny that much. He rolled away, figuring that either Sonny'd passed out or that Sonny was waiting to pounce again. Either way, he'd need some space.

Those dark eyes opened, almost black, staring right at him. "Your heart's not in it, Precious. Is the romance gone?"

"Well, we've experienced kidnapping, explosions, and a beheading. Does that mean the honeymoon's over?"

Sonny rubbed his belly, fingers exploring right where MJ's elbow had hit. "I think I'm tired. Shit, Precious, I have this weird urge to apologize."

Man, the world was askew.

Drastically.

"Let's just jack off and nap. We'll explore paradigm shifts and shit later."

"We have chocolate." Climbing stiffly to his feet, Sonny held out a hand, pulling MJ close when he took it. He got a kiss, and there was nothing apologetic about it, which was a fucking relief. He wrapped one hand around Sonny's waist, fingers working the small of Sonny's back, pushing hard.

They needed less catastrophe and more fucking.

"Mmm." That big body pressed against his a moment, Sonny leaning hard before they both moved to grab bags and get inside.

The cabin wasn't bad at all -- hell, it was cleaner than the one in Jamaica and bigger than the one in the Bahamas. It beat the living hell out of being stuck with a rotting corpse in a box on a boat.

Sonny looked around and nodded. "Not bad, Precious. You think there's a shower?"

"Yeah. Supposed to be." The bed looked clean, the kitchenette functional.

"Get naked, then. I want to get clean and maybe spend some quality time in bed, contemplating your ink."

"Mmm. You haven't done that in forever... Contemplated me." He was an enormous fan.

"I need to. Hell, if I'm going to tattoo you, I need to make a map." Sonny started tugging at him, pulling at his clothes, pulling him to the bathroom.

"The map of MJ. That has a ring." He got Sonny naked, admiring that big, muscle-bound body. "Sexy redneck."

Bruises bloomed over Sonny's chest and belly and arms. His marks. All his. Goddamn, that was hot.

"You know it. I like the idea. It will take serious study."

"How are your study habits, Sunshine? Were you a good student?" Somehow, MJ thought Sonny could have been. Honestly.

"I told you I was willing to take art history, yeah?" They'd had that discussion once, about college and shit. Sonny rubbed a hand over his belly. "I could get A's for you, Precious."

"You could." MJ hummed, stepped closer. "You have amazing hands, Sunshine. You know that?"

"You always say you like my mouth." Sonny winked, but held out one big, square hand to him. The one not reaching down to cup Sonny's cock.

"I like quite a few of your finer points. I'm reserving judgment on the rest."

"Asshole." Sonny grabbed him and pulled him close, both hands on him now. One of them smacked his ass.

"Fuckhead." He pinched one nipple, hard.

Sonny's eyes went even darker, pupil swallowing the iris. "I think your heart was way more into that."

"You don't need to worry about that part of me, man. I'm settled there." Bone fucking deep. Asshole.

"Well, I do worry every once in awhile. When you try to blow it off or whatever." This time Sonny didn't slap, just slid the palm of his hand down to cup MJ's balls.

"Job hazard." Hot. Sonny's hand was fucking *hot*.

"Uh-huh. Well, right now the only hazard you have to worry about is me. Shower." They stumbled to the bathroom, shucking the rest of their clothes, doing the dancing bear act Sonny usually saved for when they were hurt.

He got the water going, easing a little chameleon up and out of the tub and through a window.

"Oh, I don't think so," Sonny said when he would've grabbed the man. "Wash your lizardy hands."

"We're getting in the *shower*, dude." Oh, too fucking fun. He wagged his fingers. He got one of those looks. The one that said 'I am about to rip your fingers off and stuff them in every orifice that is not bleeding when I'm done with you.' Good thing they made him happy. "Lizards are very important to the ecosystem."

"Outside, sure. Just put your goddamned hands in the water. Then I'll put my hands on you." Wiggling his fingers, Sonny drove him back toward the water.

"You won't get scales." He stepped back, checking to make sure he wouldn't fall.

"MJ! Would you just do it?" Okay. Okay, he'd never noticed that Sonny had a lizard thing before. Maybe it was like his own claustrophobia...

"Do you have an irrational fear of all reptiles, or just lizards?" He pondered just licking his hand for the gross-out factor, but hell, Sonny cared enough to kidnap him and put him on a plane, so he grabbed the soap and unwrapped it.

"I don't have a fear of reptiles. I just think they smell like rotten cucumbers. That can't be hygienic."

This from the man who drank moonshine so strong that it made people's brains run out their ears. "No shit? Cool. I haven't smelled them before..."

Dude, that could be useful.

"Then you haven't ever stepped in a nest of water moccasins." As soon as his hands were clean Sonny grabbed him, pulling him around to kiss him until his ears rang. He forgot about lizards. Frogs. Snakes. Claustrophobia.

Hell, for a kiss like that he might just forget his name. Sonny held him tight, lifting him up against that heavily muscled body, rubbing like crazy.

"Don't drop me." Hard. Hard. Sonny felt so fucking good.

"Not gonna. Have I ever let you down? I make you bananas. I get shot for you. I help you blow up your ex-boss..." Sonny punctuated each part of the laundry list with sucking kisses.

"You kidnap old frat brothers. You buy me Ding Dongs." Oh... Ding Dongs.

"No getting distracted." That was the second slap on his ass in less than a half hour. He might have to beat Sonny to death.

"Don't make me kill you, redneck. I'm looking forward to being retired with you again." Someday. Maybe. If he was lucky.

"Mmm. We're retired now. We have enough to buy a bigger boat." Now who was distracted? Sonny was licking water off his neck. Must not be any lizard smell.

"Uh-huh. An untraceable new boat. No hostages. Just us and the water and the sun."

"Shit, yes." Turning him, Sonny smacked him up against the wall, muscling up between his legs where they dangled.

"Fuck." He wrapped his legs around Sonny, pulling hard. Yes. Fuck. Now.

"You want me, Precious? Want me to fuck you? Been too goddamned long." Yeah, he could feel Sonny now, prodding at him, hot as fire.

"No." He waited until Sonny met his eyes, holding the look for a long moment. "Need you. Fucking *need* it, Sonny."

"You got it." Pulling him into position, Sonny pushed at him, not bothering with prep or stretching. It was gonna be a wild ride. He held on, the cool water fucking fine where it splashed against him, sizzled against his motherfucking skin. It was something, compared to the fucking fire that was Sonny. The head of that amazing cock slid right into him, heavy and hard and full. Yeah. Right there. He drew his knees up a little, ass sinking down. Stretching. Fuck.

"Precious..." Panting, slipping only the tiniest bit, Sonny started moving, sliding inside him, wet skin all up against his. Fucking amazing. He just spread and spread, taking the fine son of a bitch in and in and in. Grunting, panting, Sonny fucked him hard, holding him in place so those lean hips and heavy thighs could work their magic. His back slid against the tile, the edges scratching, just a little, just enough to keep him jerking, squeezing around Sonny's prick.

"Goddamn." He could hear the growl, knew Sonny was getting ready to really unleash on him. MJ just held on tight and let Sunshine do him up good, more bruises popping up all over his back.

"More." He loved the way Sonny responded to a challenge, loved the way Sonny needed him.

"Fuck, yes. Come on, Precious. Show me how you want it." That big body shifted, gathered, and Sonny gave him more, harder, better. Heat crawled up his belly, his entire body going rock-hard, the pit of his stomach aching. Both of Sonny's hands grasped his ass, squeezing, giving him something to fight against, something to push into. The man leaned in and bit him on the shoulder, smacking him back against the tile.

He arched and squeezed, bore down hard so Sonny felt it.

"Christ!" Cock pushing in one last time, Sonny came for him, eyes wide and black, lips drawn back in a grimace. Those hands held him up, though. Never let him fall.

His orgasm came quick behind. All he'd needed was Sonny. Some shit didn't change.

He got a kiss that took the rest of his air right out of him, leaving him hanging limp in Sonny's hands. Then the man leaned back to grin at him a little, blinking hard. "Good."

"Uh-huh. Even with the lizard." He slid his fingers up Sonny's spine.

"No lizards." Sonny turned them again, letting him down easy, the pull as Sonny's cock slid out almost painfully good. The soap was scooped up, and his whole body took on a super lathering.

"Mmm." He stretched up, let Sonny touch as much as the man wanted. "Smells good."

"Kinda like pine. Which always makes me think of my momma's kitchen, come to think of it." One dark eyebrow went up and down, that grimace not at all about sex now.

"Yeah?" He reached for the soap, ready to return the favor. "Mine smells like patchouli."

"You know, I always wondered how a man could do black ops and wear patchouli. Nature boy." Asshole. Good thing they'd fucked out the aggression momentarily.

"It's a genetic thing - like the sandalwood soap and the undying love of tofu." Although, really, he preferred steak.

"Your dad couldn't have been into weed and essential oil, right? He's all like... rah-rah uniforms and standard issue and shit, huh?" Oh. Oh, what was the question? Sonny was massaging his shoulders, making him forget everything.

"Huh? Yeah. I mean, no. No, the Colonel was military, all the way..." His eyes went a little crossed, knees trying to buckle. "Good."

"You're all wired up. Like frozen rope." Fingers and thumbs dug in, finding every tense muscle and working it to mush.

"Been a long couple weeks, Sunshine. A long couple weeks." Deadly, even.

"Now we can relax, yeah?" He could tell Sonny was already winding down. There wasn't a hint of growl, just a slow, caramel Southern drawl.

"Mmmhmm. You and me, Sunshine. All the shrimp we can eat and long naps on the beach."

"Cool." The water clicked off, the shooshing noise stopping, only a slow drip left. "Let's start now, Precious. With the nap."

"Yeah." They were good at the napping, him and Sonny, which was funny, because once upon a time he had never, ever slept.

"Come on, Precious. Promise you'll save me from the lizards?" Fluffy towels. Dude, so much better than Jamaica or Wilmington.

"You have my word, Sunshine. From geckos to Godzilla."

## *Chapter Three*

Ah. This was the life. Neil leaned back in his lounge chair and sipped at his drink, wrinkling his nose a bit at the sight of the very hairy gentleman in a thong. Well, mostly it was the life.

The sun, the sand, the south of France... Who could ask for more? Especially when one had Padraic to sit with and watch glow in the sun. His sweet was almost completely recovered from their ordeal, his thoughts moving as fast as the clouds in the sky.

"Have you had enough sun, love?" Neil asked, glancing at Paddy over his sunglasses.

"Mmm. It's beautiful, isn't it? So hot and perfect up there, all that fire..." Paddy stared into the light again, red hair seeming like fire itself.

"Ah. Well, then. You might want to apply more sunscreen." And he needed to flip over and get away from the hairy man with the divided bottom.

Paddy started chuckling, images of something entirely more appealing than either sunscreen or hairy arses flashing through his mind.

"Oh, I do like that," he murmured, glancing Paddy's way again. "Add some ice and I'm there."

"Ice." Paddy's thoughts filled with equations and concepts and memories of the shiny, sleek laboratory his dear one had spent most of his life in. Then Paddy's eyes hit him and those thoughts faded, melting to a wanton heat.

"Shall we?" Draping his towel over his lap, Neil stood, hiding the evidence of his sudden need.

"Uh-huh." Paddy followed along, admiring his ass, his back, his ink. Those eyes felt like a caress, and Neil hummed with pleasure, giving his walk a tad of extra slink. Oh, the things they could do.

He could feel Paddy's pleasure, that sweet, constant mutter that was all for him. They made it back to their little bungalow, and Neil turned, both of them reaching out to touch. His hands slid on Paddy's skin, and those freckles felt like fire.

"Neil." Paddy pushed close and pulled him down, begged a kiss.

"Sweet..." Holding Paddy close, Neil took kiss after kiss, loving the slide of their sun-warmed skin.

"Mmhmm." Paddy's hands were ever so clever - pushing at costume and towel, baring him quickly.

"Mmm." Neil simply wrapped his arms around Paddy and let the touches and kisses and such take him, let himself rub against that sturdy body. It was the headiest sensation, the way Paddy's body held him, pushed against him. Nibbling on Paddy's lips produced a lovely anise flavor from the pastis they'd tried earlier. Pushing in with his tongue, Neil caught more of it, hearing Paddy's 'mmm licorice' loud in his head.

With that thought came flashes of Paddy's mother and family Monopoly games and long study sessions in libraries. Neil traveled with those memories, sinking into Paddy, surrounding himself with bright happy loving quiet loud. So sweet, his love. Paddy had been through so much. It was good to feel him almost as he'd been when they'd met.

At the core of Paddy's thoughts, he found himself, and that happiness blossomed, almost made him weak at the knees.

Instead he clung to Paddy's shoulders and gave his sweet a kiss that came from his toes, and his weak knees, and from his very unweak prick. Paddy laughed, walking them toward the big, soft bed that took up altogether too much room. They toppled, both of them kissing happily, little noises issuing forth as they stroked and explored. He did love Paddy's enthusiasm for the smallest details of life.

"Love you." Paddy laughed, fingers in his hair. "You smell like sunshine."

"So do you, love. And coconuts." Coconut wasn't something he associated with the south of France, but it was in the sunscreen.

"Mmm." Paddy quite liked it when he rubbed in the sunscreen, liked it a lot.

"I do, too," he murmured, licking his way up Paddy's throat. Not an unpleasant taste at all. They had, in fact, tested several types of lotion before choosing this one. The image of him gagging and crinkling his face hit him, along with the bubble and pop of Paddy's amusement. Neil laughed out loud and kissed Paddy deeply, their legs tangled together, the slide and drag of hair and skin making him hum. Paddy's fingers pushed down his stomach, heading for his cock, needing to touch him.

*Yes, please.* He thought it so loud that it probably formed words in the air above their head, like in those comics Paddy adored. Little white clouds of pleasure.



Paddy smiled, nodded. Those fingers found him, stroked him up and down; Paddy's fingers knew just where to touch him. His thighs spread, his hips rose right up, and Neil moaned, his fingers tracing patterns on Paddy's freckles. "Sweet. Love how you touch me."

The smile he was given sent electricity through him. "My hands like your skin."

"They do, hmm? You like my arse, too." It was Paddy's buttocks he had hold of, however, squeezing now, thumbs digging into the flesh of each cheek.

"Uh-huh. I like all the parts of you." Paddy wriggled for him, that tight little backside shimmying.

Neil's fingers slipped between Paddy's cheeks, pressed just a bit. "I like your parts, too, sweet."

Paddy spread, thumb stuttering over the tip of his prick. More. That was clear as a ringing bell. "More what, sweet?" Licking his lips, Neil pushed a finger a little harder, slid inside the tiniest bit.

"More. More of you." Paddy focused on his mouth, leaning to take a kiss that nearly burned him.

Yes, all that he was. Paddy had become his center. Funny, how their lives had entwined together.

Paddy bit his bottom lip a little. "Focus. No thinking."

Wicked lad.

"Sorry, love. Where was I? I think we might need slick." They had more lotion somewhere.

"You were going to drive me crazy, and then we were both going to come all over like big idiots and then nap."

"I like that plan." Yes, indeed. Paddy was incredibly beautiful when he came, and that was a distraction in itself. Slipping away, Neil found their well-worn bottle of oil and worked some between his fingers, moving back to Paddy to press again at that tiny hole. Paddy spread for him, opening with a happy little noise, sacs gone tight and wrinkled above his hand. The feeling of his finger pushing inside became shivery good, Paddy clamping down on him right away. So sweet. Hot. Then the tight muscles loosened, let him push deep.

The swirl of Paddy's thoughts shattered, only his name in that amazing, glorious mind.

Neil all but held his breath, pressing another finger in alongside the first. His hips rocked, his cock rubbing against Paddy's thigh. Paddy's fingers slid down his side as that ring of muscles squeezed him, clenched around his fingers.

"Tight, love. I can tell how you want me inside. Can feel it." He didn't have to be a mind reader to see that.

"Love that. You in me, real close."

"Are you ready, sweet?" Two fingers was enough. It would have to be; Neil could not wait any longer.

"Yes. In me." One of the nicest things about loving Paddy was how eager his love was.

Kneeling up, Neil spread Paddy's thighs and pressed in between them. The head of his cock went where his fingers had been, and he could hear Paddy chanting at the edge of his brain. A simple 'yes, yes, yes.' Paddy shifted and he pushed and suddenly he was held in a sweet heat, Paddy's muscles holding him tight.

"Oh. Love." Leaning, he let his forehead rest on Paddy's, breathing the man in. "I... Hot."

"Uh-huh. 'S the beach." Paddy rippled, body fluttering about him.

Hips starting a slow roll, Neil chuckled and pushed and panted. "No. No, my dear. It's all you."

"All us..." Paddy shifted again, slid, trying to get Neil in place. Moving, sliding, Neil worked his hips harder as he tried to find the perfect spot. Us. God, yes. When he hit it, Paddy's mind went razor-sharp, slicing into him with pleasure. His whole body arched with it, and his head snapped back on his neck. His hands clenched hard on Paddy's hips while his mind opened up to take Paddy in as his lover took him in.

Paddy needed this, needed him, reveled in it. Which suited him, naturally, because he needed right back. He loved Paddy more fiercely than he'd thought possible. Now he was proving it physically.

Paddy gave him a sweet, sweet smile, hand cupping his cheek for no more than a second before the lean body began to move again. They rocked together -- Neil pressing in, Paddy pushing up. Before he could even imagine it, they were slapping together hard enough to make a delicious sound.

The bed squeaked, Paddy moaned, and he grunted - all of them making music. "Neil. Neil, harder..."

"Trying, sweet." Neil gathered his knees under him, gaining more leverage so he could thrust with all his strength.

Paddy arched, heels thrumming on the mattress, almost screaming for him.

"Love!" That was just the thing to make him come, helplessly. Endlessly.

Heat spread between them, Paddy clinging, gasping, holding on.

Oh, that scent far outweighed the sunscreen, hot and earthy and enough to make Neil's mouth water. He kissed Paddy's throat, licking at the sweat.

Paddy stretched. "Promise me we can do this forever."

"I promise, sweet." He'd not heard a peep in his head lately of any of the echoes he'd had when they first went on the lam. He had high hopes that they were well away.

"Good. I promise, too."

"Well, there you are." Neil toppled, settling between Paddy's thighs, letting himself rest and count freckles. "We're decided."

"Yep." Paddy's hands stroked his hair, smoothing it. "Decided."

They rested, the sound of the people out on the beach far away, the slight breeze from the fan overhead cooling them. Neil devoutly embraced the idea that they would be safe and happy together forever. He'd keep a mental ear out for every other eventuality, though. Just in case.

## *Chapter Four*

The hammock swung lazily, Sonny staring at the view every time he swung to the right. The left just gave him a look at the cabin wall. The right swing, though, oh, the right swing gave him MJ. Stretching. Naked.

He wouldn't call it yoga. Hell, he didn't think MJ would call it yoga. Maybe MJ's momma would, but by all accounts she was a little weird. Still, all that bending and pulling and grunting would make a dead man sit up and take note. Or maybe a lazy redneck with waffle weave print on his bare ass who needed to get out of the hammock.

One way or the other, the view was doing wonders for his cock. Which had no waffle weave print, thank God.

"I might be permanently marked by this cheap-assed hammock, Precious."

"That would a fucking shame, man. I'm fond of your form." MJ bent backward, spine popping as he walked down the wall.

"Uh..." Wait. How come he didn't know before now that MJ could do that? That had some serious possibilities. Really, really. "I like yours, too. Bendy."

"Did you know I took gymnastics as a kid?"

No. No, he didn't know that. Sliding out of the hammock and rubbing his sore ass, Sonny wandered over to run a finger along the straining muscles of MJ's belly. "Nope. I had no idea. You're holding out on me."

Oh, look at MJ's thighs go tight, that inked belly rippling as MJ started walking back up. "Fuck."

"Okay. We can do that. I like that part." He got a good hold on MJ's cock the moment the man popped upright. He did like that laugh, all husky and deep and happy. He'd wouldn't've thought the man would have a sense of humor, but damned if MJ didn't. Sonny rubbed a little, letting his fingers trace every vein, then the ink at the base. He grinned, licking his lips. "What else can you do, Precious?"

"I can set the lip of a tea cup to blow when someone picks it up and drinks."

"Not so handy in this situation. Focus, lover." Lord. No exploding tea. Someone was still pissy about the Englishman, he'd bet.

"Focus. I can do that." MJ's hands landed on his belly, sliding down toward his cock.

"Mmm. Now, that's much better. I like it when you focus on me." Hell, he loved when MJ focused on a job, too, but this was better. Hotter. "Lower." Those fucking fingers slipped down, missing his cock altogether, wrapping around his nuts. Sonny went up on tiptoe, the pressure almost too much and not quite enough. "Goddamn, Precious."

"Uh-huh. Focusing." Those fingers slipped back, stroked the strip of skin behind his balls.

"I. Damn. More." He braced his hands on either side of MJ's head, leaning hard on that amazing hand, humping some. Goddamn, that felt good.

"So fucking fine." Those eyes burned up at him. "Want you to ink me, Sunshine. Mark me and fuck me. Never done that."

Sonny nodded. "I told you I had the design, yeah?" He barely remembered that he could move his hand, but he did, pulling at MJ's cock.

"You did." MJ's finger moved back, nail just barely scraping. "Don't tell me. I want to be surprised."

"O-okay..." The man still got to him. Jesus, how MJ got to him, like they were on opposite ends of the same wire. A closed circuit.

"Mmm." MJ did it again, watched him. "You like that."

"I do. Christ, MJ. I told you I like all the parts..." His whole body rocked, rolling into the touch, then trying to get away. He could hardly fucking stand it.

MJ slid down, lips on his belly, finger still tapping and scratching. Spreading his thighs, Sonny braced himself against the wall, staring down at MJ's sun-bleached hair. "Gonna suck me, Precious? Please?"

"You know it. Hell, if you're a *very* good redneck, I'll suck you, then slick your ass so I can fuck any lingering hammock marks off it."

Such a generous asshole.

"That's my MJ. Always thinking of his fellow man." There was a lot he would do for that mouth and that prick. Yeah.

"I'm a sweetheart, really." MJ bit his hip good and hard right before those lips slammed down around his prick, one finger pushing at his hole. His whole body went stiff, every muscle clenching up like he was gonna have a fucking heart attack or something. Fuck, there was nothing like MJ when he focused. Not a thing in the world. MJ could suck-start a leaf blower, he swore to God. That mouth just went to town, lips wrapped tight, tongue damn near slapping his shaft.

"MJ..." Sonny groaned it, one hand leaving its post on the cabin wall and slipping down to comb through MJ's hair. He held that hair in his fist, pushing MJ's mouth harder and faster. There wasn't much hotter than looking down, seeing that hard little body sweating, cheeks hollowed as MJ sucked good and hard.

His thighs worked, his ass clenching as he pushed between MJ's lips. He could do this all fucking day. Except for that whole oh God I gotta come thing.

The one finger turned into two, spreading his hole, pushing right in.

"Uhn!" Zero to sixty in nothing flat, better than his old Starfire would do, Sonny shot for MJ, right into that waiting throat. He thought he might just die happy, hammock burn and all.

MJ licked him clean, then swatted the tip of his cock with that tongue.

"Bitch." His arm shook, but it held him away from the wall, and his legs held him up. "Gonna get to the other part of the deal here soon?"

"Pushy redneck." MJ nudged his balls out of the way, pushed deeper between his legs.

Now he wished he was the one who could do that bend over backward thing, so MJ could get to him a little easier. Instead, he pulled away just long enough to turn around, to give MJ better access. MJ's hands landed on his ass - just a little harder than necessary, thank you very much - and spread him, that tongue hitting just where it needed to so it could melt his butter. "Christ." There was no wall to lean on now, so Sonny just put his hands on his knees and let MJ have him, thinking about inking that skin and about how that sweet cock would feel in his ass and kind of admiring the view. It was the ocean now...

A sharp bite made him jump. "Focus, Sunshine."

"I am. Trust me." Yeah, okay, so he'd come and his brain was a little loose in his head. That didn't mean he wasn't into what MJ was up to. Or vice versa.

"I do. How do you want to do this?"

"Huh? Is there more than one way?" You got it up. You put it in. "Come on, Precious. Work with me."

MJ bit him again. "Look, asshole, you're too tall for me to do it standing, unless you have a spare box hanging around."

Laughing, Sonny dropped to his knees, pushing his ass back for MJ to do whatever he damned well wanted to. "Well, come on, then, lover. I'm ready."

"Ah, the light dawns." MJ scooted right up, nudging his balls, lips on his shoulder.

"I'm trainable." That lean, hard body felt so damned good against him, and he wanted more, so he pushed back again, demanding. "In."

MJ chuckled, lips hot, right by his ear. "You're so fucking not. That's why I need you so goddamn bad."

Then MJ pushed in, filling him up. His spine tried to arch in a way it just didn't. MJ's did, but his wasn't built that way. Didn't stop Sonny from trying, though, his ass tilting to take more, his head falling back to rest cheek-to-cheek with MJ. "Fucking love you."

"I know." MJ was everywhere - in him, on him, just fucking everywhere. Reaching back, he found MJ's thighs with his hands, fingers digging in against the heated skin, the hard muscle. Bracing himself, he started rocking, pushed MJ deeper and deeper. MJ grunted, slammed into him; one hand slid down his belly.

"MJ. Come on, lover. Need you so bad." His voice lowered to a growl, his throat just barely able to force the words out.

"Uhn." MJ's teeth sank into his shoulder, hand finding his cock.

"Christ!" Sonny humped that hand, his whole world tightening down to MJ's hands and cock, all over him. His balls drew up again, ready to blow, even though he was the one who'd already come. "You with me, Precious?"

"Yeah. Yeah, fuck. Sunshine." MJ shoved in deep, hard, heat flooding him.

"Oh..." Caught in the pleasure, Sonny hung there, his cock and balls emptying, his whole body shaking. Goddamn.

MJ's weight landed on him, heavy, damp, solid as a rock. Sonny lowered them all the way to the boards of the little porch, and he moaned as he finally took his weight off his arms. "Just what I needed, Precious."

"Mmhmm. Much better than yoga."

"You know it." Yoga. No matter how MJ could bend, Sonny wouldn't call it yoga. More like stretching.

One way or the other it worked for him.



## *Chapter Five*

Cowboy checked his set up one last time.

Late night, college campus. The cleaning crew wouldn't get to Camden Hall for another forty-five minutes. The professor was alone, little pencil tapping a rhythm in shadow, grading papers, only one lamp lit to help him see. The windows of the old brick building would creak too much to go in that way, but they'd be a good out if he needed it. There was only one unlocked door at this time of night, but there was no security camera.

He'd much rather just take the shot from where he sat on the roof of the building opposite, but his client wanted it to look like someone had surprised the man, maybe robbed him. Not to mention that whole 'get a vial of blood, before and after death' thing. Creepy fuckers. That cost them an extra mil up front. He wasn't into that sort of kink.

He was into a lot of kinks, but that one you had to pay the good money for. Maybe he ought to make it look like some random asshole just stuck the guy for fun, like a college student with a movie adoration complex might.

Fuck, he hated it when the client tried to dictate the method.

Folding his scope down, Colby packed up, policing the area to make sure he hadn't left anything behind. A single fiber could get a man these days, which was why he went for the high-tech fatigues and nightwatch cap, just in case. He grabbed his bag and headed down, slipping like smoke through the night, avoiding the lamps that illuminated the sidewalk. His timing was just right; he didn't meet a single soul.

Now all he had to do was go to office one oh four and do the job.

His rubber-soled boots made hardly a sound, and he made it to the office door in his allotted ten seconds, counting off two more before he tried the handle. Locked. Huh.

So Colby did the only reasonable thing he could. He knocked.

"Just a sec." He heard happy whistling, the door unlocking and opening. "Can I help you?"

Wait. Professors were supposed to be older and distinguished and shit. This guy was a young thirty, tight T-shirt and jeans framing a pretty little hard body, too-long dark eyelashes, too-big dark eyes behind tiny, wire-framed glasses.

Cowboy didn't bother with words. He just clamped a gloved hand over the man's mouth, pushing him back into the office and kicking the door shut behind him. He pushed the prof backward across the man's own desk, pulling out the garden-variety pig sticker he'd bought at a pawn shop. Those brown eyes went wide, shocked, and scared for a second before they went hard and fiery, and one hand shot out, grabbing a round, glass paperweight and bashing him right in the head.

Jesus fuck! He saw stars, but held on, riding out the pain without bellaring like he wanted to. His hand was on the way, pushing in to slip that blade between two ribs, and...

And he just couldn't do it.

It wasn't that he didn't want to; his fucking arm was held in a grip that was too fucking strong to belong to the little fucker, held stiff and still, the bones creaking, threatening to break. He met bright green eyes that had a ring of pure orange fire around the edge.

What the fuck?

That fucking glass thing hit him again and that slippery mark popped down, sliding between his legs and scrambling toward the door.

Oh, fuck no. He didn't think so. He got a handful of shirt, whirling the guy around like they were dancing, slamming their chests together. His empty hand clamped over the guy's nose and mouth, holding hard.

He could feel the guy's heart, slamming against him like a little bird's, the son of a bitch fighting him, panicking. That would just help him out, really. The man would pass out soon. All he had to do was hold on.

Of course, that assumed the fucker didn't peg him in the balls.

Gagging silently, he folded himself down on top of that surprisingly wiry body, pushing his weight against the man's lungs, his hand clamping harder. Come on, asshole. Pass out.

He could swear the dude had... grown, swollen, as those dark eyes - wait... dark? Yeah, yeah, black as pitch dark - rolled, the mark fighting for all he was worth, then they finally rolled back, the lean body going still under him, settling.

Shitfire. That little bastard could fight. Colby panted, shooting his sleeve back to look at his watch. Ten minutes. All of that had only taken ten minutes. Okay. Okay, he had thirty more minutes. But he just... Shit.

He couldn't do it. Not with the guy out like a light. Not without figuring shit out, like how a lean little academic could leave bruises that he felt bone-deep, or how black button eyes went green like a Heineken bottle. Grabbing a roll of duct tape out of his utility pocket, Colby taped the well-shaped mouth and pulled out plastic riot cuffs to bind the guy's hands.

So he'd just have to take the good professor with him. Somebody was willing to pay big, big money to have him dead. Colby reckoned somebody might be interested in keeping the prof alive.

Somebody like him.

Jesus. He was losing his motherfucking mind.

Colby should've known that the job was horked when they'd wanted blood.

## *Chapter Six*

Oh.

His head felt like he'd been ten rounds with a semi truck.

What had he been drinking?

Duncan frowned, trying to remember, trying to force his eyes open. Had he gone out with Lloyd and Brian? Had someone slipped him something?

He blinked, looking around in the slice of light that came from his office... bedroom... uh. No. It was a door, but it was maybe a hotel room?

Hotel room? Where were his glass...

Wait.

Wait.

What?

His hands were all tied up, and he wasn't into that stuff (no matter what he and Price had gotten up to in Hollywood that one time...).

There was something covering his mouth, too. Not a gag. More like... tape? It was tape. Oh, shit.

Duncan panicked, pure and simple, rolling and yanking at the tape, the string or whatever it was on his wrists digging in, room starting to go a bright, sparkly white at the edges.

The light in his room clicked on, and before he could even blink there was a hand on his throat, holding him down. Just that easily. "Now, now. No thrashing. You'll just hurt yourself."

Who? What? What the fuck? He jerked, fighting to focus, trying to fucking *think*.

"Stop it, now. Stop fighting me." That thumb closed right on his Adam's apple for a moment, making him grunt and go still. Then the tape flew right off his mouth, his lips stinging like mad.

"Who? Who are you? What the fuck is this?" Duncan swallowed, over and over, fingers fisting in cloth and holding on.

"You want some water? I got some ice..." That voice. It wasn't local, certainly. It had a pure, heavy West Texas twang, deep and rich, not Dallas, not bayou, not even a hint of Mexican and.... A plastic cup bumped his lower lip, cold and damp.

He drank deep, the water focusing him a little bit. He didn't know the guy holding him - the man looked like those Marlboro man commercials from when he was a kid. Really.

"There. Better, yeah? Now, just calm down. You have a heart attack on me, it could be inconvenient."

"Who... who are you? What are you doing?"

"No questions for you, not right now. I just need you to be calm and quiet. I know you can do that, Professor." Once his eyes adjusted to the light, he could see blond hair curling under the cowboy hat, light gray eyes in a tanned face, and a neat little mustache.

Professor.

Okay.

Okay, now, he hadn't failed any jocks, hadn't come on to any students. Hadn't even pissed off the rest of the faculty, not yet. Right? "I don't know you."

"No, sir. You sure don't. Good thing, too. I'm a hard son of a bitch to get to know." The man patted his chest before getting up, standing next to the bed and stretching until his back popped.

Okay. Okay. He wasn't a stupid man. He could handle this.

Duncan wasn't sure how, yet, but he could.

"What do you want?" There. That was a good start. Go him.

"Well." That head tilted. "I was gonna kill you. But then I just couldn't."

Well, he was glad to be involved in a sudden attack of moral strength. "Uh. Good?"

"Not so much. See, I need to figure out how to make you look dead for my client, else both of us are in a mite of trouble." That smile was completely at odds with the companionable tone.

His head was going to explode. Was this man crazy? "I didn't know that people wanted lit professors dead."

"Oh, you'd be amazed. People want all sorts of folks dead. You hungry? I could order a pizza."

"I." He didn't know. He could scream when Cowboy Joe ordered the pizza, but the damned drivers took so long he'd be dead of old age before he got rescued...

"No yelling, now." Man, it was like the guy could read his mind. "You like meat or veggies?"

"No fish. Untie me. I need to get up." He was hurting, sore. Scared. He was fucking scared. He was supposed to be... "What time is it?"

"Bout eleven. And I'm sorry, but I can't untie you. You'd go for my balls again. Or my head." The hat came off, showing a dark bruise on one temple.

He didn't even remember doing that. "I hit you? Is that why I'm here?"

Those eyes just started to *twinkle*. "Partly. I mean, I have to admire a man who will fight back."

Right.

Okay.

Okay. He was tied up in a strange bed with a crazed cowboy.

Who wanted to order him pizza.

"My glasses?"

"Oh. Sure. They fell off, but they're not broke or nothin'." The crazy man went and rummaged in a duffle, pulling out his glasses and coming to set them on his nose. "Better?"

He shook his head, the sudden clarity of vision freaking him right out. He needed up. Out. Something.

"Now, now. No panicking. Be good and I'll help you sit up. I might even put your hands in front so you can eat." The man smelled like... well. Man. No soap, no cologne, no nothing to cover the scent of clean sweat and hot skin.

"I don't know that I have a choice but to panic. In fact, I think that is the most logical answer for anyone not an action hero." He did tend to slip into professor mode when he was scared.

"You did a good impression of it for a while, man." The guy eased him up, propping him on pillows. The sound of plastic pinging came just before his hands came loose, the tingling as his flesh came back to life maddening.

He brought his hands around, keeping them at his sides. "I need to hit the john."

There might be something in there - something to hit the wall with, maybe, create enough noise that *someone* would call the police.

"Sure. Come on." Jerking his head, the guy stood back from the bed, giving him room to move. And giving the guy room to rush him.

He slid from the bed, wincing a little at how stiff he was - all of him. Damn it. "I have papers to grade. For tomorrow."

"Oh, you don't have to worry on that. Someone else will take over." So fucking cheerful. Like this was all in a day's work.

"Fuck you. I'm not just fucking replaceable. Someone will notice I'm gone."

"No, someone will think you're dead. I get the rest of my money on that one condition, you see." Paid. The man was getting paid for this?

"I. This is. This makes no fucking sense." He hit the bathroom, shutting the door and locking it, leaning against it while he tried to think. This was a sick fucking joke.

He got just enough time to pee and wash his hands, which he hadn't done, when the knock sounded. "Come on, Prof. Don't think I can't get in there."

"Just give me a minute." His nerves were jangling, the look of his eyes in the mirror completely fucking foreign to him.

"One minute. Then I'm coming in." That voice wasn't light and friendly anymore. It had taken on a hard, harsh note.

Shit. Shit.

He gripped the sides of the sink, looking around frantically. No window. No razor. No lighter. Shit, what was he supposed to do?

He turned the water on, washing his face, trying to help himself think. The room wanted to just fade away a little, and he fought the urge; this was no time to hide away, Duncan. Grow up. Think.

"Okay, time's up." The door popped open like it hadn't been locked at all, barely making a sound.

"That's rude. Just back *off*." He slapped the water off, tried to make his fingers work well enough to get his glasses.

"Rude... This is not a vacation, Doc. You're here because I thought you were cute and you fought back." The guy had blue collar hands, rough and torn up and... damn. He got an up-close look at the one fisted in his shirt under his chin.

"No. No, the last vacation I took, I was very happy in P-town, thanks. This isn't my goddamn *style!*" His temper flared, and he bashed his forehead against the big asshole's.

"Fuck!" That hand moved up, clasping his throat, pushing his windpipe closed. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He joined his hands, jerked his fists up, dislodging the hand from his throat. Which would have been a good thing, barring the way said hand caught him in the chin and nose, the shock and pain making his knees buckle.

Grunting, the guy took him right down to the floor, covering him, making it impossible to move all of a sudden. "You take self-defense or something?"

"Huh?" Oh. Gross. Blood. He. Man. Shit.

"Okay. Okay, just breathe, man. Duncan, right? Just breathe. No passing out." Easing off, the guy pulled him up and out of the bathroom, propping him on the bed and going to get him some tissues.

This was the weirdest fucking evening ever. Even weirder than when Jonah took him to a bath house in Dallas. Wait. Did he say that out loud?

"Who's Jonah?" Looked like it. Damn. Cowboy sat down on the edge of the bed, another cup of water in his hand. "Better?"

"Ex. I mean, a coworker." Right. Real world. Not academia. Queer was bad.

"He any good?" Oh, those weird, gray eyes were back to twinkling. He'd gone down the rabbit hole big time.

"He thought so." Shut up, Duncan.

"Not so great, huh? Bet that's why he's an ex. You're too hot to waste on anyone that can't take you to heaven, honey."

Wait. No. No flirting with the psycho cowboy killer man.

"I haven't found anyone making good on that promise." Sex was a fabulous stress relief and a grand pastime, but earth-shattering? Shit. He wasn't a teenager.

Wait.



He was bleeding and in a bed.

This was not the appropriate time to think about sex.

"Oh, I could rock your world, honey." That slow drawl was enough to make him think about it hard, though. He'd lost his mind.

"I don't..." Jesus fucking Christ. He looked down at his cock, the stupid fucking thing just trying to get attention.

"Uh-huh. You do." One of those scarred hands settled right over his fly, squeezing. Pushing.

"This isn't. I. Fuck." This wasn't happening. It wasn't. He was fucking drunk somewhere.

"You could use the stress relief, honey." Ziiiiiiiiip. There went his zipper, and he'd never felt calluses like that on his cock. Not until now. Stress re... Oh. Oh, he. Goddamn. What the hell was up with him?

Aside from his dick, which was very up, he had no idea. The guy stroked him, hand cupping him firmly, rubbing up and down. Maybe it was the danger giving him an adrenaline rush, but it felt amazing.

"This is. Goddamn. So fucked." His shoulders rolled up off the mattress, hands landing on the cowboy's shoulders, just holding on tight.

"So pretty." Those eyes weren't looking into his anymore. They were watching where hand met cock, hot as a brand. Goddamn.

He was going to shoot. He was. It was... "Fuck."

His hips started pumping, eyes rolling back in his head.

"That's it, honey. That's it. Just like that." The man kept on pulling until he'd gone soft, until one more touch was gonna make him scream.

"You. You just. I can't." He shook with it, his head and heart pounding, throbbing.

"Shhh. Hush, now." So soothing. It was enough to make him crazy. Maybe he already was.

His eyes closed, without him even giving them leave to. "I don't know what to do next."

Besides shut the fuck up.

"You just sit back and relax. I got something I need to take care of." That sound. Well, there it was again. A zipper, and the sound of flesh on flesh.

He'd fallen down the rabbit hole.

That was the only real answer.

Duncan closed his eyes, the world swimming. If some asshole offered him tea, he was going to have a psychotic break.

## *Chapter Seven*

He waved to the little group of teenagers as he walked back from the village, bread and cheese and grapes and a glass bottle of milk in his bags. This whole 'going to the market' thing was incredibly fun. Paddy hadn't expected it to be, but it was. There were different breads every day, weird and fun pie dealies, wine.

Lord, the wine.

Neil was incredibly, fabulously, passionately adorable drunk.

He whistled, caught for a minute at the sight of the sun on the water. Oh. Pretty.

Speaking of Neil, just as Paddy turned the corner to their little seaside cottage, the man in question wobbled into view, riding a really decrepit bicycle across the sand down by the beach.

"Neil!" Look at him go! Paddy laughed, heading for his lover, Neil's short, blond hair and pretty, green eyes hidden by a huge, floppy hat.

Neil glanced up and waved wildly, the bike taking an ominous turn toward the water, Neil's legs starting to flail a little. He heard an "Oh, dear!" before Neil fell into a sandbank.

"Oops." He hurried a little faster, feet sliding on the sand.

Neil sat up about the time he reached the edge of the dune, popping up like a jack in the box. Laughing right out loud, Neil shook sand out of his hair. "Well, that didn't work well."

"Nope. I have milk and cheese and bread!" He grabbed Neil's hand, tugging.

"A veritable feast!" Standing, Neil kissed him, smiling and pretty much unharmed, it looked like. Still, it wouldn't hurt to check. He ran his hand over Neil's back, down over Neil's ass. "Hello, sweet. Did you see? I was doing rather well for someone who's not been on a cycle in years." Hugging him with one arm, Neil poked at the bag he held with the other hand. "Did you get me tea?"

"I did. And some lemons. Oh, and some little cookies that smelled like Christmas." He did like daily shopping.

"Lovely. Cinnamon and spice, then?" His Neil was all about the little goodies he brought, too, encouraging him to get cream puffs and little things with candied fruit and stuff.

"Yeah." He righted the bike, put one of the bags in the basket. "Let's take the milk home and I'll show you your surprise."

That he wasn't thinking about.

At all.

La la la.

Not thinking. Look at the ocean. Pretty pretty.

"Oh, I do love surprises. Unless you mean suddenly you've decided to set my trousers on fire surprises." He got a wink; Neil loved to make fun of his own thoughts on surprises and cleverness.

"No fires." He hadn't started a fire for at least a week, possibly ten days, and that one was in a grill for chicken and the one before that was only the littlest experiment about beach glass...

"Not unless they involve sausage." They wandered willy-nilly up the path to the cabin, the bike kind of dragging a little. Leaving it outside the front door, they headed for the tiny kitchen, Neil bright-eyed and bushy-tailed next to him.

He put the milk away, the cheese. Then the bakery stuff. The tea. At the bottom of the bag was a little brown-wrapped parcel. Two of the murder mystery novels Neil loved so much.

Neil peered over his shoulder. "Well, what could that be, love?"

"It could be a lot of things, but it is something for you." He handed them over, bouncing a bit.

The books came out of the wrapper easily, and Neil gasped with pleasure. "Oh, love! Look at that. In English, no less."

He'd found out that Neil read French, but sometimes the mysteries didn't translate so well.

Neil gave him a hug, the books clunking against his back.

"Yep. All for you." Oh, cool. He thought he'd done good.

"You're awfully good to me, sweet. Would you like some tea? I could murder a cup after my misadventure." Kissing his cheek, Neil leaned a minute before taking the books and putting them carefully on the 'to be read' shelf.

"I'll start the fire. Kettle." He did enjoy their tiny little gas stove. "Did you see I got the flames to six inches the other day?"

Whoosh.

"I saw the soot on the ceiling." That warm chuckle slid over his neck like sunshine on the water.

"Nothing burned." Down.

"Indeed. Lemon, love?" Look at that. Before he could even blink, Neil had cups and saucers and tea and stuff laid out. The cups had come from Paris, where they'd stopped on the train.

"Yes, please. No milk, though." It curdled.

"No, no. Either or." The water started to steam, well on its way to boiling, and Neil started to hum, sounding so happy.

"I like the lemon." He leaned against Neil's back, lips sliding up along the lean shoulder.

"Yes. I like the way it makes your lips pucker up." Neil liked all the parts. He knew that for sure, could hear it loud and clear every day.

"I like a lot." He loved it here, if for no other reason than it made Neil so happy to be here in the sunshine.

Neil turned, arms sliding around Paddy's waist so they could dance away from the almost ready, steamy water. Neil danced well. It always kind of surprised him, which it shouldn't, because Neil was graceful when he wasn't riding a bike. He'd learned to follow, learned that, if he relaxed, Neil would move him around the floor. They had a little dance until the kettle whistled, and Neil dipped him gently with a flourish, singing, "Ta da!"

"Tea time!" He stole a kiss, laughing.

"Such a lovely thing, tea. A grand restorative." The way Neil poured tea made Paddy happy inside. It was like when they'd first met, and Neil had made such a little ritual out of water fired in a beaker.

"I love it. Are there still cookies? Biscuits?" Little round lemon sweet things?

"There are. I saved back the raspberry thumbprints and the lemon crèmes."

Score. Someone knew him well.

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Neil flipped like an omelet, the sun beating down on his once-pale skin, making him feel like a toasted almond. Goodness, but he loved the coast, loved his little cottage and Paddy. He felt like an utter sap on occasion, but it worked for him. He reached for the sunscreen, knowing it would be time for Paddy to oil up again. That particular pale skin never seemed to do more than freckle.

"Do you need some more oil, love?"

Paddy was dozing, imagining him sliding into Paddy's body, lips sliding over Paddy's shoulders. Oh, his Paddy did have the most delightful imaginings.

Neil smiled, sliding off his towel to move over and squirt a little lotion on Paddy's shoulders, rubbing it in well with the tips of his fingers.

"Mmm. Hey. Feels good." Paddy hummed happily, arched back toward him.

"Yes, it does." Paddy's skin fascinated him. Every so often he thought about suggesting that they get matching tattoos, but he thought better of it whenever he was faced with the lovely, freckled expanse.

"I could get it on my belly." Paddy heard him, so well.

"You could. I like that." Laughing, Neil bent and kissed Paddy's neck. "I like it any way I can get it with you, sweet."

"I know. I'm glad. It would suck if you didn't by now."

"Indeed." Perhaps he would be better served leaving Paddy on his back. He simply needed to remember not to lick where he'd put the sunscreen.

Paddy laughed, those thoughts bouncing and light, filled with pure sunshine. Neil gave up on the pretense of oiling Paddy up and knelt up, letting his body cover Paddy's, rubbing all along. Oh, that felt marvelous.

"Neil." Paddy rocked, sliding against him, humming for him.

"Yes, sweet. Warm." So warm. So good against him. What a love Paddy was. Slow and easy, the heat built up between them, slicked them up. Neil quite forgot himself, kissing Paddy everywhere, the sunscreen stinging his wind-chapped lips. It did not matter a bit.

Want you. He heard that, clear as day.

"Want you, too, love." They could do this, outside, at the beach... Life was definitely the way it should be. Neil pulled down Paddy's shorts, rubbing that lovely cock a bit.

Lean thighs spread for him, let him touch as much as he'd like. So giving, so hungry, his Paddy. Sweet man. Neil touched, his fingers and thumb making a circle, rubbing up and down. He loved the feel of that hot skin, the smell. Paddy groaned, moving with him, cock sliding in his touch, the tip swollen and damp where it bumped against him.

"You're wet, love. Ready. How would you like me?" He thought of all the ways, letting Paddy see him riding, or him fucking Paddy. It all worked for him. Images flooded him - him pushing into Paddy's ass, Paddy pulling him down onto that hard cock, Paddy's mouth on him while he returned the favor.

"Oh..." Neil moaned, fumbling with his own swim trunks, trying to find the way out of them, trying to get to Paddy with all of him.

Paddy reached back, flailing a little, trying to help. They got completely tangled, both of them laughing, both of them rolling until they were on the floor of their little patio, the chaise not helping a bit.

Paddy's fingers slid over his sides, smile tickling his shoulder.

"This is better, hmm?" He got them pressed together again, got Paddy on his back so he could straddle the sturdy hips. He was determined to ride.

"Uh-huh." Paddy's fingers stroked his stomach, teased him. "Much better."

"Be careful, sweet. You'll get me going far too fast."

Those clever fingers circled his balls and tugged, just hard enough. "We can't have that."

"No. No, we can't. I... Oh." He arched, spread, let Paddy have whatever he wanted.

"My Neil." Paddy groaned, fingers sliding back behind his balls.

"Yours. Oh, there." Bearing down, Neil opened up to let Paddy in. He needed to be filled. Needed to be taken.

"Yes. Yes... I... Oil?" That finger pressed in, pushed in deep.

"Over..." He waved a hand toward his seat, where there was baby oil as well as sunscreen.

"Okay. Okay." Paddy stretched, which sent that lean, heated body sliding beneath him, like an eel. Now that wasn't a lovely thought.

"That's it." All of that stretching and moving bumped him around, rubbing him against Paddy madly.

"Want you." Now. Badly. Hard, in fact.

"Get me ready." He rose up just enough for Paddy to reach, letting his love have all of him, right there. "Come on, sweet. Hurry." The oil spilled over Paddy's fingers, but it didn't matter once those fingers were in him, slicking him. Neil grunted, pushing back hard, needing more, faster, and deeper. "Please, Paddy."

"Now? Is now good?" Paddy didn't wait for his answer, just tugged him back, pressed that sweet prick against his hole.

Now was perfect. He let Paddy feel how he felt, let his lover know exactly how right it was. Paddy's eyes rolled back, even as Paddy's hips pressed up. Yes. Yes, just so. Just like that.

Rocking back down, Neil took everything Paddy had to give and then some. He pressed his hands to Paddy's chest, feeling his love's heartbeat under his fingers. Love. It filled him up - Paddy's need and pleasure and happiness mingled inside him. All he could do was push and rock and feel, loving every scent, every sound, from the oil to their sweat to the little moans Paddy gave him. The sun beat down on them, making them slicker and hotter than ever.

Paddy's hand wrapped around his cock, tugging him in time with the thrusts inside him. That had him moaning, too, his hips smacking down against Paddy's, his cock hot and ready to go off. Goodness. The heat came so fast. So amazing.

"Love you. You're so fine. So good, Neil."

"Love you." Neil arched back and came for Paddy, his heart racing, his cock jerking in Paddy's hand. God in heaven, he could just live like this forever.

Paddy brought the long, wet fingers up to his own hungry mouth, tongue sliding out, licking them clean.

"Oh. Oh, sweet. Please." He needed Paddy to arrive as well, to complete things. Paddy nodded, loving him, loving how he felt, how he tasted. Heat flooded him, Paddy's cry ringing out. "Love. Love. Yes. That's it." He shook, trying to hold himself up and not collapse on Paddy.

"S'okay. I got you." Paddy eased him down, held tight.

"Mmm." Neil let himself be held, soaking in the happysatedyes of Paddy and trying to ignore the tiniest niggle of fear that invaded the back of his mind.

Really. What kind of evil could find them here? This was his safety net. Here. Now.

Paddy murmured, wrapped tighter around him, head shaking.

That was right. None. Not right now. Not yet. Not yet, please.



## *Chapter Eight*

"How're you doing, Sunshine?" MJ did love Nassau - everything from the colors to the food to Paulie, the big, dark, grinning tattoo artist.

Paulie was working on Sonny's shoulder, working hard, that needle buzzing like a motherfucker. It was a damned fine sound. Hell, it made him hard as a rock, made him ache some. Made him a wee bit rumbly, having someone else touch that skin.

"Good. I'm good, Precious." The break in Sonny's voice told him everything. Someone was getting off on the buzz.

"You gon' let me do another of yours, man? I haven't had you in a while." Paulie wiped Sonny off a little, looking him up and down.

"No, sir." Sonny answered for him, that redneck drawl drawing the words out. "He's got a private deal for his next ink."

He nodded once to Sonny. "Sorry, man. Not this time."

Possibly not ever. Sonny had a jealous bone. The man was getting good at scribbles, too. MJ had the feeling that Sonny was gonna make beautiful ink.

"Too bad. You have great skin, man."

He grinned. Yeah. He had a great cock, too, but Sonny wasn't sharing that, either.

Sonny made a growly noise, his cave-redneck about to go off like a rocket, and it would be a shame to ruin that pretty tattoo that was taking shape. One that matched the one on the small of his back. Fucking hot.

"Focus on the great skin you have, Paulie, and don't fuck it up."

"Not goin' to, I swear." Paulie flashed him that white-white grin and went back to work, steady as a rock.

He wandered a little, grabbing a bottle of water from Paulie's little fridge, looking at the flash art. Thinking. Sonny watched him whenever he was in range. He could feel those dark eyes like the needle was going in wherever they touched. He might just explode when Sonny inked him. Hell, he might just explode from thinking about it.

"Stop it, Precious. I can hear you thinking about it." Sonny knew him too damned well.

"Thinking? Me? No..."

"Oh, your brain is rattling around in your head." Somehow, he'd never noticed how cute it was, the way Sonny said 'haid.'

He shook his head, drinking deep and waiting. He wanted to get Sonny to the hotel room, maybe needed to.

It seemed like hours before Paulie was done, but finally the man was wiping Sonny down for the last time, letting him go look in the mirror. Of course, it was him Sonny looked at. "What do you think, Precious?"

He thought maybe he'd just cream his jeans, right there. He thought that he might have to set a charge just to watch it go off. He thought that was the finest fucking thing ever.

Sonny's eyes went so dark the iris swallowed up the pupil. "We need to get the stuff and go, Precious."

"Yeah. Yeah, we do." He pulled a handful of bills out of his pocket, handed it to Paulie without counting. "You do good work, man."

"You know what to do for it. Don't let my work get infected, huh?" Paulie took the money and would have copped a feel, but Sonny grabbed Paulie's wrist.

"I never do." He grinned, winked. "He's good with a pistol, Paulie. Don't test him."

"Well, now you get to see if he's good with an ink gun, huh?" Waving them off, Paulie went to clean up his station.

Sonny'd been practicing, and MJ knew how to be sti... Sonny started walking toward the door and he spun, watching, derailed. He wanted that.

Hell, he would swear Sonny gave that tight ass an extra little wiggle, just for his benefit. Goddamn.

He followed like Sonny had him on a leash, tugging him right along to their pretty little hotel room. The bright colors and whitewashed walls were lost on him, though, as soon as Sonny sprawled on the big bed and crooked a finger at him. Sexy bastard.

"Fuck." He pounced, careful not to hurt the fresh ink, fingers tearing at Sonny's jeans as their lips crashed together.

"Yeah." It was muffled by the kiss, but Sonny made sure he knew how much he was appreciated by lifting that sweet ass and letting him pull the jeans down.

"You're wearing my ink." He'd never seen anything so fucking hot. Never.

Well, maybe Sonny's cock slapping into his hand while he stared at that dark, spiky ink.

"I am. Told you I would." Sonny tore at his board shorts, getting him bare.

"Yeah. Yeah. You'll do me next." He straddled those muscled thighs and started rubbing.

"I will. I'm gonna mark you so good." Sonny's cock jerked in his hand, getting good and wet at the tip.

"Fuck, yes." He got Sonny's bottom lip in his teeth and tugged. "Hot son of a bitch."

Sonny'd infected him, that was the only answer. He was devolving into cave-redneck.

They rocked together, Sonny's wild grin answering him, those big hands holding his hips so they pressed together hard. He traced the skin, right outside the edge of the new tat, knowing how it would burn and sting.

"Shit! MJ. Oh, God." Bucking, moaning, Sonny went crazy for him.

He nodded, kept touching, kept tugging Sonny's cock. Beautiful asshole.

"Precious... I. Damn." Sonny reached down, too, stroking along with him, skin flushed and damp.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine. Come on, then I'll lube your ink and we can... uhn. We can do it again."

"Okay. Christ, MJ!" Sonny came for him like there was no tomorrow. Like he just couldn't wait anymore.

The hot spunk sprayed over his cock, his wrist, and he nipped Sonny's jaw hard, shooting right alongside.

"Uhn." Sonny slumped against him, heart beating so hard that he heard it. Damn.

"Man, didn't think it would be that hot, watching you. I might explode when you do me."

"Might? If you don't I'm gonna be offended." Long fingers smoothed the sweat over his skin, Sonny humming for him like an out-of-control chainsaw.

"Mmm." He settled in, listening to the familiar sounds of music and waves and people laughing as the sun set.

"Lazy ass. Don't breathe hard on the tattoo or I'll be ready to go again." Sonny kissed his shoulder, his neck, just slow and easy.

He puckered up, blew a stream of air right across that ink.

"Shit! Jesus, MJ. I..." He could feel Sonny's cock, pressing against him, rising again. Just like that.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine, I hear you." He blew again, throat fucking tight with it.

Sonny bucked against him, skin hot under his lips. "More. Damn. Damn."

He shifted, rocking back against Sonny's cock before blowing again. That just drove Sunshine wild, making Sonny rock and push and get him on his back to straddle him. Then Sonny started humping like crazy.

"Fucking hot." He pushed up, licked a line right outside the tat.

"So fucking right." Sonny bit him, teasing bastard, knowing he couldn't bite back, at least not where he wanted to.

"Fucker." He grinned, blowing again, knowing how it had to feel. Knowing that his favorite redneck would fucking remember and pay him back.

"Fuckee..." Sonny laughed and groaned at the same time, moving against him faster, driving the heat up again. His hands fit amazingly well against Sonny's ass, the muscles jumping and rocking as Sonny thrust.

"There, MJ. Right fucking there." Sonny's mouth was all over, on his mouth, his neck, his shoulders. Still so fucking oral.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine. Give it up." He grunted at a good, sharp bite, skin going all tingly.

"I don't know, Precious. You think I can come again that fast?" That ass pushed back against his hands, giving him something to hold on to.

"I know you can. You're way younger than I am." He snorted, winked, and squeezed.

Sonny arched for him, cock like a piece of hot iron, pushing and pushing. He knew when Sonny was about to come, could feel each shiver and ripple against him. MJ moaned, blew another stream of air over that black ink, knowing it would drive Sonny insane. Hips pumping, Sonny

shot for him again, and the sound that tore out of Sunshine's throat had him moaning, too. The man was hot as napalm.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine. Just like that."

"Just... like that." Panting, Sonny leaned to kiss him, a soft, breathless touch of lips.

He nodded, licked a little. Man, they might have to put off inking him. MJ wasn't sure he could fucking survive it.

Sonny stroked the spot they'd decided on for his tat, grinning a little. "You next, Precious. I can't wait much longer."

He groaned, skin just goosepimpling up. Yeah. Yeah. "Me next."

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Sonny left MJ sleeping and headed out to dig out the pack of smokes he'd hidden under the porch of their little cottage. A Ziploc baggie and some matches meant he was always ready, no matter what. Just about the time he lit up and blew a stream of smoke through his nose, though, his little phone vibrated in the pocket of his wildly patterned board shorts, making him sigh.

"Hello?"

"Hey, S.! How you doin'?" The voice had the lilting tone of the islands, and Sonny recognized it as Daffy, his local hook up for home brew. What the hell?

"Hey, Daffy. What's up?" Somehow, he had a feeling that Daffy wasn't wanting to set him up a tasting. The man was usually a 'you call me when you want something' kind of guy.

"Just thought I'd let you know, someone been askin' questions 'bout your boy."

"Someone?" A deep drag sent smoke hard into his lungs, and Sonny could tell he'd been giving in to MJ too much; he was becoming an amateur.

"Yeah. Don' know who, but Al been askin' me, saying someone's askin' him."

Well. Last time they'd sat around and tried to figure out who was asking about them, things had exploded. Time to go. "Thanks, Daff. I'll see you next time I'm in town."

"You bet, S. See you."

They hung up, and Sonny stood there and finished his smoke, putting it out in the little tuna can filled with sand before going back in and stuffing things in bags.

MJ rolled over, eyebrow rising. "We going somewhere?"

"Yep. We need to go to Jamaica." That would work, right? They hadn't been there much since that first vacation.

"Okay. What's in Jamaica?" MJ got moving, clearing each and every possible hint of them from the room, up to and including the towel they'd used to clean his ink.

"Funny bananas. Memories." He grinned over, batting his eyelashes at MJ, trying not to let the stress show.

"Uh-huh. Try harder." MJ handed over his piece, slipped another into an ankle harness.

"Someone's nosing around, Precious. It's time to go." That would be enough to put rage in MJ's eyes, and Sonny knew that always meant trouble.

Those blue eyes went steely and hard, one eyebrow rising right on up. "Nosing around? Who? Where?"

"I just got a rumor, Precious. Hell, it may just be that someone saw you and wanted to know where you got your ink. Better safe than sorry, though." He paused mid-pack and went to put a hand on MJ's cheek. "Right?"

"Yeah. Yeah." MJ leaned a little, worrying his bottom lip. "They were on the boat when it blew. I saw them."

He knew exactly what MJ was talking about. "I know. I know, Precious. I just don't like it when people get too friendly. You know me." Sonny took a kiss, hard and hot. "We'll go to Jamaica. I'll do your tattoo."

"We'll swim."

"We will. Not until after you heal up, though, huh?" Someone had told him that when he was doing his research. No swimming for a bit.

"Yeah. No swimming. That makes for shitty ink and weird-ass infections."

"So we'll have to find something else to do." They could think of something. They were smart dogs.

"You and I can have marathon Monopoly games." Oh, hell no. MJ was deadly.

"We could, I guess, but only if you play strip blackjack with me." He was so much better at that.

He got himself one of those grins, wild and heated, so much better than when MJ went icy. "Truth or dare."

"Hell, yes. I like that one a lot." They never got past the first dare, but no one cared.

"Yeah. You ready, Sunshine? There's a pretty, new boat all loaded with our supplies."

"I am. Let's hit it." Sonny grabbed the last of the bags and headed out, needing to beat the itch on the back of his neck.

"I have your back." That voice was sure as shit, and Sonny damned near felt sorry for anyone that might actually find them. Lord knew, MJ would give them what for. Sonny grinned a little, grabbing his baggie of smokes on the way by.

"Those are bad for you."

"So you keep telling me." What was a man supposed to do when he couldn't get drunk? He had to have one vice. Sonny glanced at MJ. Okay, two.

"What can I say, man. I got a vested interest and shit. Let's go."

They headed out, but Sonny wouldn't feel right until they were in their boat and out on the sea.

Somehow, he and MJ always did better on the open water.

## *Chapter Nine*

All he thought about was Manning.

In the mornings when the nurses came with their wire brushes to slough off his skin. In the afternoons when the physical therapist came. In the evenings when his superiors came - some to offer him ill-meant condolences, others to 'catch him up' on his work.

A few not-too-terribly bright ones came to tell him it was over, Manning had won, he was broken, weak, lost, time to throw in the towel and give it up because look at him.

Look at him.

Still, he thought about Manning. Even when he looked at himself in the reflection of the very-exclusive, very-well-funded, very-private hospital window - a hairless, melted wax, dripping, skinless monster - he thought of Manning.

He thought of pain.

He thought of sharing.

"...don't feel as if you're up to continuing your work on the current project. Government funding is drying up and, with the current environment being as it is, we believe that it's best to cease and desist, let the situation... phase itself out. Obviously, some of the subjects have gotten away from you."

He stared with one eye at the fresh-faced young girl standing in front of him in her perfectly tailored, yet incredibly cheap navy blue suit. He couldn't see from where he was, but if he had to guess, she'd have on nude hose, a pair of medium-heeled blue pumps. Closed toe, of course.

Bitch.

"Gotten away from me?" His stiff fingers curled around the tube of the IV, feeling the strength of the plastic, the pressure of the liquid inside it pushing back against him. As if he didn't have control over the situation, as if he couldn't wrest things back from that little surfer-boy fuck and put things right back to rest where they belonged. Fucking little cunt.



“There’s no shame in it, sir. The target is notoriously recalcitrant. Difficult, but he has seemed... less active lately, and his contact has been eliminated.”

Possibly even decapitated.

That had been fun.

Greg let himself imagine wrapping the plastic cord around MJ’s throat and squeezing, pulling the noose tighter and tighter until MJ’s eyes bugged out of his head, then letting the filthy bastard go before doing it again.

And again.

And again.

He felt his muscles flex, his skin tugging and pulling, dragging over his muscles as he forced his fingers to work.

To tug.

Hard.

When the girl’s body hit the floor, the IV tubing around her throat, eyes filled with blood, Greg let go.

Smiled.

Out of his control.

Nonsense.

Utter nonsense.

He’d created Manning, he’d taken the program over and brought it to new heights.

It was his and he had not lost fucking control.

He kicked the still-warm body, the flesh giving around his toes.

Bitch.

He dug through her bag, found her phone and her lighter, her key card, her laptop. Sloppy little pointless cunt.

By the time the fire started, twenty minutes later, he was in a cab, wearing a trenchcoat he'd swiped from the doctor's lounge, head covered by a hoodie.

Manning.

It was time to bring his lost one home and make the man pay.

## *Chapter Ten*

The prof, Duncan. Well, he was sleeping the sleep of the drugged. Literally. Colby had finally had to put a little pill in the man's soft drink. All that jibbering and growling and swelling up like a muscly horny toad...

He thought idly about what he'd have to do to make his client believe the man was dead. And then he kinda thought about what he would do with the feller after.

Really, the idea of his own Stockholm-syndrome sex slave was kinda cool, but impractical.

Wasn't like he could cut off fingers or ears or nothin', either. He'd have to send the client something besides the blood. Maybe the little glasses. Tell the client he'd had to cut it close, dispose of the body instead of leaving it.

Could they tell if the blood came from a dead guy?

Colby wandered over and crossed his arms, staring down at the good professor, mulling it all over. The man was damn pretty, especially when the bastard stopped thinking and started fighting. That temper was something else. He'd bet dollars to doughnuts that the pretty, dark-haired teacher-man worked very hard at not losing it, too.

It was damned tempting to poke the middle of that surprisingly wide chest. He'd love to see what Duncan was like all drugged up.

Just like Duncan heard him, those dark eyes popped open, staring right at him.

"Hey, Doc. How's it hanging?" A man had to observe the friendly formalities.

"My throat hurts. I have to get to class. I have midterms."

"Oh, you can take it easy, Doc. Sleep in." That blinky look was damned cute. Really. It was bizarre, 'cause he sure wasn't in the habit of kidnapping folks and jerking them off...

"I was having the weirdest dreams..." Doc reached out for him, fingers wrapping around his wrist and hugging for a second before letting go.

His hand tingled, his fingers curling right up. Oh, hell. Sighing, Colby gave up on keeping his distance, and he sat right on the bed, kicking his boots off so he could slide in next to the Doc. "What about?"

"Fighting? Sex? It was all jumbled." Doc snuggled right in, blinking a little. "You're going to think I'm awful, cowboy, but I can't remember your name."

"Colby, honey. And I don't think you're awful at all." Cute as hell, with eyelashes way too long to be a man's, but not awful.

"Colby? Like the cheese?" The doc chuckled, grinned a little lopsided. "I am seriously fucked up."

"Just a bit. And yeah, I guess like cheese." Grinning, he nuzzled up, lips on the Doc's skin.

"I... Mmm. You're warm." Damn, that was addictive, the way the doc arched, responded to him.

"You're a little chilled." Colby rubbed his hands up and down Duncan's arms, going for a little warmth.

"Mmhmm. You've got amazing hands."

"Thanks." The goosebumps died right down, and Colby went from warming to just stroking, testing the Doc's muscles. Strong, in that tennis-playing way, and damned compact - if the Doc knew how to cause trouble, he'd be even more dangerous. He had smooth skin, too. Pretty. Not all scarred up like Colby himself was. The man obviously tanned, too.

"What happened to you? You..." Those fingers traced his scars, tickling and teasing, touching him.

"Hmm? Oh, that one was a burn. There was this car..." Jesus, he was glad he'd had a nice, hard orgasm not long ago.

"Yeah?" Every time the doc blinked, those eyelashes tickled him.

Colby chuckled, rubbing their noses together. "That one happened when I zigged when I shoulda zagged," he added, when those clever fingers found another scar.

"I... Ouch. That... that had to hurt. I think scars are hot."

"Do you? You'll love me, then." Wait until the guy came across the bullet hole on his ass.

"What did I take? I'm all floaty." Not that the doc sounded like he cared; he was way more interested in touching, licking.

"Just a little muscle relaxant. You were all tense." That wasn't strictly a lie. And he sure didn't want Duncan getting all uptight again. Colby was enjoying the snuggle-age.

"Okay." Someone was in deep damn denial and was sensual as fuck, just sweet as a Sunday pie supper.

"But you're much better now, honey. All warm and good. It's a good look for you." Licking worked, too. Colby liked the licking.

"Yeah. I'm a little... goofy." That mouth slid over his shoulder, his collarbone.

"That's okay, Doc. I like goofy just fine." Look at that man, all clingy and shit. And responsive, too. Every time Colby touched him, the Doc moved into his hand.

"This is... It's." Uh-uh. No thinking. It wasn't going to help anything just now.

"Shhh." Cowboy did what any gentleman would do. He kissed the thoughts right out of Duncan's head.

Duncan opened up for him, kissing him back with a heady fucking passion. Pretty pretty. They shifted, moving to lie on their sides, his hand cupped under Duncan's head, holding the man there for more kissing. Hell, he liked that, too. Sensual fucking man - it was natural as breathing, the way the pretty bastard responded, tongue sliding against his.

They kissed for a long while, just wet and hot and slow. Wasn't no way Duncan was gonna do anything fast and urgent in the state he was in, but that was okay. Colby was pretty damned happy.

"This..." Duncan's words trailed off, tongue sliding over his bottom lip. "So good."

"Mmmhmm. Pretty man." His fingers massaged the back of Duncan's head, soothing a little, just feeling.

"Feels good." Duncan's eyes rolled up, those lips curving in a smile.

"You just need some rest, Doc. Some pampering." Right, because he was a therapist or something. He was a fucking gun for hire.

"That..." Duncan pushed closer, hand sliding around his waist, down past his waistband.

"Mmm. Oh, I like that, honey." He sure did. Those fingers slipped down to touch his ass... Yeah.

"Cowboy butt. God. You're a queer man's fantasy." Those hands grabbed hold of his ass, squeezed.

"Yeah?" Well, the cowboy butt thing was true enough. He worked hard at it in his off time.

"Yeah. Well, I have a lot of fantasies, but you're archetypal."

Archetypal. Lord, lord. Grinning, he licked a line right up that fine throat. "I'll be happy to be any fantasy you want, honey."

"Mmm." Duncan swallowed, cock full, nudging against his hip.

"Oh, feel that. You're all ready for me, huh?" Damn, that was something. Good thing he'd come along. The Doc might have exploded with all that pent-up need.

"Uh-huh. You're something else." He got another kiss, this one sharper, needier.

"I am that, honey." His free hand slid down and pushed against Duncan's cock, giving the man more to rub against. Damn, he was helpful.

"Uhn." That was just fine. Almost as good as those fingers slipping around to work his fly open.

"That's it, honey." Oh, yeah. Scooting his hips back, he gave Duncan the space he needed to get him out and working. The doc's lips parted, the man looking like a fucking wet dream as those smooth hands wrapped around his cock. Licking at his lips, Colby shifted back, right into the cradle of Duncan's hips, so their cocks rubbed together. That way they could both stroke a little.

Talk about a firecracker. The doc hummed and pressed closer, hand on his ass pulling in.

It was fucking glorious. He just rubbed and pulled and took more kisses, until they were both breathless. Duncan's hand joined his, driving them higher, thumb working his slit.

"Shit!" His hips bucked, his forehead pressing against Duncan's. His own hand worked back and forth, too, just moving faster and faster.

"You. You look. Close." Duncan groaned, eyes staring right into his.

"Uh-huh. You feel close. Come on, Doc. Come for me, and you can sleep the day away. We might even hit the hot tub." He'd move them to a place that *had* one, just for this man.

"Oh. Hot tu..." Heat poured over his fingers, Duncan shaking for him.

That did it. That had him coming like a ton of bricks, his orgasm falling over him like a sack of concrete. It left him limp and breathless.

Duncan nuzzled in, lips on his throat for a second, soft as fuck. "Mmm. 'S good."

"You know it." Colby went back to petting, one hand sliding down Duncan's back. "Get some rest, Doc. I'll take care of everything."

"Kay. 'Kay, cowboy." Man, snuggly professor. He approved.

Colby figured he'd better enjoy it now. When the Doc really woke up, they'd probably be fighting again.

Unless he could find that hot tub.

\*\*\*

The entire world was fuzzy, and no matter how much Duncan blinked, it didn't get smoother.

He had to... do. Do something.

Okay.

He had to think. Obviously

Okay. Okay. First things first. Glasses. He needed his glasses and a shower, and then he'd figure out the important stuff.

Like where he was and where his BlackBerry was.

He rolled off the bed, swaying as he tried to figure where the bathroom was.

God, he had to stop drinking.

Warm hands slid around his waist, holding him steady. "Hey, Doc. You need to hit the head?"

"I. Yeah. Yeah. I need. Yeah. A shower, you know. Gotta clear my head." Mmm. That felt good.

"Mmmhmm. You want to try out the hot tub after, you just holler." The warm body behind him pushed and rubbed, taking him right to the bathroom. "There you go."

"Hot tub." Fuck, he had to piss. And brush his goddamn *teeth* and...

Wait.

Whoa.

He looked at himself in the mirror over the sink - at the faded bruises on his throat, the way his eyes looked. "Man, I'm late for class."

He was seriously confused, something right at the base of his brain telling him to get the hell out.

"You just do your thing, Doc. I'll be right out here." Somehow that sounded ominous. Especially since the bathroom had no windows.

Shower. Shower. He got the water going, watching the steam for a minute. Come on. Come on, Duncan. Think. Think.

You went to Koko's for tempura with Sandra and Lisa. Then you went and got gas. Then back to the office to grade those horrible fucking papers on Marquez and then...

Then...

He touched his throat. Frowned.

Something stirred in his memory, something deep and a little shivery. Where the hell was he?

He stepped into the water, started washing himself. Who was that out there? He didn't pick up random men. He had tons of friends-with-benefits. And where the fuck was he?

He turned the water to cold, the sudden chill making him gasp, jerk. Cowboy. It was a cowboy. Sent to kill him. Jesus fucking Christ.

Who would want to kill him?

What had he done recently? Hell, what had he done ever? He was the guy the kids liked. He understood about schedules and shit. He knew that his students weren't interested in what he was teaching, for Christ's sake. He was doing it for the one or two a semester that went, "Wow."

He didn't seduce the kids. He played the games the dean wanted him to. Hell, he was the head of the damned GLBT Alliance, rainbow-flag waving and listening to twinkies cry about the trauma of coming out. None of this was hit-list worthy, not even in Texas.

Duncan sat there, head on the tile, breathing nice and slow like his therapist had taught him, to help with the migraines, slowing his breath until the edges of his sight were sparkling and light. Okay. Okay. Thinking. Thinking. Come on, think of something.

Right, like he was fucking MacGyver.

The knock on the door had him almost jumping out of his skin. "Come on, Doc. I'm starving. We need to get some food."

Food.

Right.

Okay. Okay, come on. Breathe. "You go ahead. I'm soapy."

Good answer. Soapy.



"Sorry, honey. I'm not going without you." Was that a threat? It didn't sound like it. But it did.

Shit. Shit. What did he need to do? He stepped out of the shower, trying to be quiet, grabbing a towel and looking for anything he could use.

"The toilet bowl lid makes a great weapon if you break it, but I'm not sure you have the strength right now, honey."

Fuck! Fuck, how did the man get the door open so quietly?

He didn't think, he just ran like hell for the bathroom door. Come on, lizard brain!

A hard arm slapped right across his middle, jerking him to a halt. "We gonna dance again, Doc?"

Jesus, that hurt.

"I'm wet." He grabbed the door handle, pulling hard. "I have a class to teach."

"You're not going back, Doc. You do get that someone wants you dead, yeah? And if they think I failed, they'll send someone else." The words fell on the back of his neck, hot and damp.

"For what? It's over. It's already over." Wait. What? What was over? What was he saying?

"It's never over with the folks that hire men like me, honey." So serious. Could that be for real? Or was the guy just trying to scare him?

"I need. I have a life. Students. Fish. Let me go!" He was attempting firm but calm. It was the biggest fucking lie ever.

"You have fish? Well, someone will take them."

"What?" He had office hours. Papers. Commitments. A standing dinner date with his book club, for fuck's sake.

"Breathe, Doc. You smell nice. All clean." That man... surely that cowboy crazy man did not just nuzzle the back of his neck?

"I. We. This can't be real." And he wasn't pushing back into the man, either.

Damn it.

"Mmmhmm. If that's what gets you through the day." That was definitely the sting of teeth, right on his nape.

"Fuck." He pulled himself through the doorway, his cock hard as nails, just defying all laws of good sense.

"Don't fight with me, Duncan. We could have some fun." The man followed, body pressing against his backside, hand sliding right down to find his prick.

"I thought you were hungry." He had lost his fucking mind. Lost it. Gone. His cock, of course, was all awake and willing to play 'entertain the homicidal cowboy'.

"I am. But it can wait. This is way more urgent." Yeah, as urgent as the hardness against his ass.

"What the fuck is going on?" That mouth hit his nape again, and his knees wobbled some, toes curling right up.

"Adrenaline. That, and you need a good hard fucking more than any man I've ever met." The one hand stayed on his cock. The other pressed against his belly before sliding up his chest, palm flattening over one nipple.

Adrenaline.

"You meet a lot of guys this way?" He groaned, his hips moving of their own accord. Honestly, he'd completely lost control of this situation, assuming he'd ever had it. There was a chunk of really fuzzy time in there.

"Nope. You're the first one I've ever taken with me. Just seemed like a good idea at the time." Rubbing hard, the cowboy just hummed happily, the sound completely incongruous with their situation.

"A good..." He went up on tiptoe as his cock got a nice, firm tug. "Oh..."

"Uh-huh. A real good idea. You're fucking hot, Doc. I like it. I like it all." Oh, God. That thumb just rubbed up and down, pressing and pushing.

"I can't. I have to think." He couldn't think like this, not at all.

"Not right now. No thinking. Just feel." Jesus. Oh, sweet Jesus. The cowboy turned him around, sank to the floor, and sucked his cock right into that amazing mouth.

His head slammed back between his shoulders, every single inch of him going tight and hard and needy. Fuck. Fuck, yes. So hot. Hard hands closed on his ass, hot lips slid down his length, and all he could do was stand there. The man sucked like a Hoover.

Duncan did the only thing he could - he went with it, humping and jerking, pushing back into those bruising hands. The pleasure all but brought him to his knees when the cowboy sucked him all the way down, one hand slipping to cup his balls. It was all he could take. He shot so hard his teeth rattled, balls aching with it. The fucking world went white and sparkly.

When he came back down he was on the floor, too, the cowboy holding him, murmuring nonsense. Just when had he lost his mind?

And why the *fuck* wasn't he more concerned about losing it?

He didn't pull away. He just couldn't, not yet. Not with the man holding him like that.

"I got you, Doc. I got you." Sweet. That kiss was sweet as anything.

"Mmm." Did that sound come from him?

"Yeah. You just rest now. I'll order us some food. Then we'll hit that hot tub, 'kay?"

"Kay." Wait? Was it? Damn. He. Yeah. Food. He needed.

Food.

"Cool. Come on, upsie daisy." Lifting him right up, the guy... He had a name. What was it?

Cheese.

Cheese.

Jack? No. Colby.

"This is... completely out of my realm."

"Yeah? It's kind of a day at the office for me." They got settled on the bed, Colby grabbing the phone book.

That was sort of... deflating. "So what happens next?"

"I order food. I mean, we could get room service." Which brought to his attention the fact that they were in a different room than they had been in before.

"Room service. Where are we? I mean, I'm a little... lost." There wasn't a thing on the bed stand that would tell him where he was, either. No logos. No stationery or guest book. What sort of place didn't have a guest book? Hell, what sort of place didn't have a room phone?

"Oh, we're here. Not there. Now, hamburger? Pizza? Steak?" The hotel was nice. That much was clear. Way nicer than the one they'd been in earlier.

"Whatever is fine. I'm not a picky eater." He headed to the window, needing to look out, to see something that gave him a reference. The man actually let him, which was kind of a relief and kind of scary, all at the same time. He heard humming behind him, and flipping through that damned phone book, too. Man, they were up high, but the skyline wasn't Dallas. That was Six

Flags, Hurricane Harbor. Arlington. Okay, not too far from home. He could get a cab, even. Call some friends.

When he glanced back to see what the cowboy was doing, he shivered a little. The man watched him like a hawk.

"Pretty lights. Where are my clothes?" My phone. My wallet.

"You ready to go there, Doc? Because you're still looking a little wobbly, and that will be a hard conversation."

"I need to go home, Colby. This isn't a movie." This sort of thing only happened in movies.

"Come sit down. I'll keep my hands to myself." Sure. The hands. But what about all that bare skin? Muscle. Blond fuzziness. He sat on the edge of the bed, fighting the urge to grab a pillow and just whack the living shit out of the cowboy. "Now, now, Duncan. I can see what you're thinking, and we've been all civilized..." One corner of that pretty mouth kicked up, giving the smile a rakish tilt. "You can't go home, honey."

"I have to. I have class." People would notice, damn it. Miss him.

"You do. You're a classy dude." Winking, Colby settled on his side, head propped on one hand. "Thing is, people want you dead. Think you are. I sent them blood and shit."

"But I'm not. I mean, I'm *not*." Blood. Blood. His blood. Christ, his head hurt.

"Not what? You trying to tell me you didn't do something to piss some biggie-wows off? I mean, they paid a lot for a guy that never did nothing." One sandy eyebrow went up, the cowboy just staring.

"I'm trying to tell you I'm not fucking dead." Not. Not dead at all.

"Right. Let me put this in little words. I was hired to kill you. Now the people who want you dead think you are. Got it?" That 'humor the lunatic' voice actually had him reaching for a pillow...

It felt fucking amazing, when the pillow connected. Hard.

So he did it again.

In fact, he did it again and again, hollering until his throat hurt and just whaling away. Colby never stopped him, just put one arm up to protect his face.

What the fuck was he doing?

What the *fuck* was he doing?

He dropped the pillow and bolted, heading for the door, everything in him going rabbitrabbitrabbit.

His feet slipped right out from under him when Colby hit him from behind, tackling him to the floor. "No running, Doc."

"No. Let me go. Let me go!" Things went bright red and vicious, panic just taking him as he fought, pulling him down into a whirlpool that sucked his good sense away and surrounded him in blankness.

No more.

## *Chapter Eleven*

MJ reached up with his toes, jingling the little bell hanging from the edge of the cabin. All he had to do was push a little higher into the handstand, stretch out and...

Ding-a-ling.

Bingo.

He lowered himself back down, legs parting, knees bending to stretch out his lower back, working with the swells that were moving the boat.

Ship.

Whatever.

"Is this some sort of yoga meets cat toy thing, Precious?" Sonny wandered by, pressing a cold bottle to his balls.

"Fuck!" He jerked, almost fell over, balls trying to crawl up inside him. "Asshole! You're just jealous."

"No. No, I'm not. I'm tickled, because this is all mine." Sonny rubbed something else between his legs, something a lot warmer.

Oh, now. That was nice. He closed his eyes, focused on spreading his legs out to the side, nice and slow, giving Sonny a show.

"See? Just like that." That hand pressed against him, rolling his balls, pulling them to the base of his prick. "Love your yoga, Precious."

"Uhn." He wobbled a little bit, swallowing hard. Fuck, those hands.

"Yeah. See, that's what you need. A little stretching the right way." Bending, Sonny kissed him, right between his thighs, licking a little.

"D... damn. Sonny." It was like the best kind of high, that little bit of stubble, those lips.

"Mmm." That man loved on him until he thought his head might explode, then Sonny gently turned him upright. He swayed some, blinking as he raised his face up for a kiss. Dude. Head rush. Fucking cool. Kissing him hard, Sonny pulled him up close, hands on his ass, hard as hell against him, ready to start the next set of exercises.

He climbed his own favorite pole, humping and rolling against all those amazing fucking muscles.

Biting his neck, Sonny laughed out loud for him, holding him up. No chance of letting him fall. "Better than bell ringing, Precious?"

He chuckled and reached up, whacking the bell. "Man, this way I get both."

"I'll ring your bell good, you want me to." A slow roll of Sonny's hips left no doubt what his redneck meant.

"Mmm. Here, kitty, kitty." He wanted. He really wanted.

"Come and get it." Carrying him to the little built-in seat, Sonny lowered them down, pulling him to straddle those hard thighs.

He tilted Sonny's bald head up, leaned down, and took a good, hard kiss, fucking those lips good and steady. Sonny's hands slid behind his head, fingers gripping his hair, holding him right there so the kiss could go on and on. God love a naked redneck on a boat.

Man, that should be on a T-shirt.

He could wear it to introduce Sonny to Mom.

Oh, man. That would be something.

Sonny growled a little, deepening the kiss. Right. Focus. Pulling him up with one hand under his ass, Sonny rocked them together, pushing his balls against Sonny's cock. Oh, yeah.

Oh. Oh, fuck yeah. He wanted. He leaned down, tongue dragging on that healed ink. His. "Fuck me, huh?"

"Uh-huh." Sonny bucked with every movement of his tongue, fingers sliding back to find his hole. "Slick?"

"Uh. Somewhere?" Was he supposed to *think*?

"Damn it, Precious, you're supposed to pay attention." Sonny stuck two fingers in front of his face. "Lick."

"How about suck?" He wrapped his lips around those thick fingers, sucking good and hard.

"Sucking is good." Watching him like a hawk, Sonny moaned for him, pushing up against him. When those big fingers were good and wet, Sonny pulled them away and pushed them against his ass. MJ didn't screw around; he pushed down, groaning as the burn climbed up his spine.

"MJ. Oh, fuck, yeah. Still so tight." Those fingers pushed right up and in, pegging his gland.

"Sonny!" Fuck him. His eyes popped open, and the world came to a screeching fucking halt.

"Like that?" That wild grin made him think of pirates. "Fucking love the way you move."

"Do it again." He licked the corner of Sonny's mouth.

"This?" Sonny hit his sweet spot again and again, getting him open and ready.

"Uhn. Uh-huh. Fuck, Sonny." He was going to fucking explode.

"That's the idea." Fingers slipping free, Sonny lifted him, pulled him closer so that cock could push against his hole. He groaned all the way down, eyes rolling back in his head. "Oh, Christ, Precious. So damned good." Sonny moved him up and down, got a good rhythm going.

"Uh-huh. Better than yoga." MJ groaned, bounced like Sonny was the world's most muscled trampoline.

Wait, did that make sense?

Moaning against his neck, Sonny humped up against him, hot and hard inside him, hands like steel bands on his hips. He rode faster, thighs burning, just shaking with it.

"More, Precious. God. More." Bracing against the deck, Sonny pushed up into him and filled him up all the way.

"Fuck. Fuck, I..." His body went tight as he held off, not wanting this to end, not yet.

"Come on, MJ. I need it." Sonny slid one hand around, grabbed MJ's cock and tugged, working all the way up and down his shaft.

"Need." The second time Sonny's fingers tugged the crown of his cock, he lost it, shooting like a tab of C-4 with a remote detonator.

"Shit! Oh, yeah." He wasn't the only one. Sonny came for him, deep inside, filling him with heat. He went a little goofy, head bobbing, body shivering with the aftershocks. "Did I ring your bell?" That smile felt so fine against his neck, Sonny leaning and giving him something solid to sit against.



"You fucking know it, Sunshine. You're my honest to God ding-a-ling."

"I also provide your Ding Dongs."

Oh. Chocolate. Yum.

"You are my motherfucking hero." He was well-fucked, happy, solid. Where was the goddamned chocolate?

## *Chapter Twelve*

Neil woke in the dark hours before dawn, feeling restless in a way he hadn't in months. Paddy was right beside him, there was no one else in the cottage, and the weather out there was calm. He could hear the waves crashing on the beach, which usually had him sleeping like a baby.

So what was the problem?

Rolling to his back, Neil closed out Paddy's sleeping stream of consciousness and focused, trying to pin down the feeling. Something stirred, like a slimy denizen of the deep, before settling just out of his grasp. Neil sighed, pushing the light sheet off his legs. Perhaps a cup of tea would do him good.

It wasn't but a few moments before his Padraic followed, blinking and mostly asleep, digging in the tiny refrigerator for the milk. A simple breakfast tea in the cup, hot water in the kettle, and Neil settled in to drink, letting Paddy lean on him.

Paddy didn't say a word, just touched him, petting and stroking. Those curious little thoughts bounced and hummed, like the bubbles in champagne. The thought made him smile. Paddy was nothing if not effervescent. Neil kissed his cheek, humming with the pleasure.

"Better?" Those fingers found the ink in the small of his back, tracing it without having to look.

"I am, love." Of course he was. Paddy was touching him. "I'm sorry I woke you."

"I always wake up when you have nightmares. I worry." And Paddy was worried, but he wasn't sorry, was he?

"Mmm. It wasn't so much a nightmare as a feeling, love. I'm a little worried myself. The last time I ignored these niggles, bad things happened." Very bad things.

"So, let's go." Paddy sounded like it was the easiest answer in the world.

"What if I like it here?" Oh, he knew he was being stubborn for the sake of it, but he did adore their bitty cot.

"I do, too, but..." Paddy sighed, nuzzled his neck. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

"No. Nor you, either." They could go to Spain. The southern coast was lovely, after all. They could see the Alhambra.

"Wherever." Since they'd taken Paddy from his home, he'd become quite the wanderer.

"You constantly amaze me, love." He grinned. "We could go to England. You would quite like Dover."

"Would you like that? You could have tea on demand, and everyone would sound like you."

"They would. It might be easier to hide for a bit." Not that he minded the idea of Spain, either. Perhaps Italy.

"I could go anywhere, so long as we're together."

"Then we'll go to Britain. It's easier for now, and we can blend a bit more." He could show Paddy the amazing tea shops, perhaps get a new tattoo.

"Oh..." Paddy groaned, snuggled closer. "Me, too. Me, too, Neil."

"Yes?" Oh, gracious. Yes, that would be lovely. Hot. They could have fish and chips, and he could introduce Paddy to the joys of Marmite.

"Yes. Anywhere. I'll come with you."

"Then we'll go, tomorrow." They would leave a few months' rent on the kitchen table and slip away, run from the feeling that kept shadowing him.

"Okay. Do you want me to pack?" The long finger slid down his stomach, the caress slow.

"Not yet. It's too late to leave tonight, but we should go in the dark." He wanted one more day in their idyllic spot, wise or not.

"Mmhmm. Then could we..." He received another touch, Paddy's worry and need fluttering against him.

"Could we? Oh, yes. In fact, I think we should." He turned and took a kiss, letting his tongue trace Paddy's lips. Paddy's relief poured over him, and he ended with a lapful of excited redhead. "Hello, love." Laughing, letting Paddy's joy roll over him, Neil hugged him close, kissing along a line of freckles.

"Hello, Neil. I want you." Paddy's fingers were curious and quick, scraping over his skin, teasing him, playing his nipples.

"Oh, I want you, too. Can you feel it?" That was quite the silly question. Surely Paddy could feel his cock, hard between them.

"Inside. I always do, now. I feel you." Paddy blinked, thoughts shattering as he nibbled a sweet spot on the sweet neck.

"Yes." Just like Paddy was always with him, bubbling along the surface, occasionally falling deep into him. Neil took another kiss, then another, moaning a little.

There was a moment of stillness, of quiet need, that made him ache. Then they began moving again, rocking against each other, both of them starting to pant a bit. Paddy's fingers found his cock, rubbing nice and easy, the thumb working the tip.

"Sweet..." That felt amazing. Made Neil feel like he could forget everything else and just eat Paddy up. Licking a line down Paddy's neck, Neil stopped at the base of his throat and sucked hard enough to leave a bruise.

Paddy's hand squeezed, a low gasp filling the air.

"Padraic." He was still so in love with Paddy's name. Neil loved to say it aloud.

"You're the only one that calls me that."

"You've never been a Rick to me." Paddy's old friends and co-workers may have called him that, but the ones that loved him, his mother, his siblings, had called him Paddy.

"No. No, you've always heard me, even when..." Flashes of images - pain and blood, fear and a scarred blond with deadly eyes - pushed between them.

"Even then." No, love. No more thinking about things like that. They should think about kissing and loving and touching. His arms wrapped around Paddy's body, and their lips met, Paddy throwing himself into this. Pushing up with his hips, Neil rocked along, his cock sliding through Paddy's fingers until he thought he might scream with it. "Want you, love."

"Uh-huh. Here? Sofa? Bed? Washing machine?"

"Here works." He was solidly planted. Paddy could do the most acrobatic things, and Neil could sit.

Paddy nodded, lifting up a little so that pretty prick could slide against his belly. Closing his eyes, Neil shifted, letting their bodies slide together. When he opened his eyes again, Paddy was staring at him, those bright eyes speaking volumes. His cock slipped behind Paddy's balls, the hot skin dragging along the tip. That sent a wave of pleasure up his spine, and he grabbed Paddy's hips.

"Again." He smiled against Paddy's mouth, rocking them together.

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh." Paddy's groan tasted sweet.

"Love." Neil bucked up, pressing his prick into Paddy's body.

They started sharing short, heady kisses, each one making him more breathless. Squeezing, Neil pushed Paddy's bottom, working them together, letting their skin slide on skin.

"Need you." Paddy's ass went tight, thighs shaking.

"Got me, love. Any way you need me." When he finally reached down and grabbed Paddy's cock, it was almost too much for both of them. Things became wild and fierce, their need ratcheting up, Paddy's mind spinning. His own mind locked on to Paddy, and that was all he could see or think or hear.

"Neil!" Heat sprayed against him, wet and right, Paddy's world gone all sparkles and shine.

Lovely. So bloody perfect. Neil moaned, coming hard, heat spilling from him as well. That was exactly what he needed. Exactly the thing that would drive the restlessness away. At least for tonight.

"Come to bed. I'll pack tomorrow, and we'll leave after supper, I promise." Paddy kissed his nose, his forehead.

"Fair enough." Neil helped Paddy to his feet before climbing up himself, both of them a little unsteady. "I love you, sweet. No matter what."

"I know, Neil. I'll take care of you." Something in the words made that twinge of worry sing inside him again. They had to go. Tomorrow. As soon as it was dark.

"We'll take care of each other." They had to. They were all they had left in the world.

\*\*\*

Clothes. Books. Tea. Clothes.

Paddy wasn't sure what was out there, and he wasn't sure what was worrying Neil, but he knew it was bad.

Knew it.

Knew it right now and it wasn't fair, because they were happy, but it was what it was and... Oh, Neil's mug.

He wrapped that in a tea towel, then another one, then tape. Neil was sleeping. Neil was tired and he was tired, but he couldn't rest. Not right now because they needed to pack and be out of here

before whatever bad thing that was going to happen happened. His eyes landed on the phone, and all of the sudden he wanted to call his mom, tell her hello and that he was sorry and that he loved her, so much, and didn't want her to worry, because he knew she did.

Would.

Had.

Except that she thought he was dead, even when he wasn't, and...

Right.

Whatever.

The books went into two backpacks, the puzzle books sliding in the side pockets.

Hurry. Hurry hurry hurry.

Paddy stared at the doors, the windows, where he'd booby-trapped them all with tiny little flash bangs - nothing fancy, just little fireballs that were more sound and light than heat.

Don't come in. I won't let you in.

Whoever you are.

Hurry, Paddy. Hurry, hurry, hurry.

He headed for the bathroom, gathering toothbrushes and combs and soap and shampoos, heart pounding in his chest.

"Paddy?" Neil came to the door of the bathroom, hair sticking up everywhichways.

"Yeah, Neil? You're awake. You're supposed to be asleep, huh? You were so tired."

"I was. I am. I could hear you. Worrying." Neil gave him a small smile, coming to help pack a ditty bag.

"Me? I'm sorry. I try not to let you, but I can't. I just can't."

"Padraic." Neil kissed his shoulder, pressing close briefly. "I'm not made of glass. It's okay to let me know."

Paddy shivered, turned to face Neil. "Don't open the doors or windows. They're trapped."

"Oh, good to know." Smiling into his eyes, Neil took a kiss, those light-colored eyes shining for him. "I might have thrown open a sash."

"That would have been bad." And loud. Blinding. Sort of jarring.

"Indeed." Neil kissed him again before turning them both back to packing.

Brush. Razors.

He headed into the bedroom, finishing up their clothes, grabbing the pillows. He liked their pillows. He knew it had to be bad when Neil didn't stop to look at every little thing. Neil was way more attached to this and that.

They got packed, everything moved to the front door. "You want to call for a car or what?"

"No. No, you stay right here. I arranged transport."

Oh, man. He hoped it wasn't a boat.

"Let me get the things on the door." He unhooked the flash bang, packaged it up. He'd get the windows next. Neil watched him, one leg bouncing, hands working the tiny little cell phone Neil carried. Must be texting. Go Neil in all his techno glory. It didn't take any time at all to fix the windows and he was ready. Solid. Steady. He had his Canadian passport for George Patterson. Neil had his Spanish one. They were good.

A car pulled up, silent as a ghost, no lights on, even in the growing dusk. It was an odd sight, but only because he was used to walking now, or to bikes.

"Okay, Neil. Let's go." He could see it - see the worry and tension in Neil's face. Now. Now was good.

Right now.

"Yes." Neil took one last look around, wistful, almost truly sad. Then they went and loaded everything in the car.

Neil never looked back.

He did, though. Paddy looked hard, trying to remember every single second. This had been a good place.

He prayed that it wouldn't be the last one.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

They had a little cabin by the beach. It was starting to be a theme with them. This one was nicely out of the way, with only a path down a steep cliff to the beach. Easily defensible, isolated, and fucking perfect. Sonny had set up all the equipment, studiously making sure everything was sterilized, because no way was he inflicting gangrene on his Precious. Then he went to find MJ.

It took him a minute to find the man, but he did, stretched out in the sun, basking like a big, inked lizard.

"Hey, Precious. You ready? 'Cause I'm ready."

"Sure, what're we blowing up?" MJ rolled over, stretched, ass in the air.

"We're not. I'm going to tattoo you." He was so ready he hurt. Literally.

"Oh." Oh, man. Look at that. Look at that flush, climbing up MJ's back.

"Yeah. Oh. Are you ready?" Damn it. Come on. Sonny bounced on his toes.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sunshine." MJ rolled up, stretched. "Man, the sun feels good."

"It does." He reached out, grabbed MJ's hand. "Come *on*."

"Eager." MJ pushed right up against him, cock filling like a balloon hooked to a tank of helium.

"I am. I want to see you. Smell you. I want you, Precious." Laughing, he pulled MJ back into the little cabin, pushing him down in the chair he'd set up. MJ didn't look worried. No, those eyes just stared him down, starting to heat up around the edges.

"Mmm. I could eat you up." Sonny bent and took a kiss, lips and tongue moving with MJ's, before he drew back and got the razor.

"You're not eating me with that, man." MJ grinned at him, all sprawled and relaxed..



"No, I'm just cleaning your hairy monkey shoulder." That might not even make sense. Sonny was the hairy one.

"Hairy monkey. Ooo ooo ooo." Smart ass.

"Yeah, yeah. Lean." He had to get to MJ's shoulder, get it cleaned up so he could start work. It was weird. He should be nervous. He wasn't a bit.

MJ leaned, let him have that muscled shoulder. The prep work took a few short minutes, and then he was ready. Really. Damn. "You solid, Precious?"

"Yeah. Yeah, Sonny. I'm with you." MJ dragged him in, kissed him good and hard.

He let himself sink into the kiss for a moment, really loving it, knowing he wouldn't be able to do this without getting all hot and bothered, anyway. MJ rippled all against him, arms wrapping around his shoulders.

They rocked together a bit, both of them making little noises, the very idea making them crazy. Sonny finally pulled away, though, knowing he couldn't let himself get distracted. "I come, I'll have to go to sleep. You know that, Precious."

MJ got all tickled, laughing at him. "You mean that your hand won't be steadier if I blow you?"

Oh, shithead. "My hand is always steady. I just can't doze off with an ink gun in my hand."

"No, then I'd be all modern art museumy, man." MJ rolled his belly, making the dark ink dance. "You freehanding or drawing on me?"

"I'm freehanding." Risky, but the design was simple enough, and he liked the intimacy of the idea of tiny imperfections.

"Cool. Here, let me..." MJ stood, swung the chair around and straddled it, chest leaning on the back. "That'll be more stable."

"Excellent." Sonny got the gun ready and made himself be all loose and shit. "Let's do this."

MJ didn't answer, just leaned forward and let him have at. He snapped the rubber band around the gun motor, dipped into the little cap deal of ink, and took a deep breath.

Letting half of his breath out, Sonny put the needle to MJ's skin, having memorized what he wanted to use for the test line. For the rest, he had the design drawing propped up on the table next to him.

MJ let out a deep sigh, and he laid down the first line, long and dark and heavy, the beads of blood just forming. He'd learned how to wipe that away and keep working, how it was better to

keep going if he could. By the time Sonny remembered to blink to clear his eyes, a quarter of the outline was done.

There were rays and the first curve of the sun there, outlined in black.

Thank God he didn't have to do color. He did have to do shading, but he could do that. He could. It actually looked pretty good.

MJ grinned at him. "Have you worked out the nerves enough to talk during now?"

"Yeah. Yeah, Precious. I think I might could even chew gum." If it wouldn't've ruined the tat, he'd let MJ have it with that needle.

"Wow. I've never had an artist that could do that."

"Well, there you go. I'm multi-talented." Hell, MJ knew how talented he was, especially with his mouth. He did another line, another ray of sun.

"I know that." The serious note in MJ's voice rocked him a little bit, let him know that his Precious was as into this as he was. Fuck, it was good. It was beyond good. Sonny hummed, working, wiping blood out of the way. Wasn't near as gross as stitching MJ up after a bar fight.

"I want you so fucking bad." MJ's cock was leaking, the scent just fucking heady.

"I know, Precious." It came out more of a groan than anything else, but he had to finish now. Had to.

"I used to go, after jobs. Thought I needed them. Now." MJ's thighs went rock-hard. "Fuck, I haven't even done a job in weeks."

"You've never been inked by me." No one would ever work on MJ again but him. Sonny was sweating, panting, but just like when he drove, his hand stayed steady.

"Not until now." MJ groaned, eyes closing a little.

"No. Not until now." He pushed in more ink, letting his fingers and wrist do the work, his eyes admiring the way MJ's skin took.

"Tell me you're going to fuck me, after. I've never done that, either."

"You always did the fucking, huh?" Sonny leaned in close to MJ's ear. "I'll ruin you for life."

"Swear it?"

"Fuck, yes. I don't lie to you, Precious. Not ever." He knew better. MJ would find out about it and kick his ass anyway.

"You don't. Jesus, that is the hottest fucking burn." The smell of MJ rocked him down to the bone.

"Love how you look like this. How you smell, MJ. Makes me fucking hot." Sonny moved a little closer, finishing the outline on the outside.

MJ looked, that grin just pleased as hell. "Yours. I like it."

"All I have to do now is shade. I have to change needles." His hand was just a little shaky while he pulled away. It would be fine when he went back to work.

MJ's hand slid up his spine, touching him, stroking him in a straight, long line.

"Careful, Precious. Got to finish." His nipples were tight, his cock rock hard, and he was glad as hell this was a simple design.

"You will. Then you'll ruin me for life. I can't fucking wait."

Neither could he. Sonny breathed in and out a few times before starting again, the buzz of the needle making him pant. Shit, as hot as this was, MJ was gonna be the illustrated fucking man. He could sign his name after he was done. 'My Precious.' Hell, yeah.

The shading turned out to be easier than he'd thought, because the motion didn't have to be as precise. It took no time at all.

"Damn. You do good work."

"Not bad for a beginner, huh?" He'd practiced a hell of a lot on pig parts, which had grossed him out some.

"It fits in with all the others. It's your mark."

"Yeah." Wiping the last of the blood and ink away, Sonny smoothed his gloved fingers over the work. "Oh, Jesus."

MJ's groan was the hottest fucking thing he'd ever heard. Then MJ reached down, started stroking his own cock, just a little.

"Gotta clean you up." No germs. Germs bad. Sonny got the spray bottle, the plastic. His hands were shaking like leaves.

"This is my favorite fucking part." MJ held still, panting for it.

"Yeah? Which part is that?" His body was screaming, but Sonny took his time cleaning up, making MJ feel it, admiring his work. "You want to see?"

"Yes." MJ's cock bobbed in front of him, the man heading for the little head, looking hard. "Oh. Oh, damn, Sonny."

"Yeah? Good?" Hell, MJ was the expert, here. He was the one with all the ink. What if he thought it sucked?

MJ groaned, fingers brushing the edge of the ink. Jesus Christ, those heavy balls drew up, his Precious fixin' to shoot, just like that.

"You like it." Now he wasn't asking. He was gonna just take. Sonny moved up and grabbed MJ's cock, pulling hard at it.

"Yeah. Yeah. Your fucking mark. Sonny." MJ's head fell back, tanned throat working.

"Mine. Just like I'm yours. Goddamn, Precious. So good." That fine skin felt so hot against him, MJ's cock pushing through his hand.

"Want you to fuck me. Want to flip this motherfucking place upside from doing each other so hard."

"Yeah. Yeah, Precious. Now." Sonny slid to his knees, getting MJ turned so he could slide his lips down the crack of that amazing ass, then lick at MJ's hole.

That scream made his toes curl, made his lower belly ache like he'd been whacked. Fuck, yes. Never letting anyone ink his fine son of a bitch again. Never. Only him. He would put the needle to MJ any time the man asked. He licked, pressing his tongue in, really getting MJ wet.

He could hear those cries, getting higher and higher, louder, MJ shaking around him. Sonny knew he'd have to hurry, or MJ would come. Of course, he fully expected MJ to come when he pushed his cock in, then get it up and come again.

There were benefits to that whole fucking a stud thing. Really.

MJ snarled, thighs going tight. "Hurry the fuck up, Sunshine."

"Coming. I'm ready." No fingers required. MJ was ready for him. Sonny pulled MJ down instead of standing up, letting the man slide right onto his lap. MJ was slick as anything, and he filled that tight little hole right up, his Precious taking him right in. Grunting, Sonny pulled down on MJ's hips and pushed up with his, pressing in deep. A deep groan poured from him, his hands shaking.

"Damn. Damn, Sunshine." He could feel MJ fucking rippling all around him, muscles fluttering.

"Dreamed of this. Just like this. Come on, Precious." He reached around for MJ's cock again, and his hand closed tight.

Heat poured out of MJ on that first touch, MJ squeezing him like a fist. A cry ripped out of him, and Sonny had to remind himself not to bite MJ's shoulder. No fucking up his work. He bent close and looked, though, knowing how fucking hot it felt, loving how it looked. He got MJ moving again, not letting them rest, needing more. He blew on the tattoo, just like MJ'd done to him, chuckling a little. Oh, fuck. That made MJ's body do amazing fucking things.

Yum.

"Fucking hot. Really fucking hot, MJ." He was... well. Sonny figured he might just explode.

"Uh-huh." MJ started bouncing again, sliding and moving on his prick.

Fuck. Every hard muscle in MJ's body flexed, showing off under that tanned skin, and Sonny was just fascinated. He started touching, one hand staying on MJ's cock. MJ's head fell forward, too-damned-long blond hair sticking to the nape of his neck.

Sonny nuzzled in, moaning when the motion drove him deeper inside MJ's body. Yeah. They rocked like that again, both of them grunting.

"I. Goddamn. Sonny." Uh-huh. God fucking damn.

"Love how you feel. Did I mention I love my ink on you?" They were gonna go until they fell over. He could tell. Boom.

"Uh-huh. So fucking hot." MJ squeezed him, almost too hard.

"MJ!" Panting, humping, Sonny rode out the squeeze, hoping his muscles wouldn't lock up that way and cramp. Jesus.

"Going to have you under my fucking skin forever." The words were as serious as anything he'd ever heard. Ever.

"You already did. Now we just have proof." Groaning, Sonny moved faster, his need riding up and down his spine.

"Uh-huh." MJ's hands creaked, those fingers fisted so hard.

"Fuck. Fuck, Precious. I can't hold on. Gonna." He just... Fucking A. He came so hard his teeth rattled in his head, every muscle in his body vibrating with it.

"Christ." That was just enough to scour a man and leave him dead on the side of the road. All he could do was lean.

MJ nodded, chuckling breathlessly. "Shit. That was better than Singapore and Lisbon all together."

"Yeah? One day you're gonna tell me about Singapore, you know?" Of course, after what he'd learned about MJ's life in the last, oh, six months, he might have exceeded his limit.

"One day. Not today. Today's all yours."

"That's just the way I like it, Precious." He liked all the parts. "Wanna do it again? Not the ink, the fucking."

"Fuck yes. Over and over." MJ turned, those blue eyes fierce. "The ink, too. This won't be the last time."

"No. No one but me from now on." They had to get the matching ones first, though. That was the most important part.

"Yeah. Yeah." MJ nodded, rubbed, both of them sweaty and slick as fuck. "Shower?"

"Yeah. We'll get all cleaned up so we can go to bed and do it again." And again and again, if he had his way.

Some days were just better than others.

Today had to be one of the best.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

He woke up in the middle of the night, eyes flying open. What the fuck?

MJ slipped out of the bed, rolling his shoulder a little, the healing flesh itching and a little raw.

Okay.

Okay, what was up?

He grabbed his piece, staying away from the windows, listening for the sounds that were supposed to be outside. The sounds that weren't. He prowled the little cottage, head tilted, trying to hear anything that might have caused him to wake up all restless. Sonny was still snoring away in the bedroom.

Okay, whatever it was, it wasn't inside. He slipped on his flip flops and headed for the back door. The wind was blowing, the clouds coming in over the ocean. He managed to skirt the perimeter, make sure no one was right on them, before Sonny slipped out, a darker shadow in the shadows, gun in hand. "Precious?"

"Yeah." He nodded, nostrils flaring. What the fuck woke him?

"You okay?" Sonny's voice barely carried, and the man kept moving, not making a still target.

"Something woke me. You know?" Something was making his nerves jangle.

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. I could hear you prowling around." Sonny came over, digging under the porch to pull out a pack of cigarettes.

"Those are bad for you." He chewed on his bottom lip, eyes on the water. Man, maybe he was just getting old.

"I know." Sonny lit up, the sound of the lighter reminding him of an ignition switch. "You're always reminding me."

"It's a hobby." MJ headed away from the house a little, nostrils flaring. He wanted a joint.

The cigarette went sailing past him, into a puddle of water, where it hissed out. Sonny's hand fell on his arm, the man fast and silent. "Come on, Precious. Let's go inside."

"That's littering." He headed in, though, feeling just a little exposed out here.

"You're off your game, man. You haven't hit me once." One big hand pressed against his ass, loving on him.

"Last time I checked, you weren't the enemy." He swatted Sonny's ass once, almost gently. Maybe his mom needed him.

"I'm not. So not." They got the door closed behind them, locked, and the windows checked. Then Sonny was on him like white on rice, kissing him hard. MJ blinked - both at the whole idea of thinking white on rice and at the way Sonny's tongue pushed into his lips, fucking him.

Sonny grabbed his ass and pulled him up hard against that hard lower body, laughing against his mouth. "You're thinking too much."

"It's my job." He'd pay, if Sonny could make it stop.

"Uh-huh. I got something for that." Pushing him back, Sonny spilled him right down on the little couch, pressing down on top of him. Oh. Skin. His hands slid right down, getting a handful of ass, squeezing good and hard.

"Mmmhmm. Just like that." Sucking on his neck, Sonny made his skin tingle, made him wiggle and arch up.

"Huh?" He groaned, chin lifting. Fuck, he loved the rasp of that stubble.

"Shut up, Precious." That hard chin rasped over his collarbone before Sonny licked down his chest to bite at his nipple. His teeth clacked together, his toes curling up hard enough that he lost a sandal. Sucking hard, Sonny pulled at his skin, and the bastard's teeth rubbed together on his nipple over and over again. He got one hand on Sonny's head, fingers trailing over the bald scalp. He'd done a good job, yesterday, shaving. A very good job.

Moaning, Sonny moved to his other nipple, licking hard at it before blowing on it, making it draw up tight-tight. Oral bastard. He could write fucking odes about Sonny's mouth. Odes. Songs. C-4 recipes. The good stuff.

Especially when Sonny worked down his belly and licked at the head of his cock, tongue rubbing insistently. His knees came up, shoulders too, and MJ rocked on his ass. Don't stop. Don't fucking stop.

Sonny wasn't about to stop. MJ could tell by the way that mouth took him all the way in, his cock hitting the back of Sonny's throat. He kept his eyes open, watched every fucking second of



his cock pushing into those lips. Those dark eyes met his, Sonny staring him down, licking and sucking like there was no tomorrow.

Fuck. Fuck, that made his heart hurt, made his skin feel like it didn't fit. That fine, redneck motherfucker was under his skin. One big hand cupped his balls, pulling them up against the base of his cock, really making him feel the stretch. Damn. Oh, damn.

"Sonny. Sonny." He couldn't figure out what to say, but it didn't fucking matter. His Sunshine'd know. Sonny always knew. Always. The man circled his hole with one finger, reminding him that no one else had ever had this. Only Sonny.

"Yeah." He grunted and bore down, that stretch almost fucking perfect. Rough and sharp with that stubble, Sonny's chin scraped over his balls, working down so Sonny's tongue could find his hole. Fingers and mouth worked together, making him arch and holler. "I want you to fuck me, so good that I can sleep, so I can fucking rest, Sunshine."

Sonny's head came up, knowing eyes meeting his. "I will, Precious. I promise. Only me."

"Only you. That. That belongs to us." And he had this fucking itch - like poison ivy in the brain.

"Mine." Sonny sat up, pushing up between his legs, stroking MJ's cock to gather up moisture before rubbing it over his cock, getting ready. "Now?"

"Now. Now, Sunshine." Now worked.

"Yeah." Sighing happily, Sonny pushed between his legs, hard and heavy, filling him completely. Just what he needed.

MJ kept his eyes open, watching Sonny take him, letting that fine fucker in. Sonny pressed in, then pulled out, the slow roll of those hips making him grunt, making him clutch at Sonny's back. He groaned a little, lips finding the curve of Sonny's throat. There was something about the stretch, about the burn, that got him off.

"Mmmhmm." Sonny liked it when he sucked, when he bit. Liked the sting, too.

Of course, there was the fact that tomorrow Sonny'd look like a fucking leper, all marked up with him.

Sonny moved harder, faster, making him forget everything but the feel of them together, the idea of them. He had all he needed, right there. Deep, raw sounds tore out of him, ringing out and filling up the place as he fought to make it last, make it good. Sonny pulled back to stare him right in the eye, reaching down to grab his cock, pulling hard. "Want everything, Precious."

"Every..." He couldn't even get the second part of the word out; he was too fucking busy blowing his wad.

Sonny's eyes went wide, that look all about heat and wonder. Then Sunshine was filling him right up, hot and wet, pushing into him one last time. They slumped there, panting hard, sweaty and fine. Better. So much better.

He couldn't hear anything but the ringing in his ears. Not one damned thing. Well, that and Sonny breathing against his neck.

He hoped to hell whatever woke him up was gone, because fuck, he was just zoned.

His own personal redneck seriously did it for him.

Sonny nibbled at him a little, absently, kind of loving on him. Lazy bastard.

He opened his mouth to say something - either thank you or fuck yeah or good night or something - but by the time he figured it out, he was already asleep.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

Damn. That man was strong. Really, really strong, to Cowboy's way of thinking. Too strong to be what he seemed, anyway.

He'd thought it already. Hell, he'd thought it a few times, but this last little hissy fit had been something else. Like screaming, raging, incoherent fighting. Enough that Cowboy had needed to knock the man out.

Duncan was sleeping now, the bruise on his jaw kind of lurid and gross, but damned necessary. Shit. Maybe he ought to call MJ. His old buddy was way better at psychology than he was.

The phone rang three times, then he heard a familiar sound. "Dude! Cowboy, babe! Where the fuck have you been?"

Ah, it was good to have friends.

"Been working. I tell you what, jobs are something else these days, man." MJ sounded plumb happy. Weird.

"Yeah? You keeping busy? I'm retired." There was something there. Something odd.

"Uh. Sure. Busy, busy. Retired, huh?" He was treading carefully. If MJ was compromised...

"Sorta. Been exploring options off the grid, some. Blowing around some things. You know me, I get bored, just like that time in Montana, huh?"

Oh, man. There was some shit that hit the fan, then, if MJ was bringing up Montana. His hand went to the scar on one ass cheek, and he winced.

"God help us when you get bored, honey. I'm still in mourning." Grinning, he glanced back to make sure Sleeping Beauty was still asleep.

"Yeah, I haven't crossed your path in too long. What's up?"

"Well, I was on this job. Met this guy. He's, uh, well, you remember that time in Utah?" They'd met a freakish strong man in Utah, though he'd been huge. Duncan wasn't.

"You climbing mountain men again?"

"No. This one is no mountain, but he might as well be. A little nuts, too."

MJ's laugh tickled the shit out of him. "You always did like the loonies."

"No shit. Must be why I hooked up with you. He shorts out, kinda, Incredible Hulk like. Any ideas?"

He could use any advice.

"Where'd you meet him?" MJ's voice went ice cold, which ranked up there on the odd shit scale.

"On a job. I mixed business with pleasure." He was starting to get a cold chill himself.

"You always were busy. You still at the same email? I'd like to keep in touch."

"Yeah. Yeah, I am. You know me. Creature of habit." So not true, but he did have one public email that never changed, so MJ could send him coded messages.

"I'm sure I have some jokes for you. Happy things that'll make you laugh your ass off."

"Jokes are good." Jesus, he wanted to talk more, ask for MJ's advice, but MJ was right. Coded email was safer.

"Absolutely. I've missed your particular sensibility, man."

"Shit, I've missed you like a sore tooth." Suddenly he wanted to be on the beach in Mexico, with MJ, a bottle of tequila, and some salt and lime.

"We'll make a plan. I have someone for you to meet."

"Yeah. Yeah, same here." Glancing at Duncan's sleeping form one more time, Cowboy lowered his voice. "It might be a real good idea."

"I'll email. Watch your back, my friend." The line went dead, just like that.

Shit. Sighing, he flipped the phone closed, resisting the urge to go check his email. MJ would wait at least a few days. "What the hell am I going to do with you, Doc?"

"L... let me go so I can have a drink and some aspirin. I hurt."

"Oh, honey, I can't do that." He hadn't expected an answer. How much had the guy heard?

"Man, if I don't get something for my head, I'm gonna die."

"I got some migraine stuff." He rummaged in his duffel, pulling out the good stuff. Had enough caffeine in it that even MJ would like it.

"Oh..." Someone was hurting bad enough not to snarl at him, enough to be thankful.

"Here, here's some water." Ice bucket, water that was still cold... Go him.

The Doc took three, swallowing hard. "Untie me?"

"Promise not to go crazy? You got to work with me, here."

"Huh?" He got the cutest damn look, just like the man didn't know what he was talking on.

"Doc. I swear, you went nutso on me. Not gonna let you go if I have to subdue you again." Man, this was the weirdest shit...

"Nuts? Me? Are you ins... Wait, that's probably not a question I want the answer to."

"I'm not the crazy one." Cowboy stared the man down, serious as a heart attack all of a sudden. Sometimes a man just had to impress the seriousness of the situation on someone.

"I'm not crazy. I'm quite sane." Those eyes were serious right on back, staring at him.

"Uh-huh. Well, then, I ain't untying you." Nope. No, sir. Not until the guy admitted he'd come unhinged.

"Fuck you." The air got a touch dangerous, sorta thick and heavy. It was hot.

"Nah. I'd rather do you." Cowboy grinned, showing a little tooth, kinda encouraging the guy to get het up again. Hell, it would amuse him *and* prove his point.

Those lean muscles rippled, almost seeming to bulge a little. Mmm. More rope. Digging through his utility duffel produced a nice bit of nylon rope that would almost look erotic. He pulled it out, flexing it in his hands.

Doc looked at him, eyes wide, muscles going tight. Oh, fuck yeah.

"You're looking ready to go off again, man." MJ would laugh his ass off at how the idea of tying the Doc up was making him hard. Of course, MJ always found him funny as fuck. This guy, though? He wasn't laughing. "What's the matter, Doc? Don't like the whole bondage thing?" Cowboy started by tying the rope off to the furniture, anchoring it.

"I'm going to fucking kill you." Listen to that growl. It made his balls ache.

"You know how many people have tried that?" His fingers brushed over Duncan's belly when he started wrapping rope other places.

"Not enough." The doc's cock was filling up, so pretty.

"No? I don't think you really want me dead, honey. Not one bit." Licking his lips, Cowboy knelt down, wrapping the Doc's legs.

Those muscles rippled, the Doc trying to raise his knees. "Let. Me. Go."

"Nope. Not a chance. You're interesting." He looked right up, putting his hand on Duncan's crotch. "I been bored."

"Bored?" When did the lean professor get broad-shouldered? The rope creaked a little, and that cock jerked and pushed into his touch.

He looped another bit around that chest, those arms. He was turned on, but not stupid. Still, he only needed one hand to do that. The other stayed right where it was, squeezing.

"Yep. Cooped up, watching the paint peel..."

"Let me up. I don't want to do this." The man kept saying that...

"You sure? Your body's talking." It might wear him right out, dealing with this man, but it would not be boring.

Duncan's cock throbbed, leaking on his fingers, damn near burning him. Leaning down, he licked at it a little, just needing to taste. Hot as fire, a tiny bit bitter. The ropes creaked and Duncan moaned, bucking up toward his mouth. "You like that, don't you, Doc? Want to bust those ropes and fuck me raw, don't you?" He said it against that thin, hot skin, letting his tongue rub a little.

"Fuck..." The single word was a snarl, and he bet this one would pitch and catch and play all the positions.

"Uh-huh." Cowboy licked a little more. "Too bad you're all tied up and can't get me."

"Going to fucking get you." The ropes creaked again, and he watched to see if they'd hold.

They did, but only just. Cowboy grinned. "Well, you're welcome to try. I doubt it, though."

"Let me go. Why are you smiling? This isn't funny."

"No, but it's fun." He bent and kissed the tip of that cock again, loving the tension, the need.

Doc moaned for him, a low sound on the air, sort of cutting through all the blustering. Closing his eyes, Cowboy played it dangerous and sucked Duncan all the way in, going down to the root. He worked his tongue up and down, rough enough to sting, giving a hint of teeth. Duncan started humping up, taking his mouth, happy little sounds filling the air.

Which was when he stopped, natch. Time to bait the bear. Pulling off, he licked his lips. "You want more, Doc?"

"Mother FUCKER!"

He thought that was probably a yes.

"Huh. Well, maybe I'll just go sit over there and jack off." He jerked his head toward the little chair, moving back a few feet. The fury flared in those pretty eyes, and he saw those muscles clench and bulge, fighting the ropes furiously, the wood of the furniture groaning and creaking. Jesus. That man might purely tear him up. Hopefully the urge would be more fuck than fight. Cowboy backed up another half a foot.

One hand came free, then the other, those eyes fastening onto him, filled with pure hunger.

Come on, Doc, he thought. Come on. Hell, he could tie the guy up again when he wore out. Cowboy reached down, very deliberately adjusting himself, teasing.

Doc pounced, taking his ass down with a thump, mouth crashing down on his and kissing him like it was the end of the goddamn world. Fuck him. Fuck him raw. His hands came up to clutch at Duncan's shoulders, his head falling back at a hard angle under the onslaught. They drove together, hard enough that their cocks were gonna bruise. Duncan bit his lips, stole his breath.

He bit back, holding on for dear life. Shit, this was more exhilarating than skydiving, better than a good bar fight. One hand found his ass, yanked him up closer, tighter, squeezing them together.

Cowboy tore his mouth away to breathe, laughing a little, egging the man on. "Come on, Doc. You can do better than this. I want."

Doc snarled and bit down on his shoulder, the sting burning deep. Those thick thighs pushed under him, spreading him wider. Wait. Wait, when had the lean professor gotten *thick*? He stared a little, testing those muscles with his hands. Dude. It was really was like... like the Incredible Hulk or something. He wondered of the Doc's cock had gotten bigger.

At least the son of a bitch wasn't green.

A wet-tipped, heavy cock pushed under his balls, driving against him.

"That's it. That's it." There was no way he could ask the man to actually fuck him like this. That cock was heavy enough, thick enough, that it would tear him up with no lube.

Didn't mean he didn't crave it.

"So hot." The words were almost lost in the low growl, but he heard them, balls to bones.

"You know it, Doc. Hot." He pushed one hand down to grab Duncan's ass, squeezing, those muscles like hot stone. Jesus fuck. Doc moaned and jerked and shot - boom, boom, boom. God damn.

Grunting, Cowboy let Duncan's orgasm push him over, let that hot body and all that rage make him come. He shot hard, his teeth clenched on a moan, his fingers digging in against Duncan's skin. The doc moaned softly, easing down against him, relaxing suddenly, almost completely.

"I got you, Doc. I do." Lord. This was a cluster fuck of mammoth proportions, but he wasn't bored. No sir. Not one bit.

He only got a soft sigh in answer, the man seeming to get lighter.

His hands automatically moved while his mind raced. They'd have to explore this whole phenomenon in depth, and at length. For right now, though, he'd let the Doc sleep, and get him tied up again.

Just in case.



## *Chapter Sixteen*

Neil listened idly to the thousands of little thoughts that bounced off his brain like angry Africanized bees. The commuters were about to start going into the heart of London, and the area around Canary Wharf buzzed with people who had cut themselves shaving and put ladders in their stockings. People who worried about meetings and about how many bagel sandwiches they had to sell to make a profit. It was actually rather pleasant, as it drowned out a good bit of the rather urgent dread lingering in his own mind. They had made it to London just fine. No one seemed inclined to take notice of them, and the modern glass and metal angles of the Wharf seemed to delight Paddy.

Still, Neil had to wonder how his sweet would feel about Canterbury. Or York. Edinburgh.

"Anywhere." Paddy's fingers touched his wrist, just barely, then Paddy melted back into the crowd, curious, looking, watching.

It should have shocked him, that Paddy could do that. Perhaps it had, the first time Paddy had picked another's thoughts out of his head, wanting to know why Neil was craving eel pie.

Neil loathed eel pie.

Paddy had since learned to separate the thoughts, just as he did. His sweet was a smart one, so quick to catch on. It was the oddest thing, though. Paddy could only hear through him; it was all about him, somehow. Chuckling, he reached over to stroke Paddy's belly. His very own receiver.

"Mmm." Paddy smiled at him, eyes just twinkling. "Do you know what fun I could have with one of those chestnut cart dealies?"

"I do, actually." He'd heard all about it in Paddy's mind the night they had roasted chestnuts from a cart near the British Museum. Paddy had loved Russell Square, with the big, stately hotel and the park where tourists took pictures of squirrels, of all things.

That just made Paddy smile all the harder, pure joy pouring from him. "We should go see the mummies again."

"We should. The bog man is rather fascinating, too, hmm?" The museum had made Paddy bounce, which Neil thought was the most delightful thing.

"The bog man. The statues. The whole thing, Neil. It's like magic." Paddy loved the jewels and the bronze and the marble and the hieroglyphs - Neil could see them swirling, making insane patterns.

"Then we'll go again today." Why not? Before they moved on. They would wait out the morning rush at a café and then go in on the Tube.

"The Tube." That fascinated and terrified Paddy, all at once. "Cool."

"Indeed. I know. You think of all of the ways bad things can happen, hmm?" He stroked Paddy's belly, drawing little patterns.

"I can't help it." Of course he couldn't. After all, that was what Paddy had been trained to do for years - invent ways to make bad things happen.

"I never thought you should help it, love." Rising up, Neil leaned on one elbow, smiling down.

Paddy's thoughts scattered, and Neil could see himself, suddenly, lovely and amazing and fine. Smiling, he bent and took a kiss, letting Paddy see how sweet his smile was, how much Neil adored him. Paddy had become his world, somehow. Paddy moaned into his lips, tongue sneaking out to lap at him.

"Mmm." Sweet. Hot. Far better than caffeine to wake up on.

Paddy's laughter tasted good, tickling his lips. "Paddy in a cup."

"With cream. Whipped, not clotted."

Oh, yes. He could have Paddy with whipped cream. Gracious. What a pleasant idea. Oh, Paddy liked that - liked the idea of dabbing the cream between them, tongues licking them clean. Neil put it on his list of Things to Do and concentrated on the now, kissing Paddy harder, pushing him on his back again. That smooth skin was so warm, so good.

Fingers stroked the lines beside his eyes, his cheekbones, Paddy's fingers curious and questioning, mapping him out. Loving the tiny touches, Neil pressed his cheek to Paddy's hand. God, it felt good to focus on Paddy, only his Paddy, letting everything else fall away.

Neil. Neil. Neil. The chant echoed, over and over, Paddy singing it inside, like a prayer. Like a worried prayer.

"Shh. We're fine, sweet. Just fine." Cupping the back of Paddy's head, Neil took another kiss. Then another.

Those lips opened up to him, swollen and soft, following him like it was a dance. They kissed long and lazily, both of them turning a bit to hold on, hands sliding on skin. The bed felt soft and good beneath them, the sounds of their neighbors moving about muted and blurred. Paddy stroked his stomach, fingers drawing wild pictures before sliding around, touching his ink.

"Mmm." There was something amazing about Paddy touching his tattoos. Almost meditative, but sexy at the same time. Sensual.

Paddy slid down, lips trailing down his belly, whispering over his abs, tongue fucking his navel. His body arched, his muscles tightening and releasing, his skin heating up. Neil reached down with one hand, petting Paddy's head. Those curls were wiry, slipping around his fingers, almost holding on as Paddy's lips headed for his cock.

Neil spread his legs and arched, needing more of that mouth, more of the forgetfulness of touch. His love. His.

"Mmhmm." Lips circled the crown of his cock, tongue flicking the slit.

"Love. Oh, love." He petted Paddy's shoulders, his upper back. Yes. More. So good. That wicked tongue pressed inside him, the sting enough to roll his eyes for him. "Paddy. Please." Suddenly it wasn't lazy anymore, wasn't just warm and good. The need uncurled in his belly, riding him hard.

Careful fingers cupped his balls, wrapped around him. Oh. A long, low moan escaped him, his hips arching up and up, his balls drawing tight. That was just it. Just there. Paddy stroked and petted, fingers dragging over his perineum, tapping his hole.

All he could do was spread wider, arch up, then push down, trying to get more sensation. Paddy drove him quite mad. It was delicious.

Paddy loved it, humming and laughing, pulling hard all around his cock.

"Mmm. Yes. More. Please." He had to rock, had to move. Sweet. God.

Two fingers pressed inside him as that hot mouth took him deeper, pushing and stroking hard. Neil rode those fingers, the pressure inside him perfect. Absolutely perfect. He moaned, pushing harder, the stretch making him wiggle. Of course, his wiggle made Paddy chuckle, which made his cock bob.

Laughing, Neil thrust, his cock rubbing at Paddy's lips before pushing back inside. Only Paddy had ever made sex so much bloody *fun*. Paddy's tongue flicked out, lapping and nudging at the tip, almost fucking the slit.

"Love you, sweet. Love you. I swear." He thrashed, trying to remember how to touch, how to make Paddy feel good, too. He was lost, though.

I know. He heard it, clear as a ringing bell, Paddy's tongue slapping his cock, just a tad.

"Good. Good." It seemed very important all of a sudden, for Paddy to know that.

Paddy nodded, the motion tugging him deep into the tight sheath of Paddy's throat. Neil couldn't take any more. Not one second. He came hard, his hips rocking, his skin so tight he thought he might explode. Paddy sucked him down, swallowing hard, loving him.

Flopping back on the bed, he stroked Paddy's hair, murmuring nonsense words. Gracious.

"Mmm." Paddy's lips brushed over the base of his belly, tugging at his curls.

"Sweet. You're so good to me, love. Come here." He pulled Paddy up until their bodies were flush, Paddy's prick pushed against him.

"Love you, huh?" He could feel Paddy's hunger, the little edge of desperation.

"I know, sweet. I know." He reached down, pushing his hand between them, grasping that sweet prick and tugging.

"Mmm..." Paddy pressed against him, eyes going wide.

"So hard for me." Hot, too. Paddy responded to him so well. So perfectly.

"Uh-huh." He squeezed, rolling his fingers against Paddy's cock, loving the moan that earned him.

"Come on, love. Come for me and we'll have a shower and a lovely breakfast." He adored waking up with Paddy.

"Mmm. You can have your beans and mushrooms."

"You can have a fried slice." Somehow, Paddy had grown inordinately fond of deep-fried toast.

"Uh..." Paddy stopped mid-nod, eyes going wide as heat poured over his fingers.

Neil chuckled, licking at Paddy's neck. "It's lovely to know a fried slice is all I need to make you come, Paddy."

Paddy's laughter was like bubbles.

Pulling Paddy close, Neil hugged him tight, holding on for a few moments. A few utterly peaceful, loving moments before the world intruded again.

## *Chapter Seventeen*

He fucking loved the water.

MJ dove deep, chasing a school of little yellow fish, watching as they shifted and turned, the filtered sunlight making them shimmer a little. Pretty pretty. There'd been a wicked evil storm in the night that he hadn't been able to sleep through, so he'd been out on the water for hours now, bare-assed naked and playing.

A huge splash sounded above him, rocking little waves around him, and he could just hear the rebel yell that came with it. Just.

Ah, the morning call of the rare North American Wooded Redneck. One of his favorite species.

MJ swam up toward the surface, taking his time to admire all the way up. Someone else was just as naked, kicking along the surface, that big, fuzzy body all his for the taking. All. His. He nuzzled those heavy balls on the way up, water bubbling around his mouth as Sonny jerked.

Sonny hauled his head above water, grinning at him like a fool. "Hey, Precious."

"Mmm. Sunshine. Good morning." It was working out to be a lovely morning.

"Sun. Water. Your ass. Definitely good." Sonny was all hands and kicking feet, feeling him up but good as they treaded water.

"Mmmhmm." He pushed his hand down, cupping Sonny's balls and tugging a little.

"Don't make me drown, now. You'd miss me." Grinning wider, Sonny swam closer, body flush with his.

"No drowning the local wildlife." His thigh brushed between Sonny's, rubbing a bit.

"No drowning. We agree." Sonny took a kiss, just about the time that they started to sink.

He wrapped his legs around Sonny's waist, dragging them down deeper. His. His redneck. They shared air, kissing back and forth until they had to surface to breathe. Sonny had gotten better at

holding his breath once MJ'd taken away most of the smokes. MJ threw his head back, throat working, gulping in air. Hot. Damn, that was hot.

"Mmm. Damn, Precious." Sonny sounded blown, breathing heavy, voice hoarse. That was even sexier.

"Uh-huh." He grinned, kicked up, nipping Sonny's bottom lip.

Grabbing his ass, Sonny pulled him close, rubbing him all up and down. That weightless thing? So rocked. Of course, those thoughts led to Sonny in Space thoughts. Dude, floating blow jobs.

"What are you grinning like that for?" Sonny's hands were doing something ingenious, so he might really have to think about that.

"Who? Me?" He couldn't help it. There was something grand about the idea of Sonny, bald head in one of those round space helmets, cock bobbing as he floated.

"Yeah. You went from hot as hell to goofy." Sonny bit him again, just to prove his case.

"Huhn?" All thoughts of floating and astrophysics and gravity went the way of the dodo at the touch of those teeth.

"What is it you always tell me? Focus. We're sinking again."

"I am focused." Mostly. Pretty much. Really.

"Uh-huh. I made food. Come up on deck and I'll blow you for breakfast." Tempting. Damned tempting.

"Food and blow jobs? I'm all yours."

"Come on." Sonny gave him one last squeeze before striking off, swimming strongly back to their little boat ladder.

Fuck, he loved his life. He followed along, getting close enough to bite and nip at Sonny's ass all the way up.

This was almost as fun as C-4.

"Watch it, now." Sonny wasn't bitching, though, he was laughing, wiggling, really playing it up.

"I am. I so am, Sunshine." Every fucking inch.

"Mmm. Yeah? Well, you can watch the front." Sonny turned, arms up.

"Oh." Damn. Look at that. He scrambled up another rung, lips parted, taking Sonny's cock in.

"Oh, fuck, Precious." There was extra salt there, from the sea, but the taste of Sonny was unmistakable. He looked up, tongue fucking the tip of that thick cock, taking more and more in. "That's it. Just like that." Sonny was oral both ways. Equal opportunity. Sucker and suckee.

He held on to the ladder, letting Sonny's hips set the rhythm, push him. They kinda swung, just slapping against the hull a little, Sonny pressing into his mouth over and over. He could so get used to this. He licked and sucked, both of them working, Sonny's cock sinking deep. Sonny's feet were slipping on the rungs, but those big hands held, the body itself rock solid so Sonny could push into his mouth. Over and over.

Addictive asshole. He sucked harder, swallowing around the tip of Sonny's cock.

"Shit! Shit, MJ. Christ." Sonny came for him, just... Yeah. That was even better than swimming.

Hell, it was better than almost anything.

"Mmm." Sonny pushed one hand through his hair, the other still holding that fairly lax body up on the ladder. He licked Sonny clean, then braced himself, using one arm to spin Sonny and him back into the water.

"Gonna drown me now, Precious?" Sonny clung, heavy and hot, rubbing all over him.

"Nope. Just swimming." Touching. Good shit.

"Oh, good." He got another one of those bright grins, Sonny looking to be in an amazing mood, now. "What about you?"

"I might be dying of an advanced case of blue balls. Either that or it's the bends." Sometimes he amused himself.

"Well, I can't do a thing about the bends." Sonny reached beneath the water, cupping his cock with one hand. "This I can help."

He bobbed, up and down, swallowing his groan. "You'd better."

"You sure you want to do this in salt water?" Teasing bastard was already stroking him, knowing how he liked it.

He opened his mouth to answer, moaning instead, one hand on Sonny's shoulders. "Just don't let the sharks get me."

"I promise, Precious. No sharks." Sonny's legs moved against his, brushing against his skin as they both kicked.

"Good." Maybe this fucking in the water was a bad idea. He could see them wearing out.

"Shh. No thinking."

No. No thinking, not when Sonny's thumb pressed against his slit, the sting almost shooting him out of the water.

"Who's thinking. Fucking do that again." Now.

"Like that, huh?" Sonny did it for him again, a little harder. A little stronger.

"Yes. Like that. God *damn* it, Sonny." He needed that fine, strong bastard like no one else. Ever.

"Shit, Precious. You're fucking amazing." Sonny gave it to him good, stroking and pulling, scraping his most sensitive skin until he wanted to scream.

Their lips crashed together, drawing blood, and he shot so hard it hurt in the back of his head, made his heart pound. Sonny held him, solid as a rock, while he thrashed in the water, and that heavy body managed to keep them afloat, which was probably a miracle. "I got you, MJ. I got you."

"Wow." His legs felt like jelly. "You may have to leave me here."

"I could tow you, huh? Like, trolling for sharks."

Evil man.

"Don't make me kill you. I'm all boneless."

"We love boneless. Chicken. Steak. All of those things. I like you with or without." Sonny gave him a hard, sucking kiss before towing him to the boat.

"Mmm." He nodded, started to help. "We should nap, then I'll shave you, hmm?"

"That sounds like a great idea." That slow, wide grin made him laugh. Sonny loved it when he shaved that bald head.

It made for a sweet afternoon.



## *Chapter Eighteen*

He couldn't stop dreaming.

No matter what he did, how he tried to wake himself up, he couldn't stop dreaming about hospitals and doctors, red floods of rage. Duncan moaned, jerking and twisting, hands and feet caught.

Caught.

Wait.

His eyes popped open. Caught. Ropes. "Let me up."

"Shh. You have to calm down, Doc. I don't have time to fuck you into oblivion right now." The cowboy was standing by the window, off to one side, peeping very carefully.

"What's the matter?" Somewhere, deep in the back of his head, he heard, 'Are they coming to get me?'

What did that mean?

Where did that come from?

And didn't he want someone to rescue him?

"Maybe nothing. Maybe a whole lot. We'll just have to see." Silent as smoke, Cowboy came over to the bed and pulled a bag out from the drawer in the bedside table.

Was the man going to leave him here, like this?

He started tugging a little, trying to make his fingers work, figure out the knots.

"Shush, Doc. I'm just getting a little insurance. You'd best just stay down." A big black gun appeared in Cowboy's hand, gleaming and smelling like oil.

Okay. Okay, people didn't just pull guns in hotel rooms in... were they still in Dallas? Had they moved? What day was it? Still, Cowboy just had done all that, right? Jesus.

Okay. Okay. He wasn't stupid. He was a professor. He could untie knots. Up, down, around. Come on.

"Sit still, Doc. You hear me? I need to know where you are if things get hairy." The man crossed back to the window, leaning on the other side, now.

"Hairy? God, let me up."

"Will you shut up?" Cowboy's voice cracked like... like a pistol shot. Boom. Made him jump.

He shut up, focusing on staying still and working the ropes. Whatever was coming, whoever was coming, he didn't have a real good feeling about it. Just about the time he thought he was free, Cowboy came rushing at him, untying the last of his knots and pushing him to the floor. "Find some clothes," Cowboy hissed. "It's about to get ugly."

A sudden, sharp rage hit him, deep in the gut. "Who is it? Your bosses?"

"I don't think so, honey." Crouching next to him, Cowboy shoved a pair of pants at him. "I don't think so."

"I didn't do anything." He dragged the pants on, tugged on a shirt. "I didn't fucking *do* anything."

"Well, tell that to them." Hand on the back of his neck, Duncan pushed him toward the door, keeping him low. "Keep your head on, Doc. I kinda like it."

"What are we doing?" This was more than a little outside the grading-papers-and-drinking-coffee lifestyle he was used to.

"We're getting away, honey." He got a wild grin, Cowboy's eyes glittering with a kind of crazy humor. "They're not coming through the door."

"They're..." Oh, God. Okay. Damn. The sound of glass breaking happened as they shut the door.

They moved down the hall, Cowboy looking like a commando from a movie or something, only in jeans and boots and shit. Somehow the whole thing made him want to laugh hysterically. He heard something behind him, a door crashing open, the cracks and snaps of something that he didn't consciously understand. Then fire bloomed in his shoulder and the world went a blinding white and Duncan was gone.

Just gone.

## *Chapter Nineteen*

He snarled and ran, blind with a dark fury, hands reaching for the enemy, the skulls like children's balls in his palms, the sound of them snapping and crashing together unavoidably satisfying, feeding his dark hunger.

Something hurt - something deep in his shoulder, burning like a dozen stinging bees, but he didn't care. Enemy.

He knew this.

He knew.

His feet slammed into the floor as he headed for another one, the weapon in its hands flashing as he swatted it away then sent the enemy soaring through the air, sliding down a far wall at the end of the corridor, the body leaving a wet smear behind.

Enemy.

The sound was maddening, a bang, bang right behind him, over his shoulder, and another of the bodies flew away. A warm body hit his back, pushing him past the fallen ones. He turned to attack, met familiar eyes. His. He reached back and grabbed the man, running for the stairs, carrying both their weights easily. "Out."

A breathless chuckle answered him. "Yeah, honey. Out. Now."

"Out." He knew this. He hit the glass door with one shoulder, the whole thing shattering.

The other clung to him, holding on hard, soft curses falling around them with the shattered glass. The pop pop pop sound came next to his ear, but he barely acknowledged it. The night was heavy, thick and misting, and he sniffed hard, trying to find the darkest shadows, the heaviest quiet places.

"Honey, you have to put me down." The words barely made sense, but he knew he didn't want to do what they told him to.

"Dark." He moved deeper into the shadows, the edge of danger fading from the corner of his brain.

"Uh-huh. Dark. Car. We can go to the car."

He stopped, confused, the rage fading a bit, the pain the only thing keeping him here.

"Come on, honey. Put me down. I can help." The voice, the one that was his, made sense now. He got it.

The shudders were starting, vibrating all through him, and he eased the voice down.

"Good. That's good." Warm hands fell on his arm, the feel of even hotter metal in one of them making him jump. "I left most of my shit in the car. It's parked a few blocks away. Stay with me, Doc."

"Stay." He lumbered, following, the bright ache in his shoulder all he could focus on, the blackness where he lived most of his days yawning behind him.

Picking up one foot after the other, putting them down, he followed, stopping when the other stopped, staring at a large, black vehicle.

"Come on, Doc. In. I'll patch you up as soon as we know we've lost them."

"Lost them." He crawled into the darkness in the back, made himself small.

Very small.

"Mine."

"Well, technically it's mine, but you're welcome to bleed on it." The car roared to life, the momentum as they went backward slamming him into the seat.

He didn't bother to argue. He simply groaned and closed his eyes, let his man take them away.

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The Doc wasn't doing too bad for someone who'd been shot more than once. Well, shot hard once, nicked a few times, and had a few burns on his ear where Cowboy had shot over the Doc's shoulder on the way out.

The man had carried him. Carried him, through a glass window and most of the three and a half blocks to the car.

Talk about a novel experience.

Now he was holed up in a much cheaper motel than the last place, doors and windows barricaded, with Duncan spread out on the bed, ready to be surged on.

Sighing, he put his cell phone aside, knowing it would be better to call MJ from a pay phone, so it would have to wait. Duncan was still bleeding sluggishly, but he looked surprisingly good for someone who'd done the berserker thing.

Duncan shifted a little, sighing restlessly. "What happened?"

"You got shot. Sorry about that, Doc." First Aid kit, bandages, ice bucket full of water. Ta da.

"Shot. You know, you could have left me to grading my papers. I was happy."

"I could have, but then you'd be dead. Happily dead?" Cowboy tilted his head. "Is that one of them oxymorons?"

"I suppose that depends upon whether the dead person in question was miserable or overjoyed."

Snorting, Cowboy grabbed the tweezers and the bottle of rubbing alcohol. "Don't get all prim and pedantic on me, Doc. I ain't stupid." Hell, he'd bet Duncan was surprised that he knew what pedantic meant.

"I don't believe I accused you of stupidity, Colby. Over-eager violence, yes. A rather unique sense of personal space, absolutely. But not stupidity." Duncan looked over at him. "Besides, I always get pedantic when I'm scared."

"Well, you sure didn't look scared when you were carrying me out of the last hotel." He snapped the tweezers and bared his teeth. "This is the easy part."

"I couldn't carry you. You outweigh me by fifty pounds, easily." Duncan looked green around the gills. "Are you sure this is necessary?"

"Well, it's not like I could do x-rays, but there's no exit wound. So the slug has to come out." It was kind of amazing how little bruising the Doc had around the bullet hole. Hell, Cowboy was one big bruise, just from going through the window.

"No. No, I don't think so." Duncan shook his head. "I'll go to a hospital."

"Sure. 'Course, the kind of guys you got looking for you will be monitoring all hospitals, and doctors are bound by law to report gunshot wounds to the police..."

"That I have looking for me? Excuse me? You're the one with the gun. Who would want me? I'm a fucking English professor!"

"Good thing I had that gun, too." They could go round and round for hours, and the Doc was still bleeding. Cowboy bellied up to the bed and held Duncan down by the simple means of kneeling over his hips. Duncan bucked up, ass rubbing right into his balls.

"Careful, Doc. You'll give me a happy." The only other guy who'd ever gotten him off all bloody and bruised was MJ.

"Fuck you." Man, the meat of Duncan's shoulder was raw, but the bleeding had stopped, the skin knitting.

"We'll get to that." Laughing, he poured alcohol right on the wound, figuring there wasn't any sense in babying this along. Then he pushed in with the tweezers, searching until he felt the clink of metal on metal.

Duncan bit out a short scream, muscles rippling under him. Then the man bucked again, damn near throwing him.

"Doc. Come on, it's almost out. Don't get all muscle man on me now." He just had to... ha! There. Now he just had to make sure there was no trace of shirt fabric in there.

Duncan went still under him, the only sound the soft panting.

"Good. You're good to go." More alcohol, a swab or two with the big pad, and that was that. He didn't think it needed packing.

"I'm going to take a shower." Duncan started wiggling, trying to slide out from under him.

"No, you're not. I still have to clean up a couple grazes, and then I need you to check my back. Glass." He had more than a dozen little cuts, which were more an annoyance than anything, but he had to make sure they were clean.

"Glass. Where did we get covered in glass?"

"When you busted out of the hotel. Weren't you listening earlier?" Lord. He could understand the whole losing time and action thing. A good warrior could do that and not remember a thing later, if he had to.

Still, he'd mentioned the window, he was pretty sure.

"Well, I remember some nonsense about me carrying you, but that's impossible." Doc shifted, grunted as he wiped down another long cut. "Of course, this entire fucked-up thing isn't possible. I don't even know what day it is."

"It's..." He paused. Shit. Cowboy didn't know what day it was, either. "Okay, Doc. You're good. Check me out, then you can have your shower."

Then he could go to the parking lot and call MJ.

The face was as gray as a storm, but to his credit Duncan sat up, took the tweezers from him. The slivers of glass were carefully removed, the man oddly gentle with him.

He sighed once they were all out, rolling his shoulders. "Thanks, Doc."

"Uh-huh." The man stumbled to the bathroom, the door shutting and locking, the water starting almost immediately.

Damn, he was tired. Cowboy slipped on a shirt and his shoes, heading out as quietly as he could. Hopefully, Duncan would sit in the shower and shake a bit, giving him time. Just in case, he put a little rubber doorstop under the door, which might stymie the Doc a bit.

The pay phone was gross, grimy and damp, but Cowboy just wiped it down and dialed in, using a stolen calling card to do the job. The phone was answered, the connection tinny and buzzing. No one said a word.

"Hello? Is this Shiner's Bar and Grill?"

"Yeah. You looking for the bartender or the manager?"

"The manager. I need to talk personnel." That ought to tell them exactly what he wanted.

"Give me five minutes and I'll get him." The phone clicked and clacked, buzzed and hummed, then MJ's voice sounded. "Cowboy. We're in the clear."

"Good. I hope the wait was worth it." He grinned, feeling better just hearing his buddy's voice.

"You know it. Where are you? Having fun?"

"You have no idea, man. I'm having so much fun it's like going to the movies every day. Like, the Incredible Hulk, for instance."

"What? I thought they were all dead..."

"Wait." Cowboy checked his danger spots before indulging in a growl. "You know this guy?"

"Nope. I know of the project, vaguely. Let me guess, he's into academics somehow? A scholar? Student? Professor?"

"English prof, yeah. Jesus, Jay-Jay. There was a program? Someone did this deliberately?"

"Yeah. There was some brutal shit going on. Still is, I guess. You need to just walk away, babe. Turn and walk away..." He could hear MJ's brain clicking away. "How'd you find him?"

"I was on a job. He was the job. So you can see why I can't just let it go." He didn't complete the task at hand. That could get his ass killed.

"Damn. Yeah. Okay. I, uh, guess completing the job isn't an option for you."

"Nope." Shit, MJ should understand that. He'd taken up with some redneck moonshiner who'd kidnapped him, for God's sake.

"Cool. Does your client know?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I would say so. They tried to retrieve the package."

"Fuck me. Babe, you need to hustle. You need to hustle and check him for a chip - hairline, under the arms, crease by the balls. It'll be little, but you'll be able to feel it. Get it out and put it on a bus." MJ was a wealth of entertaining information.

"Oh, that'll go over like a lead balloon." Sighing, he rubbed the back of his neck, watching the entrance of the motel.

"Well, your other option is to fight them in waves. That could be fun." MJ was always up for a little trouble.

"I'll find the damned chip." He'd just get the Doc mad... "What else do I need to know?"

"I never met one in person, man. They were testing on their adrenals, their pituitary - heavy-duty crapola. There were rumors about starting armies, about programming scary shit into normal guys. The project was on the outs when I left, and the rumor was that the place burned, killed them all - subjects and scientists - a couple years ago."

"Well, if there's one, there might be more, so if you hear rumblings, let me know." The back of his neck started to tingle like a Spidey sense or something. When the hell he got dumped into a motherfucking comic book story, he didn't know. "I need to know I can get ahold of you if I need you, man."

"Any time. You have the account still, for the email?"

"I do." That would work, assuming he got a new laptop. His old one had gotten, uh, lost, under Duncan's foot at the last hotel. The thing just shattered. "You'll be where you can check?"

"Yes. You be careful. If you need anything..."

"I'll holler. If you think of anything else I need to know, you let me know." They'd been on the phone long enough. Time to go, get that chip and put it on a semi.

"Ciao." The line went dead. Click.



Damn it. MJ was always a help and a hindrance at the same time. Oh, he couldn't blame the man for not offering to ride to the rescue, but he could offer a little more...

Whine, whine, whine.

Cowboy headed back to the motel room, ready to do a little more surgery.

The door was still shut; he took that as a plus. Hell, the water was still running. The little doorstop came away easily, and Cowboy put it back under the door from the inside, fixing the deadbolt with a magnetic spike. Then he knocked on the bathroom door, giving Duncan the illusion of privacy. "You okay, Doc?"

It took a second, but he heard the muffled, "Yeah."

"Well, I got us some food out of the SUV, so when you're ready, come on out and have a bite." I need to dig into your skin and get a chip out...

"Kay." The man was never getting out of the bathroom. Ever.

He could pick the lock, but damn. The Doc had really had a rough day.

Eventually, though, the water stopped and Duncan walked out, draped in towels. The steam damned near made his eyes water. "Feel better, man?"

"Yeah. I washed out the clothes. My shirt's trashed, but the pants are still fine."

"Cool." He patted the bed, handing over a survival rations pack. "You're not allergic to peanuts, are you?"

"No. No, I used to think so, but I ended up not being."

"Huh. Well, this has peanuts and chocolate chips and some pretzels. All the good stuff. We'll get a real meal once we've moved again."

Moved, gotten rid of the homing device.

"Where are we going?" Duncan still looked a little shell-shocked, shoulder still a little stiff.

"We're going to try to outrun the guys who are chasing you." He gave Duncan a shrewd look. "You used to work at a special school, didn't you?"

"A special school?" Duncan's head tilted like a puppy's. "No. No, I mean, I taught at a university for gifted students - focused on science and math. They had horrendous papers."

"Yeah. That counts as special." MJ was one of those gifted students, God help him.

"Why? Is this... is one of my students angry at me?"

"No. No, I think it's more about the administration." He waited until the Doc was munching chocolate, getting the good feelings from it, before moving up behind him on the bed. He had to find that chip.

"They were all assholes. Government types. The benefits were great, but... sometimes you have to move on."

"I bet." He started tracing patterns on the back of Duncan's neck, checking the skin for irregularities.

Duncan shivered, head falling forward. "What are you doing?"

"Just making sure you're not hurt anywhere else." Which was true enough, but if there was no chip, there was no use in panicking Doc.

"I think I'll be okay."

Nothing there. Damn it.

"Well, if you don't mind me looking." Cowboy chuckled. "You didn't mind me touching before."

"No. No, I... You've got a... a seductive touch."

"No shit? That's the first time anyone's said that, Doc. No one was ever able to press charges, though." Seductive. Him. Wow.

Duncan chuckled. "I feel like Alice after she's gone down the rabbit hole."

"So do I, honey." For good seductive measure, he kissed the back of Duncan's neck, his fingers searching down either side of Duncan's spine.

"I..." Duncan groaned a little bit, shifting. No little scars, no bumps. Damn it.

"Hmm?" Shifting himself, he eased Duncan back to the bed, kneeling next to the prone form to start on the front.

"Nothing." Duncan pulled the towel tighter around his hips.

"Don't get all modest on me. I have to see." There were some cuts and scrapes on the arms, but no scars by Duncan's armpits or elbows. He reached for the towel, sliding it open as he kept going. His fingers found an appendix scar, a little outie belly button. Heavy curls, that pretty cock, ball sac... His fingers trailed over a tiny scar, right at the join of thigh and hip, a little bump, right there.

"Damn." Sighing, he geared up for what would undoubtedly be a bad conversation. "Doc, we got a problem."

"What? And why am I not surprised?" Duncan scooted away, sat up.

He met Duncan's eyes, holding them with his. "It's not my fault, man. Not yours either, I imagine, but it is what it is. You've got an embedded homing device." Might as well just spit it out.

"A what?" Duncan moved a little further away.

"A chip. Right here." The spot felt rough under his fingers when he reached out to push against it.

"Bullshit. That's a scar from a medical test, when they were trying to help my migraines."

"Migraines?" The anger was a good thing, allowing him to scoot closer without Duncan noticing.

"Yeah. I get them. I've tried lots of things." Duncan ran his hands through his hair, sighing a little.

"You ever lose time?" Another inch, then two, and his leg rested against Duncan's on the bed.

"Yeah. I get the whole thing - visuals, light sensitivity, the whole shebang. You get them, too?"

"Me? No. I got a friend who used to. Bad." The things the government did to people...

"Yeah." Duncan shifted again, nostrils flaring like the man was scenting the air.

"Anyway, I want you to feel, right here." Cowboy touched that spot again. "There's something under there."

"It's just scar tissue. I've had the doctor look."

"What doctor? The one at the school?" Shit, those people were... Kind of horrific.

"Yeah. I told you, I'm on this program. Was. Whatever. I mean, the program got canceled a few months ago."

"Well, there you go. A doctor with the Program could lie. Look, let me prove it to you. If I'm wrong, I'll think of some way to make it up to you."

"Prove it how?" Duncan was starting to panic.

"Let me make a tiny cut." Okay, the Doc might bolt. Cowboy got ready to hold him down.

"Huh? No. No. No fucking way. I just let you stick tweezers in me."

"Well, I guess I could just leave you and let them track you down. Took all of five hours last time, yeah?" He'd play hardball if he had to.

"Me? What about you? Why would they be after me? You're not making sense, asshole!" Doc could get shrill.

"Don't call me an asshole." He stared Duncan right down, waiting for the man to calm. "They're after you because you're the test rabbit. I'm just the guy who was supposed to take you out."

"So go. Let whoever it is that is supposed to be coming come. I haven't ever been shot at or kidnapped or cut or..." Duncan was about to lose it; he could tell.

"Doc." Cowboy reached out and put his hand on Duncan's thigh, high enough to nudge those heavy balls.

"Fuck, man. I'm way out of my league."

"We're not out of mine. You just have to trust me." He was well aware that the Geneva Conventions would accuse him of, like, trying to create Stockholm syndrome or something, but in this case, the Doc really needed to believe him to stay alive.

"I... Fuck. If there's nothing, I'm leaving. Do you understand? If there's nothing, I'm going to hit you in the head with a lamp and leave."

"Okay. We have a deal." Of course, Duncan in a full rage might kill him with a lamp, but hey. He got up and got the first aid kit again, knowing there'd be a sterile scalpel. Duncan stood up, started pacing, muttering to himself.

"Duncan. I can't do this with you up and walking." Poor guy. This was a lot to take in. Cowboy? He was used to weird shit.

"I know. I'm just... Trying to walk off nerves."

"Oh." Right. Uh-huh. "Well, holler at me when you're ready." The ice bucket was still full of water, so he dumped it in the sink and rinsed it. "I'm going to get ice. Don't run off."

"Yeah. Right." He got a look, then Duncan shook his head. "I want a chocolate sundae, a fifth of tequila and a steak."

"Sure. In that order if you want, as soon as we get rid of the chip." He sighed, rolling his head on his neck. "The ice will help numb you down a bit, Doc. That's all."

"Yeah. Yeah, okay. Let's get it over with before I lose my nerve."

"I'll be back in a sec." He went to the old ice machine, listening to it wheeze, checking the parking lot carefully. This would take a few minutes. It would suck to be interrupted.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

He couldn't help but think this was somehow MJ's fault.

Ice achieved, he beat the concrete back to the room, making sure Duncan was still with him. That seemed weirdly important, especially since Cowboy was really the love 'em and leave 'em kind.

The door was open, and he could just see Duncan's ass, bent over by the Coke machine.

It was really a fine specimen of an ass. Far too nice for a professor. Really.

Duncan popped the top of the Coke, turned and jumped. "Damn. You scared me. You want one, too?"

"Sure." Who couldn't use a little caffeine? "So, they have Dr. Pepper?"

"Yeah. Yeah, they do. Hold on." Duncan walked back, that shoulder not even really pulling anymore. That was just freaky. For a moment, Cowboy allowed himself to imagine MJ on a drug like that. He assumed it was a drug. A series of drugs. Whatever the fuck it was, it was wrong. Hot and sort of cool as fuck, but wrong.

"Okay. You ready?" Back in the room, he watched Duncan suck his Coke back and waited, knowing the man had to settle.

"Yeah. I managed to let you pull a fucking bullet out of me. This is more like a splinter, right?"

Duncan sat down, undid his pants, and spread.

Oh, fuck him raw, that was distracting. Cowboy shook it off. "Yeah. It'll be like a splinter." He got his shit together, got over where he could touch.

Of course, that heavy cock started to fill and things started to get intense.

"Really damned distracting, Doc. Gonna need steady hands for this." One finger trailed the length of Duncan's cock. He just couldn't help it.

"It's a completely biological reaction. I can't help it." Uh-huh.

"Sure. I tell you what, Doc, this is one messed-up situation." He took a handful of ice and rubbed it over the spot he needed to cut, knowing it would help with the sticky-outy part, too.

"No..." Duncan peeped a little, jumped. "No shit."

"Sorry, but it will help." Washcloth, sterile pad, alcohol. "Take a deep breath, Doc, and hold still."

Duncan sat, eyes focused somewhere past his shoulder.

Good man. There was no way to make it better except to stop putting it off, so Cowboy pinched up the skin around the chip and picked his spot, his damned good knowledge of anatomy keeping him from hitting anything important.

Duncan went stiff, muscles jerking against his belly. No bulging up on him now.

"Breathe, Duncan." Cowboy met those eyes for a moment, trying to calm the guy. "Just a few more seconds."

He could feel it. It was going to pop right out.

"M cool." Uh-huh. That suave voice was all growls and rumbles.

"Shh. Just in, out. In through your nose, out through your mouth." That was one of the first things they taught you about pain management and torture. Grinning at the thought, Cowboy got the scalpel under the little metal and plastic device and worked it out of Duncan's skin.

"Jesus fuck, that pulls." It was gory, too. Kind of cool. Too bad he couldn't keep it.

"I know. I'm sorry." He cleaned the little wound thoroughly, swabbing it with the alcohol, then pressing a towel down on it. "Hold that while I clean this up so you can see."

Duncan held the towel, nostrils flaring like a horse's. Yep. This *had* to be MJ's fault. He was going to kick Jay-Jay's ass next time he saw the man.

He toweled the chip off, but left it just gory enough that Duncan couldn't accuse him of producing it out of nowhere. "There you go, Doc."

Duncan stared at it, face pasty. "What is that?"

"It's a chip, Doc. A locator." He needed to get it on a truck. Something.

"Why?"

"Shit, Duncan. It would take a month of Sundays to explain." Not that he really could. He needed MJ to do that. "I need to get rid of this."

"Okay." Duncan nodded, stood up and fastened his pants, found his shoes.

"Doc... What are you doing?"

"I don't know. Trying not to have a meltdown. Leaving. Going home. I don't have the foggiest fucking idea."

"No. You go home, they won't need a chip." He looked around, seeing too much gore and shit to stay there. They'd paid up front, cash, so they could go, give themselves a little false trail.

"I don't even know where the fuck I am. I don't know what day it is. I don't know if my classes are being covered or if someone's feeding my motherfucking FISH!" Yep. Shrill.

Cowboy pushed Duncan back down on the bed, opening the recently closed fly of the doc's pants, pushing in to grab the thick cock. "Too much thinking, Duncan."

"What the fuck are you..." Their lips crashed together, hard enough to split their lips, and fuck him raw, Duncan tasted good, felt better. He pushed his hand farther into the cloth, rubbing in a full circle, Duncan's cock moving under his hand. They kissed like there was no fucking tomorrow, hard and deep and enough to make his blood pound in his temples.

"More." Duncan bit his bottom lip hard enough to sting, get his blood bubbling.

"Uh-huh." Definitely more. He pushed Duncan down, crawling on top, straddling those lean hips.

"Fuck." Duncan's heels dug into the mattress, those hips slamming up into him hard enough to jostle his bones.

"That's the idea, honey." A wild grin stretched his cheeks, and Cowboy bent to kiss Duncan again, rubbing his ass against that hard cock. Duncan was right there with him, humping and moaning, rocking but hard. His hands slipped back, one to brace himself, the other to grab Duncan's cock and push it harder against him. He should have taken his damned jeans off.

One hand dragged down his spine, leaving a burning trail along his skin.

Grunting, Cowboy let go of Duncan and fumbled with his own zipper and button, his cock about to bust it was squeezed so tight in the cloth. Oh, fuck. Better.

"I can smell you." The words pushed right into his lips, one hand landing on his ass and pushing them tighter together, their cocks sliding and bumping.

"Smell us," he corrected, rubbing harder now, the feel of skin on skin making him moan. Shit, this guy got to him.

"Fuck. Fuck, yes." Doc moaned, one leg wrapping around his hip. "Harder. Come on. I'm burning up."

"I know, Doc. I can feel." Shifting, he got their cocks fully together, the skin at the tip catching on Duncan's, his balls rubbing against skin, too. Jesus fuck.

"Yes." Duncan stared at him, eyes blazing, then their lips crashed together again, both of them driving hard.

He couldn't tell if the Doc was in there, or if this was his evil twin. Didn't really matter, either, not when the man was making him feel this good. Hell, it was like two for the price of one. Buy a bottom; get a top. Kidnap a professor; get carried off by a big-assed super soldier.

Duncan shifted, leg rubbing a little harder against his balls, and he lost his train of thought. Boom.

His cock throbbed, the threat of orgasm shooting up his spine. Cowboy dug his fingers into Duncan's chest, the skin there rough with the tiniest bit of extra hair. Shit, yes. That low growl vibrated in his ear, fingers tapped his hole.

Back arching hard, Cowboy panted, his skin too damned tight. "In, Doc. S'okay."

Doc roared and spun him. All of the sudden he was on his belly, staring at the comforter, a hot tongue on his hole.

Huh. He'd have to remember that reflex next time. Use it to his... Oh. Christ. Good.

Doc was thorough - hungry and pushy, tongue driving into him, but damn thorough, making sure he was plenty wet before pulling away and pushing into him. Every muscle in his body went tight; every bit of him strained to keep the Doc out. To pull him in. Doc's growl vibrated all along his spine, and one big, rough hand wrapped around his cock, grabbing him and stroking him off.

"Fuck!" The sound exploded out of him, a shout that rang through the room. He bucked, caught between Duncan's hand and cock, not sure which way to go to make it even better.

"Fu-u-u-uck." Duncan chose for him, pushing him with that cock into Duncan's hand.

Cowboy shot like a ton of bricks, his head almost smacking into Duncan's, his back arched so hard with it. "Jesus fuck!"

Duncan's prick pushed deep, those hips rocking for what seemed like forever - hell, he was thinking he could almost get it up again before the strong rhythm got jerky and hard. Pushing back with everything he had left, Cowboy rocked until their skin slapped together, so hard that it rang out like a pistol shot.

"Yes..." That heavy cock pulsed, filled him up.

Shit. He might just be ruined for life. He'd never be able to walk away like a man. More like a man with bad jock itch.



Doc landed on him, heavy and solid.

He listened to them both breathe for a long moment. Time was ticking away in his head, though. They had to get moving. "Doc. You better?"

"Mmm." That was a heavy, sleepy sound, almost like a bear.

"Good. I hate to be the one to bust your bubble, but we got to go. You can sleep while I drive." His aching ass would keep him awake.

"Go?" He felt the soft rumble more than heard it. "Again?"

"I know. But we got to get that chip going one way and us the other. How do you feel about the beach?"

"I like the beach. Padre?"

"I'm not sure, but we'll head that way." He was thinking someplace obscure, but with a big enough marina for MJ's boat.

"Okay. I... You're sure. You're sure they're after me?"

"Doc." He squirmed free and raised up on one elbow. "I know. This was a widespread program. I can't explain it all, 'cause I don't know, but I know someone who can."

"I don't have any reason to trust you." Duncan was going to, though, Cowboy could tell.

"I know. Hey, I didn't shoot you." That was something, right? He'd shot MJ before.

"Are you sure?" Fuck him, that was a fine, fine smile. It just lit the son of a bitch right on up.

"I am. I got you shot, which, okay. My bad. But you were kinda focused." He grinned back, hauling his ass up, even though it was kinda screaming at him.

"I think you mean terrified." Duncan got moving, too, grabbing clothes, cleaning up.

"That, too." Look at him, motivating the Doc. He hoped. "Okay, I need to wipe down after we're done."

"Wipe down? You want a shower? I left you a towel."

"No, I mean wipe the room for fingerprints. We'll take all the towels and find a place to dump them." No blood evidence, either, not if he could help it.

"Oh." Man, someone needed to get a survival bone.

At least the Doc was willing to learn, helping him gather up everything and stuff it into the laundry bag, including the ice bucket. He used the last towel to wipe everything down, handing off the bag to Duncan. "Use the towel to open the door. I'll get my kit."

"Okay. What are you doing with the... the thing?"

"We're going to put it on a truck." A big one. One that would move fast and had a Yankee license plate.

"Okay." That was definite. Someone seemed a little offended that he'd been chipped like a prize dog.

Why not? He woulda dug it out with his bare hands. One last check of the room told him they'd done all they could, and his neck was on fire, his nose for trouble telling him to move, move, move.

"Come on, Doc. Let's get this show on the road."

Hopefully they'd cover their tracks well enough to get ahead a good ways.

Then they'd get to someone who could explain.

## *Chapter Twenty*

Sonny watched MJ get the boat ready to move, pulling lines and checking anchors. They were pushing toward the mainland, and he wasn't real sure why. All he knew was that someone had called MJ, not once, but a couple times, and suddenly they were moving out.

He'd been a good boy. He hadn't asked. Sonny had, in fact, waited patiently for MJ to tell him what was going on. Looked like he was low on patience now, though, because he was getting pissed off.

A lot.

Finally, he just got in MJ's way, arms crossed, waiting for the man to acknowledge him.

"What's up, Sunshine?" MJ met his eyes, one eyebrow quirking.

"Well, Precious. I want to know who you're calling babe on the phone." Shit. That wasn't what he wanted to say at all.

"Huh? That's Cowboy. He's a friend of mine."

"A friend." He didn't know MJ had friends. The last old friend had ended up causing no end of trouble.

"Yeah. We've done a couple jobs together, hung out. I taught him to surf. He sucks at it."

Sonny stared, his lips pressed into a tight line. Then he took a deep breath. "So, why are we going to meet him?"

"He's got a problem and he's hoping I have answers. Besides, you haven't met him yet. I want to show you off."

"Uh-huh." A friend that MJ called babe. "How long is he staying?"

"We're going to him. I want to be able to move if shit gets weird." That cold look was in MJ's eyes, one that meant trouble that didn't have anything to do with him.

"So, what's going to get weird?" He reached out to touch MJ's chest, knowing it would be better if they connected.

"Mmm." MJ stepped closer. "He got a guy who he thinks used to be in the Program. A professor. One of the experiments."

"No shit, huh?" Oh, fuck a doodle doo. Those people were crazy.

"Yep. I didn't want to give our spots away, so I said we'd go to him." MJ's hands wrapped around his waist. "We're cool?"

"Yeah. Just kind of took me by surprise." He'd have to meet the guy before they were cool.

"He's good at his job. He only shot me once."

Sonny was going to kill him. Like dead. The guy, not MJ. "He shot you."

"Once."

"Well, that's more than I've shot you."

He got a quick, wild grin. "You took a bullet for me. That's vastly more impressive."

"It is. You just keep that in mind." Damn it, he wanted to be mad.

His scar was touched, stroked. "Yeah. I do."

Fucker.

"Come here." He hauled MJ right up against his body, hands going around to grab that fine ass. He needed to remind MJ about more than getting shot.

Their bellies slapped together, almost fucking stinging him. "Horny bastard."

"Mine." Horny, growly, and damned ready to get over himself.

"Yeah? Prove it." MJ leaned in, bit his bottom lip but good.

Moaning, he pushed MJ right down on the deck, covering that tanned body with his own. Goddamn, that was fine, hot as hell, his cock pushing down against MJ's hip.

"Fuck me." It wasn't a question; it was a goddamn demand.

"Yeah. Yeah, Precious." MJ's head smacked against the deck when Sonny pushed him again, sliding back to lift those lean hips in the air. He got a good, hard look at all that tanned skin, the

black ink, the rippled belly. All his. Then he bent and spread MJ wide, licking at the tight hole, his face nudging those heavy balls. Everything. He needed everything. Now.

MJ's heels dug into his shoulder blades, MJ pushing into him, taking all he wanted to give. The heat and musk made him dizzy, and the taste of his MJ was addictive. He could almost forget everything else. Almost. Good thing for MJ that he had focus. When he had MJ good and wet, he slid two fingers into that hot body, opening MJ for his cock, getting the man ready for him. He wasn't gonna go easy.

"Yours, yeah? Come on. I won't break." No. No, MJ took everything he'd give.

Sonny pushed his fingers in and out, making sure MJ was ready. Then he backed off, getting his other hand good and wet with spit to slick himself up. "You ready, Precious?"

"You know it, Sunshine. Do it like you mean it."

Pulling MJ up on his thighs, Sonny muscled up, the tip of his cock pushing, demanding entrance. He could feel MJ bear down and open up for him, so he slammed right in, needing to claim.

Oh, fuck him raw. That was the most perfect fucking place on earth. Sonny moaned, his hips starting to move in hard, short thrusts, pushing his cock in and out. He bent and kissed MJ hard, bending the man in half. MJ was right with him, bucking and riding, ass working his prick like a fist.

"MJ. Goddamn." There was no way they were rocking the boat, big as it was, but it sure felt like it. Hell, yes.

"Yeah. Yeah, more. Come on, I want all of you." Demanding fucker.

Good thing he could give it up like no one else. Sonny pushed harder, holding MJ's hips, smacking against that tight ass like nothing going. They were gonna set the motherfucking boat on fire. Either that or they were working toward the best orgasms since he'd tattooed MJ.

Oh, ink.

Sonny moaned, reaching up to trace MJ's tattoos, his fingers knowing the lines by heart. God, that man. "Make me crazy, Precious."

"Good. I like you crazy. Oh. Oh, fuck. Sonny. Right there."

"Yeah." He knew he'd hit the right spot, even without MJ telling him all about it. MJ's arms and legs had gone tight, like someone had applied an electrical current to them. He hit it again, and MJ's eyes rolled like thrown dice.

"So fucking hot, MJ. So fucking mine." He stroked and thrust, his hips hammering, his cock about to just explode.

"Yes. My motherfucking hero." MJ's grin was wild, so fucking happy.

"Yours." He bent and kissed that beautiful bastard again, until blood ran, until they were both panting, gasping.

"My cock. Fuck, Sonny." He had to laugh at that, MJ being so far gone that man couldn't jack himself off.

"I got you." Sonny moved one sweat-slick hand, reaching between them to grab MJ's prick, his hand closing tight. "This what you want, Precious?"

MJ arched, the move so fast he swore he could hear bones crack, and spunk poured over his hand. "Fuck, yes!"

Sonny watched, gritting his teeth and holding back so he could see it all. He didn't let 'er rip until MJ went lax under him, panting hard. Only then did Sonny come like the proverbial ton of bricks.

One hand cupped his jaw, MJ blinking, trying to focus for him. "Fuck. Good."

"You know it." They did fuck good. Sonny chuckled, shaking his head and easing down on top of MJ. MJ wrapped around him, squeezed the breath out of him. "Ooph." Sonny bit at the skin of MJ's neck. "I'm good, Precious." Until he met this other guy face to face, anyway.

"Good. I can't wait to introduce you to Cowboy. You'll like him." MJ was blinking a little, winding down.

"You think?" He didn't think so at all. Cowboy. BABE.

"Yeah. He's a stud. Has great scars. I'll have to get him to tell you about Singapore..."

Oh, the fucker. He'd been tantalizing Sonny with the Singapore story for how long, and Cowboy had been there? Sonny was starting to get pissed.

MJ's hand slid down his spine, petting some. "Shh. I never fucked him. Never even kissed him, that I can remember."

"Well..." Hell, he'd never been this jealous, even of the damned tattoo artist that MJ had told him about, the one he used to fuck after getting ink.

"He's a friend. You're... Sonny." Like that explained anything.

"So, I'm not your friend?" Sonny was grinning now, though, shaking his head at the weirdness of it all.

"You're mine."

"I am." Solid as a rock, and one hundred percent MJ's. That was him. "Want to wait to shove off for another half hour, go do it all over again?"

"Fuck, yes." That grin went the rest of the way to making things okay.

Sonny hoisted his sticky self up off the deck and lifted MJ into an across the shoulder carry. "Good. Because I could ruin you for life. Right now."

MJ snorted, stretched. "Naw, you'd get bored."

"I would." He felt up that fine ass, feeling the heat he'd left there, just from friction. From the pure, raw violence of how much he wanted this man. MJ's cock actually jerked against him. Impressive. Little surfer horndog. "You're wanting again. Goddamn, Precious. You're something else."

"Consider it a talent, Sunshine. Explosions and long, hard fucks."

"I know how talented you are, MJ." No babe, there. Just Precious. Just his. Sonny dumped MJ on the padded bench just behind the cockpit, unable to make it down below. Then he mashed his mouth against MJ's, thinking how this was the only man he'd ever liked kissing.

MJ opened up to him, tongue pushing against him, tasting him like nothing going.

He traced MJ's lips with his own tongue, his hands finding MJ's chest, thumbs working the tiny nipples. They were hard for him, drawn up tight and hot. MJ's hands were on his scalp, digging in a little, tilting his head. The kiss went deeper, Sonny fucking MJ's mouth with his tongue. The taste just exploded through him, all sunshine and lemon, all his.

His hands were tangled up in that too-long hair, tugging MJ just a bit, moving the man this way and that.

When they finally came up for air, they grinned crazily at each other, both of them panting. "Want you, Precious."

"Got me." MJ grabbed his ass and squeezed but hard.

"Yeah. Wanna ride." He always gave as good as he got with MJ. Always.

"Yeah. Turn around." MJ stood him up, turned him, and bit the top of his ass but good.

That sent him up on tiptoe, his whole body shuddering. Jesus, that hurt so fucking good. "Again."

"Pushy redneck." He got another bite, this one farther down.

"You know it. Jesus, that's good." His legs shook a little, his breath hitching in his chest.

"Mmhmm. Spread for me." MJ's tongue slid down his crack, teasing the hell out of him. Sonny pushed his legs wide, bracing himself, because he knew what was coming. Only the hottest mouth ever. He got it, too. MJ licking him, that tongue designed to do nothing but make him a blithering idiot.

It was working. Goddamn. He pushed in return, his back arching, his hips rocking back and forth. More. That tongue worked him like...

Like...

Like something amazing that he couldn't fucking think of because MJ was licking and sucking and rimming his ass.

All he could do was gyrate and cuss a little and try to pretend that he wasn't going to explode. Boom. Sonny fish food. Chum.

Fuck, that was sorta gross.

MJ slapped his ass hard, making him jerk. "Focus, asshole."

"Fuck me, damn it." That would make him focus, make him zero in like a fucking laser.

"You said you were going to ride." MJ pulled away, sprawled out on the bench.

"Asshole." He was ready, though. So ready. He climbed up on the bench, straddling MJ's thighs, inching up until he was over MJ's cock. "Now?"

MJ shifted, cock rubbing against his hole, teasing. "Now is good for me."

"Then we do it now." Sonny reached back and steadied MJ's cock before sinking down on it. MJ's tongue had done its job, making him wet, open, and ready.

MJ stilled, moaning long and low, letting him set the pace. His skin felt like it was about to catch fire, and his ass was screaming, but Sonny pushed right down, his butt meeting MJ's hips with a smack. MJ's eyes stared up at him, not a bit of cold there. "You'll feel me tomorrow."

"I will." He reached up with one hand, grabbing the hair at the back of MJ's head and pulling the man up for a kiss. Goddamn, he was an addict.

"Beautiful motherfucker." He heard the words before their lips crashed together.

The ride got rough after that, Sonny bouncing up and down, the muscles in his thighs protesting like crazy. MJ pulled him down, drove into him like there was no tomorrow. They slapped



together on every thrust, and Sonny could feel bruises rising up. He grinned against MJ's mouth, knowing that was the best kind of sex on earth.

MJ bit his lip, hard, tugging on it, making him groan.

Bearing down, Sonny took more in, took MJ all the way to the root, his moans almost one continuous sound. His head fell back, the sun all but blinding him. MJ's hands moved him, up and down, driving him on that fat prick, filling him up to the top.

"MJ. Oh. fuck. So full." He was stretched to the damned limit.

"Mmm. Good." MJ grabbed his head, pulled him down so he could see those blue eyes, serious as death. "Don't think for a second I'd give this up, man. You're mine."

"Yours." Sonny watched those pretty eyes, stared right into them when he came. Without even touching his cock.

MJ reached down, touched the too-fucking-sensitive-for-words tip of his cock, then licked his fingers clean.

"Fuck. Fuck, MJ." His body clamped down, the muscles along his belly clenching tight.

"Yeah." MJ lost focus, bucking up hard a couple times before he felt heat filling him up.

Sonny held on, the ride bumpy at the end, almost throwing him off. He wasn't letting go, though. No sir. MJ finally eased down, humming nice and low. Oh, yeah. Somebody was feeling good.

Hell, so was he. They could rest a bit, and then he might even be willing to get moving.

Maybe.

If MJ promised not to call that Cowboy guy babe anymore.

## *Chapter Twenty One*

England was cold.

Like really cold.

Paddy stood at the window and stared out into the street, watching about a zillion people all wearing the same black coat trudge through the rain. It was weird. At home - and California was still home, even after all this time - which had it been that long? A few months? Maybe a year? Everything had crunched together in his head somehow. There was before Neil. Before Boomer and the kidnapping. Before...

His brain cringed away from the thought of that... that man with the red line across his throat, the sound the head made as it fell on the wooden boards in that horrible little shack thing. The boats.

He hated boats.

Hated them.

Hated even more that MJ seemed to think that somehow he was involved with something - someone or someones or whatever - that would cut somebody's head off in a shack because he wasn't that kind of person and...

Stop it.

Stop it, Padraic.

You stop it right now.

They weren't on the boat and, even if they weren't in France, which sucked because Neil (his Neil, his lover, his heart who was having a nightmare right now, a terrible nightmare but he didn't know that, he couldn't know that) loved it there and only tolerated London, they were safe and hidden and he could sit and stare at the rain and watch.

All day if he wanted to.

Neil moaned, just a little, and now he could say he'd heard enough, not just something normal, not a plain old dream, and he could go wake Neil up. Go help him shake the nightmare loose. "Neil. Neil, wake up. You're dreaming. It's raining outside again. We could go get food, if you want. Roast."

Neil popped up violently, hands flailing out, and when those pretty, gray eyes opened they held only blind fear. "No. No no no."

"Okay. Okay, Neil." He grabbed hold of Neil, shaking him but good. "Stop it. You stop it right now. We're safe."

Please God.

Please.

Neil turned to face him, hands clutching at his arms. "Paddy?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it's me." He looked right into Neil's eyes. "We're okay."

"Oh, dear God. Good." Neil hugged him, moving so suddenly that it made him jump.

Maybe they should go again.

Maybe they could go to Africa or something.

Paddy held on tight, squeezing, giving Neil something to cling to.

"Oh. Padraic." Poor Neil sounded blown, his voice hoarse, and his skin was all clammy and goosebumpy.

"Yes." He wished he could say he'd never been so worried, but it would be a lie. It had been worse.

*It'll be worse again, Padraic.*

Where did that come from?

"Love. Tighter. I need to feel you. I need to know you're here."

"I'm here. I swear. Should we pack? Go?" He squeezed hard enough his muscles shook.

"We should. We... I must get you away."

"Then let's go. Come on. Get up." Okay. Okay, moving. He could handle that. Paddy hurried to the closet, started grabbing suitcases and bags.

"It won't be tonight, love. Not... not yet. Sit a moment." Those hands reached for him, and he couldn't not go.

He reached for Neil, that shame hitting him again, right between the shoulders. He'd done this. He'd brought this onto Neil somehow.

Neil laughed a bit, the sound hitching in that slender chest. "Oh, love, I would do it all over again to have you."

"Shh. Shh, now. You had a bad dream. That's all. When you're good and awake, we'll pack and go."

"Yes. We'll have some tea and eggs, and we'll make a plan." Neil always wanted tea when he was trying to think.

"Okay. You know I have tea-making down to an art." One that was even good enough for an Englishman.

"So you do." Kissing his jaw, Neil sank back down against him, the shaking almost gone.

"It'll be okay, Neil. I swear. I'll help to make it okay."

"You will, love. I know you will. Now, let's have that tea." Scooting to the edge of the bed, Neil got up and hugged him hard.

He kissed Neil's forehead, nodded. "I'll get the kettle on."

## *Chapter Twenty Two*

Cowboy loved the beach. Oh, not as much as MJ did. That man's love for the water was unreal. He liked it, though. The sun, the sand, the lack of bullets whizzing overhead. Bullets tended to find him more at seedy motels and in jungles and shit. Maybe Afghanistan.

"You ever been to Afghanistan, Doc?"

"No. No, I've been all over the US and Mexico, the UK, and to the Bahamas, once. You?"  
Duncan was sitting, legs curled up under him, face shadowed under a ball cap.

"Yeah. It's rough country." Rough, with lots of native bandits with big firearms...

"I haven't explored much roughness, I guess."

"No? Well, you might have plenty of chance." They'd gotten rid of the transmitter, and so far no one had shown up on their ass, but Cowboy knew it wouldn't be long.

He got a chuckle. "Woo? I'm not the boy you want with you in a fight."

"I think you might surprise yourself, Doc." The man had certainly surprised him, that first time. Well, and every time since.

Duncan lifted his face to the sun, seeming to soak it in. Maybe he did. Solar-powered berserker. The thought made Cowboy grin.

"You look happy." Duncan had pretty fucking eyes, so dark.

"Huh? I like the beach. You look good on it, too. Sun suits you." Lord, he was getting soft. Or hard. Whatever.

"I feel like it's been forever since I was outside."

"It probably has been." Whether he knew it or not, the Doc had been pretty strictly controlled. Cowboy would bank on it.

"Mmmhmm." Doc finally uncurred, sorta like a lizard, basking. Now that was more like it. Durn pretty.

Cowboy moved a little closer. A teeny bit. He wanted to feel the heat from Duncan's skin. Duncan shifted as he did - closer, not away. Reaching out, he put one hand on Duncan's leg, thumb rubbing all along that fine skin. "How do you feel about boats?"

"Boats? I went on a cruise once. It was nice."

"Well, we might be taking a little cruise soon." He might have mentioned that before, but with the Doc, things bore repeating, depending on his frame of mind.

Duncan's legs spread a little more, let him in, easy as that. "Where to?"

"Oh, I don't know. We'll cross that gangplank when we come to it, huh?" He didn't want to know where they'd go, actually, so he couldn't give MJ up if something happened.

"This is very... random for me. My life tends to be structured."

"Well, I can give you a schedule, Doc." Grinning, letting the evil show a little, he petted Duncan's belly. "Spanking at ten. Sucking at noon."

"Shootings at three? Kidnappings at five?" Those wicked smart eyes flashed back at him, proving that he wasn't the only one with a little evil in him. "Does the fucking come before or after the impromptu surgery?"

"Before and after, I think. I like to make sure I schedule lots of that in."

"Good to know. When do I get to beat on you again?"

"When the bruises fade." Cowboy winked, letting his fingers tickle at Duncan's skin.

Duncan blinked at him, then laughed, good and hard. "Oh, yeah. I have fallen down the rabbit hole."

"That happened a long while back." They were somewhere at the caterpillar stage.

"Can you tell me what's really going on?" The laughter stopped, that focus on him with a snap.

His hand fell away from Duncan's skin, almost like he'd been burned. "I can tell you what I know, Doc. We're waiting for a friend of mine who knows more."

"Okay." Duncan looked at his hands, reached out and touched his knuckles, tracing scars. "Okay. That's good enough. Hell, right now I just want to know why I want to crawl into your lap and hump your leg. I'm not typically... promiscuous."

"Honey, it's not promiscuity if you only do it with me." Cowboy unfolded, standing and holding a hand down to Duncan. "Wanna do it now?"

"I most definitely do." Duncan reached up, took his hand. "We'll deal with the whole why part after the orgasms. It's fucking time somewhere."

"That's the spirit, Doc." Lord, that smile was already starting to make his belly hurt, and that was a bad sign.

Duncan pulled him into the little beach house he'd rented, shutting the door behind them. Then, suddenly, his arms were filled with a needy professor who didn't seem to want to wait one more minute for him.

"I got you, Doc." He pushed Duncan up against the wall, loving the feel of that hard body, the heat of it, sun-warmed and firm.

"You seem to be really good at that." Duncan rubbed against him, starting to moan a bit.

"I do, huh? It's kind of amazing." Laughing, he pressed harder against the Doc, one leg sliding between Duncan's thighs.

Duncan spread for him, hands wrapping around his shoulders, fingers digging into his skin enough to bruise. Goddamn. That man didn't know his own strength when he was excited. Cowboy loved that. Loved that this guy could take him if he wanted. And the fact that the son of a bitch didn't even know it?

Made it that much better.

Grinning a little wider, Cowboy pushed up even closer, leaning in to bite at Duncan's neck. Hard.

"Mmm. You'll leave a hickey, man." Duncan's cock liked that idea, he could tell.

"Uh-huh. My friend's going to have to know you're mine." Not that MJ would poach, but still. Cowboy never denied his caveman urges.

"You sound sure about that, Mister Cowboy." That chin lifted, let him have more.

"I am. I promise you that." Latching on, he sucked up a mark, sure as shit, letting Duncan really feel it. Doc's cock rubbed his hip, sure and steady, the man humping his leg like a naughty puppy. The doc liked it just a little rough, just a little hard. Cowboy was more than happy to give it to him. Damn, yeah.

"Colby. Shit, harder." Oh, he liked it when the doc got all low-brow on him.

"You got it, Doc." He slammed their bodies together, his hands slipping and sliding on slick skin, his fingers pinching a little whenever he found purchase.

Duncan started wiggling, getting their clothes loose and off. The man had some talent. They were naked before he could take even a few deep breaths, and they smacked back together. Now he could get that fine ass in a good, hard grip, could pull Duncan up so their cocks rubbed together.

Man, he hoped to hell MJ wasn't hurrying. He could do this for another few days, no problem. They moved faster now that they were naked, Duncan's hands and mouth greedy as hell. Cowboy just moaned and kissed those lips hard, wanting to crawl inside the man. Now there was an idea, and one they hadn't tried yet. He slid his hand down, cupped Duncan's ass, squeezed hard.

"Wanna do you, Doc. Bad." He pushed and pulled, giving Duncan a graphic demonstration of what he wanted.

"I'd much prefer it if you did me good. Incredibly good."

"Well, I can do that, too." He swung Duncan around, pushing him toward the back of the little room, where the big bed stood against the wall.

Duncan climbed up on the bed, giving him both a nice, long look at that tight little ass, as well as the pink, smooth skin where the man had been shot, not three days ago. Cowboy reached out to stroke that little scar, amazed at the feel of it, not even a bit hot, not a bit infected, despite the whole lack of sanitation thing. Hell, there wasn't even a \*scab\* anymore. In fact, the only place there was still a wound was the spot where he'd taken that... thing out.

He wasn't gonna think on that anymore. Damn, it was just too weird, and he wanted right now, didn't want to lose the moment.

Of course, the way Duncan rolled up into him, ass rubbing against his thigh, helped his focus.

He could be the king of focus. MJ always said so, anyway. Damn, that skin fascinated him, made him want all manner of things. Lean and fine, his hands looked dark splayed over Duncan's back, fingers curling over the man's ribs. Cowboy took a kiss, licking at Duncan's lips before pushing between them with his tongue. The man made him crazy.

The angle was awkward, but damn, that made it hotter, Duncan twisting to get to him.

"Shit. We need to get... Damn it." They needed to get where he could do Duncan and still see his face.

"I don't have any rubbers..." Duncan spun, pulled him down into a kiss that blew his mind.

He didn't care. Shit, what self-respecting government conspiracy would let Duncan have a venereal disease? He just humped, his cock knowing where it wanted to go. Duncan wrapped one leg around his hip and pulled him in closer, hips tilting, rubbing the tight hole against the tip of his cock.



"Don't want to hurt you, Doc." He was willing to do prep, no matter how fast the Doc healed.

"Touch me, then? I want some."

"Yeah. Yeah." He got his fingers wet, reaching between them to push at Duncan's hole, wanting to get the show on the road. That little hole gripped his fingers tight enough that he gasped, his cock jerking at the thought of being in there. Working his way in, he got Duncan relaxed and as wet as he could, knowing that spit wouldn't be the greatest, but it would work. Then he got a little impatient and pulled free, holding Duncan over him. "Ready?"

"I won't break." Didn't he know that?

"I know. Gimme a little credit for romance, huh?" He slammed Duncan down on his cock, grunting at the heat and tightness of it.

"Fuck!" Duncan arched, head slamming back, mouth open.

"Uh-huh. More." Yanking Duncan against him, Cowboy started to move, in and out.

That little ass was like a fist around him, squeezing him so tight he starting grunting with every push up.

"Doc. Oh, Christ. I. You. Hot." Yeah. Smooth. Suave.

"Uh-huh." Duncan gave him a wild grin, the look fierce and sharp, like the son of a bitch was one hundred percent there with him.

They shifted, just enough to really get leverage, and then all they had was sweat and skin and moans. So. Fucking. Good.

Duncan's hands landed on his chest, the man riding him good and hard, ass slapping down against his thighs. Cowboy gritted his teeth and held on, his balls aching. The friction on his cock was going to make him scream.

"Damn. Damn, you." Duncan stared at him, eyes just burning, staring into him.

"I have no doubt, Doc." A man knew when he was going to hell. He took Duncan's mouth, desperate to pull more of the man into him, against him, around him. Of course, with kisses like that? Shit. He'd take Duncan with him, just for the company. Wasn't that what he was doing? Oh, fuck, Doc was tight. Squeezing him like there was no tomorrow.

Duncan grabbed his hand, tugged it around to his cock, demanding as hell.

"You want some of this, Doc?" He stroked, his hand closing tight so he could pull hard at that sweet cock.

"Oh, yeah. Need it. So fucking good."

"Duncan." His hips kept moving like he was a damned machine, his breath coming hard, his hands clenched on Duncan's skin. Christ.

Duncan fucking took his lips, ass working his cock like nothing going.

His eyes rolled back in his head, and Cowboy lost it, his cock jerking inside Duncan's body. He came so hard he saw stars, his ears ringing loud as hell. He barely felt the splash of heat against his belly, but he felt the way Duncan's ass worked his prick.

"Doc." Cowboy just whooped for breath, trying to hang on when all his body wanted to do was flop down and maybe die.

"Mmm." Duncan nuzzled in, tongue sliding on his throat for just a second. He patted that fine ass, his body still jerking a little with the aftermath. "We're safe here?"

"For now, yeah. I can't promise how long." Hopefully until MJ came. Then he'd have some real help.

"There aren't guarantees for anything. I'll take it."

"Then we'll go with it." Man, he did love the beach.

## *Chapter Twenty Three*

Sonny tapped his fingers on the rail, waiting to toss the line, waiting for MJ to jockey them into position. They weren't meeting this guy MJ called 'babe' at the marina, or at the hotel the other guy was staying at, just in case. Nope, they were finding someplace neutral, someplace equidistant if things went horribly wrong. Sonny had a feeling this wouldn't end well, and he wasn't even the psychic.

Huh. He hadn't thought of Neil and Paddy in weeks.

"Come on, Precious! You're slow as an old grandma."

"Don't make me beat you, Sunshine." MJ's hair was long enough to tie back in a little ponytail now. Sonny couldn't decide if it was a pussy look, or hot. The little board shorts with the pockets big enough to hide MJ's piece? Those were hot.

"You never beat me anymore. Makes a man wonder if the romance is gone." MJ got them into the slip, and Sonny got them tied off before heading over to slide his hand into MJ's shorts, feeling the heavy weight of the pistol there.

"Sonny, if letting you jack my Glock while it's pointed at my balls isn't romance, then I don't know what is."

"You know you love it when I fondle your nine millimeter." MJ had a point, though. A good one. "We could just say fuck it and stay here and fuck."

"We could." Those pretty fucking eyes met his and it felt good that there was serious temptation going on there. "I have to see what Cowboy's showing, though. It's something they made."

"Okay. Okay, Precious." Sonny didn't love it, but he understood it. Those bastards had done MJ dirty a good many times. "We ought to get moving, then."

"Yeah. We're not staying onshore, though. I don't like this." No. No, Texas was too fucking close to California and Arizona.

"I'm ready for whatever. It's your call, Precious." He had his own piece in the back of his cut-offs, his shirt big enough to hide any bulge.

MJ nodded, dug out a pair of sunglasses. "Let's go. There should be a car waiting. Cowboy said he'd leave the keys in the convenience store."

"How kind of him." Okay, he was being a bitch, and he knew it. Sonny slipped his gimme cap on. "Ready."

They headed into the marina, MJ walking into the little Wag-a-Bag convenience store that was sitting there. MJ headed straight for the back, the racks of Bud Lite and Michelob. He pulled out a few twelve-packs of Coors Light and put them down. The little boy that was stocking raised an eyebrow, and MJ shrugged. "I like 'em real cold, dude."

"Yeah. What's it with guys and cold beers today?"

MJ's stare got a little colder. "It's hot."

He picked another box up, and Sonny heard something jingle. "This one'll work."

MJ handed him the box.

"Cool." He held the box while MJ paid, and sure enough, when they got outside, the car key was in there, along with directions to where the vehicle was parked.

The man had the handwriting of a serial killer. Not only that, but it was a fucking Camry. A white fucking Camry.

"Well, at least it's not a Prius." Sonny sighed, sliding in behind the wheel and adjusting the seat so his knees weren't under his chin anymore.

"Yeah, yeah. Cowboy's a Texan. I don't think he believes in smart cars."

"Well, he sure likes foreign shit." A Camry. Maybe it would blend.

"Bitch bitch bitch. Next time we meet one of my friends in Houston with a mutant super soldier asshole, I'll make sure to arrange a goddamn Chevy for you." Someone was nervous.

"How many more friends can you have?" MJ was not one for collecting people. Well, Sonny had never thought he was.

"Well, okay. I'll take you to meet my mom."

"Your mom..." Sonny almost drove into a parked car. "I get to meet your mother?"

Goddamn.

"Absolutely. She'll love you; you'll hate her. It'll be like Christmas." MJ stretched, slipping off the deck shoes. "Besides, we need to replenish our stash."

"Sounds good to me, Precious. Been awhile since we had a road trip. You have to buy me a muscle car, though." It tickled him like a feather up the butt, how MJ loved to buy him cars.

Those icy eyes warmed right up. "I can so do that. You want a 'Vette this time?"

"I do. Think how good that would be out in the desert." They could really open it up, get the speed on.

"Mmm. Can we have a convertible?" His sun worshipper.

"Yeah." It wasn't like a Corvette would stop bullets anyway. They pulled out of the marina area, and Sonny glanced over. "Where am I going, code man?"

"North on 146, then west on 528. There's a town called Alvin."

"Gotcha." Lucky for him, he was good at road signs and shit, because MJ had very little patience for navigating. Sonny pulled in at Joe's Barbecue maybe forty five minutes later, slow and careful, keeping an eye out for trouble. MJ slipped out of the car, whistling long and low, a crooked smile on the man's face.

"Hey, buddy!" A guy in jeans and a T-shirt seemed to appear out of nowhere, a cowboy hat on his head and a smile on his face.

"Cowboy! Babe!" MJ bounced a little, grinning like a fool.

Cowboy grabbed MJ and pulled him back between two big SUVs, grabbing the man by his ears and planting a kiss on MJ's mouth. A big. Wet. Kiss.

Sonny didn't even feel himself move until his fist connected to the cowboy's jaw. The guy's head slammed back, swacking into the SUV, the alarm going off.

Before he could even blink there was a gun in his face, the cowboy guy cold as ice and steady as a rock. "Don't you ever do that to me again, son."

"Boys, we've had altogether enough fun now." MJ was right there, his Glock underneath the guy's chin, the barrel not wavering, and he knew that tone, knew that he was in between deep and deeper shit. "He's not yours to play with, babe. He's mine. Sunshine, warn the nice assassin before you hit him. He's sensitive."

Assassin. Well, now, the things your loved ones didn't tell you about their friends. Sonny nodded as much as he could with a gun at his nose. "You got it, Precious."

The cowboy didn't bat an eye, just grinned a little, lowering the gun. "You're no fun anymore, Jay-Jay."

"I have more to lose these days, babe." MJ grinned, slipping the pistol away. "And you, you were just being a fuckhead."

"You know it. Good thing the Doc is asleep in the car. He gets bulgy when he's mad."

"Yeah? You've seen it?"

Sonny knew that look, too. That look happened right before something blew up, or something disintegrated, or something went terribly, terribly wrong.

"Now, Precious. Don't get any ideas." Sonny didn't want to think about a bulgy, angry man and MJ's plans.

"Ideas?" Lord, MJ had completely lost any innocent look he might have ever had.

"Yeah. Ideas." The spot between his shoulders was itching like crazy. "Can we get this over with?"

"Is he always this impatient?" Cowboy put the gun away, as fast as MJ's had gone.

"No. Sometimes he's incredibly patient. I prefer to think of this as focused." MJ touched the guy's chin, the little scar there. "That's new."

The bastard touched MJ's face, the scar from where Woody'd shot his Precious. "So's that."

"Okay, enough with the touchy feely, yeah? Where's this Doc?" Sonny was just gonna lose his shit.

MJ tilted his head, looked over at Sonny, nodded. "Yeah. First, though, what are you intending to do with him? Use him?"

"Me?" Cowboy didn't do innocent worth a damn, either. Then the man sobered. "No. I mean, I don't want to have to, though I got to admit, that whole getting shot and being able to keep going is a plus for a getaway."

"Yeah? Can he think when he's... is it a change? An adrenaline rush? What?"

"It's kind of like his lizard brain kicks in. He's just cave him."

Sonny knew he was in so much trouble when MJ's eyes lit up. "Really? Fucking cool, man. Where is he?"

"In the car. Come on." Cowboy led the way, heading to a dark SUV parked behind the building.

"Can I shoot him a little?" MJ was bouncing. Fucking bouncing.

"Precious, what have I told you about shooting people in parking lots?" Jesus, Sonny hated it when MJ met up with old cronies. Of course, MJ had never let Paddy touch him.

Those pretty eyes flashed back at him, laughing. "You said Village Inn parking lots, Sunshine. This is a barbeque joint."

"No shooting." Damn it, he was going to have a psychotic break.

"Not even a little?" Was MJ flirting? Now?

"Not even a little." He fell for it, though, didn't he? Boom. He had to face it; he loved being the center of MJ's attention.

"You never let me have any fun where I can get caught." MJ's step slowed, waiting for him to be close enough to touch.

His hand automatically found the small of MJ's back, fingers circling. "I got all the fun you can handle."

Cowboy snorted. "Ah, true love."

MJ nodded. "You know it. Introduce us to your monster."

Cowboy knocked on the window of the SUV before opening the door. "Doc. Doc, they're here."

The window came down, and this perfectly normal-looking guy looked out - clean-cut, a little prissy. Nothing special. "Hey."

"So, you worked for the YSA program?" MJ's voice was light, but it sent chills down his spine.

"What? Years ago. I taught English to a bunch of kids there. Did you go there?"

Oh, man. The Program made MJ a little nuts. Just a little. Sonny moved into position, ready to stop any freak outs.

"I did. I was one of the original group of graduates, so to speak."

Man, even the cowboy tensed a little.

"Oh. Cowboy says you can tell me why they want to kill me. Well, he also says they want to kill me."

"I thought you were all dead already."

"We all, who?"

MJ tensed. "Participants in the... what were you in? Amnesia study? Migraines? Detox?"

The guy went pale - like sheet-white pale.

"Migraines," Cowboy said quietly. "He says he has terrible migraines."

"Huh. They put you in a hospital. Tried something experimental - probably over a summer, but it was longer than you think."

"Stop it."

Oh, man, this was bad.

"You probably don't remember much, but your headaches got better when they let you out. They gave you shots? Pills?"

"I said stop it. Colby, let's go."

Yeah, real bad.

"Tell me, Professor, do you remember the first kill?"

"Jay!" Cowboy's voice cracked like a pistol shot. "I think you need to back off. He's not here for you to bully."

MJ blinked, actually took a step back. "Yeah. Yeah. I'm sorry, Cowboy. I... We need to not do this in a parking lot. We need to not do this in public."

"Yeah." Cowboy glanced around. "There's a place about five blocks down. The Wagon Inn. Go around to room number five."

Without another word, Cowboy got in the SUV, and the window went up on a very white-faced man.

"Come on, Sonny. Let's go."

"You okay, Precious?" Shit, he could tell the answer to that one himself, but he wanted to be sure MJ could do this thing.

"No. No, I'm sick and tired of this shit."

"I know." Sonny rolled his shoulders. He couldn't even tease MJ about Cowboy. This was just fucked up.



"I thought they'd killed them all. There were three waves of them that Paula and I knew about, about thirty in total, but they all died. There was a huge fire - they rounded them all up and immolated them."

They climbed into the Camry, Sonny waiting to give Cowboy plenty of time. No sense in making themselves more obvious than they had. "Well, obviously one is still around."

"But why?" MJ stopped, stared at him. "Why? Why let the one go? Most of them died on their own. I only heard about a couple even surviving the fucking treatment..."

"I don't know. Maybe they were just doing more tests. Your friend was supposed to take him out, wasn't he?" He couldn't remember if MJ had told him that, but it made sense. They were trying to reel the Doc guy in.

"Doing more tests... now? When they've had one major installation blow? That seems weird..." MJ reached out for him, fingers sliding over his hand, his leg.

"Yeah." He backed out, driving with one hand, the other reaching down to cover MJ's. "I don't know. There has to be something he knows, even if he thinks he doesn't."

"I could just shoot him."

"No. No, it looks like your buddy is fond." There'd been entirely too much gun waving already. "I could just drive."

"You could. We could just go."

Sonny glanced over, not able to read a damned thing with the sunglasses in the way. "Tell me now, Precious."

"I want to, but I can't just fucking let this go, over and over. I don't get it, Sonny. I fucking don't get it. Why's the whole fucking thing waking up now?"

"It's all you, Precious. They thought you were dead." Sonny hated to put it all on MJ, but he'd been over and over it in his head, and if people like Paddy and the pale Doc were all that were left of the program, they didn't pose a threat. MJ, though? He could blow the whole fucking thing wide open. Could and would, now that they knew where each other stood.

"I was. I was fucking dead. I should have killed your fucking lover when I had the chance."

Wait. How did this become about him and Woody? He'd been minding his own business when MJ came along. Still... "Yeah. I should have let you."

"Yeah. Still." MJ's lips twisted. "It was so worth it, man. You're so fucking worth it."

They slid into the parking lot at the Wagon Inn, and Sonny parked out of sight of the main road before popping it into park and reaching for MJ. "So fucking worth it, Precious."

MJ slammed into his arms like a freight train hitting a stalled Buick, mouth mashing onto his. Fuck, yeah. He'd remind that man who belonged to who, who needed to touch. Jesus, that kiss made him crazy, his cock hard and aching in seconds.

"Sonny." Fucking tiny foreign cars. His Precious needed.

Grunting, he reached down and pushed the seat all the way back, then reclined that fucker as far as it would go, just to give them some damned elbow room. Then he pulled MJ up against his chest, reaching into those loose shorts. MJ damn near growled, teeth nipping his bottom lip good and hard, hands holding his face still so that hungry mouth could have everything MJ wanted. Sonny let MJ take, just touching and pushing, his thumb scraping over the tip of MJ's cock. He could see all that ink, just out of the corner of his eye, could see the black on tan. MJ never said a word, just kissed and bit and humped, pushing on him like it was the end of the earth.

Stroking harder at that fine cock, Sonny bit MJ's lower lip, hard enough to draw blood. He wanted the man to feel him. Right there. Right now. He could feel MJ's belly going tight, feel the way MJ's prick swelled in his fingers. Best of all were those eyes, staring right into him.

"Who am I, Precious?" He grinned wildly, knowing the answer would come like clockwork, even as he pushed MJ over the edge.

"My motherfucking hero. My Sonny. Oh, fuck. Yes." MJ shot, just like that.

"Christ, Precious." That... Oh, fuck, he could smell it, feel it, so hot it almost burned.

MJ blinked at him a second, all baby-headed, then he heard the slow clapping from outside the car, the cowboy standing there applauding.

Sonny very carefully pushed MJ over to the passenger seat, pulling his hand free of MJ's shorts. Then he opened the car door and bared his teeth at Cowboy. "Consider yourself warned."

Never let it be said he couldn't strike like a pissed-off cottonmouth.

"Hey, man. I ain't never seen Jay-Jay so hot for it that he went stupid in a parking lot. You must be good."

Sonny popped the man right on his laughing mouth, so fucking mad all he could see was red. If this was a friend, he didn't think he wanted MJ to have any more of them. Cowboy swung back, knocking him in the jaw, and he stumbled back, bumping into the car. He'd have leapt right back into the shit if a gunshot hadn't gone off, the asphalt spitting at the bastard's feet. MJ was standing there, vibrating, Glock barrel smoking.

"Enough. Get. In. The. Room."

Sonny got, knowing that MJ had taken all he could stand. Looked like Cowboy knew it, too, because he went meekly.

The professor-dude was standing in the middle of the floor, looking lost, moving right for Cowboy like the man could help him.

MJ pulled out a chair for him, then sat on the cheap-assed table, staring, gun in hand. "I fucking hate Houston."

"No shit." Sonny plopped his ass down, glowering at everyone. Cowboy just slipped an arm around the Doc's waist and grinned.

"Anyone want a Coke?"

"Those things are bad for you. I want tequila. Or iced tea." MJ's hand landed on his shoulder, rubbing good and hard. Something slipped into his hand as they sat there. Ah. Drug kit. Right.

He was good at that whole 'make them unconscious, Sonny' thing. Oh, yeah. His whole damned self was aching. Two punches at an iron jaw in one day was enough to kill. That last hit would have taken anyone else right down. He was gratified to see it bruising, at least.

Cowboy handed out water bottles. "Sorry, no tequila. There's tea bags over there."

"Thanks, babe." MJ nodded at Cowboy, then looked at the professor. "So, I'm going to ask some questions, okay? Just answer them. Don't lie and I won't shoot you."

"Well, that's a comfort." Lord, the pale dude had balls. "Who are you?"

"I didn't say I'd answer questions."

Cowboy snorted. "Despite the appearances to the contrary, Doc, he's my friend. Just let him get to the bottom of it, okay?"

"What's your name, man?" MJ kept rubbing, the question deceptively simple.

"Duncan Phillips. Yours?"

"MJ. This is Sonny. When did you work for the Program?"

Sonny hated it when MJ went all lizard brain. Well, maybe not lizard, but cold and working. It gave him the shivers.

"The YSA? From 2002 to 2005. I got the offer from Dallas; I had to take it."

"Are you sure?"

Duncan blinked. "What?"

"Are you sure you left in 2005? When did you start your new job?"

"Right after, of course?"

Sonny frowned, the exchange making his head hurt. "You got any payment records? Tax records?"

"I obviously don't have anything, do I?"

MJ looked. "Come on, man. Tell me about the music when you went to Texas. How you picked your house out? How long did it take you to drive?"

Smart MJ. So fucking smart. Sonny just had to stare and admire sometimes.

"What are you talking about? What does it matter?" Dude, look at Mr. Professor Man flush.

"Get it ready, Sunshine," MJ whispered, then focused on the professor again. "It matters. Come on, tell me who interviewed you. Tell me the first place you ate in Dallas. Did you hire a van or did you get a U-Haul? Think, man."

Get ready for what? Sonny settled himself so he could jump to his feet if he needed to, and he made sure he could get his hand on his gun in a hurry. God knew, when MJ warned him to be ready, these days he was.

Then the professor guy started shaking, badly, teeth chattering hard enough Sonny could hear it.

MJ shook his head at Cowboy, who was reaching for Duncan. "Think, Professor. What did you read? Your final test? What was it over? Did you teach Hawthorne? Kafka? Henry Miller? Don't you remember?"

"Doc? Doc, what is it?" Cowboy had both hands on the Duncan guy now, holding his arms.

"Stop it. Make him stop it."

"Come on, Doc, don't be a pussy. Think. Tell me. Your final at the YSA. What was the topic?"

"Colby!"

MJ stared at Duncan. "Man, they're simple questions. Harmless."

"Doc. What is it? Can't you remember?"

Doc started convulsing, teeth chattering, foam spotting his lips. MJ jumped up. "Sonny. Downers, dude. Now."

Sonny grabbed the kit MJ had handed off to him and worked up a syringe, grinning a little at how easy this had all gotten. Then he moved lightning fast, jabbing the Doc in the butt before Cowboy could stop him.

"Put him on the bed, Cowboy, before he hurts himself." MJ patted him on the butt. "Excellent job, redneck. You're a pro."

"I have you to thank for that. Well, you and funny bananas." Sonny helped wrestle the man down to the bed. "What the hell is going on?"

"He's been messed with, Sunshine. His brain's been reprogrammed. I'd bet you big money that he taught one semester, maybe two, and they had him in that hospital for tests for years." MJ sighed, shoved up one of Duncan's eyelids, and looked at the rolling eyes. "I pushed the wrong buttons and he couldn't compute."

"Jay-Jay! You weren't supposed to break him." Cowboy was laughing, though. Laughing. Lord, the man was crazier than the last one, and Paddy was a nut-burger.

"Hey, I didn't break it; that was the government. I just chipped the spackle off the cracks." MJ looked at Duncan, at the fading convulsions, shook his head. "Pretty interesting, hmm?"

"Shit, yes. Man, I've never seen you foam at the mouth, even in a tight space." Sonny shook his head. "This is crazy shit."

"Yep. So, we have some options - you can shoot him, we can overload him with opiates, we can just hope for the best..."

"No shooting him." Cowboy moved a little closer, staring down at the Doc, who was slowly dropping into sleep, not convulsing anymore.

"You like him." MJ got that evil look on.

"It ain't a crime." The man just winked, nudging MJ with one elbow. "At least I wasn't getting my hard-on handled in the parking lot."

"Well, I'm particularly fortunate there, babe. Sonny's the best. Did you get the chip out?"

He was going to beat MJ for every 'babe.'

"I did. It's on a truck bound for Yankeeland. No worries."

Sonny stared. "Chip? Like in micro?"

"Yeah. A tracking device. You know that little scar by my balls? Paula took mine out when I left the Program. She didn't have one. Only the ones that traveled outside the Program had..." MJ stopped.

Blinked.

"Rick."

"They took Rick where?" Sonny knew better, knew that MJ meant Paddy still had a fucking tracking device and his brilliant motherfucking lover hadn't thought of it. "We got a land line, Precious. Call him."

"Jesus Christ, Jay-Jay. What kinda shit you into, boy?"

MJ groaned, pushed back his hair. "You have no idea."

Sonny sat back down next to MJ and sighed, reaching out to put one hand on MJ's leg. He had a feeling none of them really knew what kind of shit they were in. Hell, he had an even worse feeling that they had just tapped the very edge of the shit iceberg.

"We have to get on the road, Cowboy. We have to get moving. All of us." MJ was vibrating for him, tight as a strung bow. "I don't know if he has one. There wasn't any reason to tag him. They never ever let the lab rats go. None of them." MJ stopped, looked over at Duncan again. "Of course, they didn't let any of Duncan's type go, either, did they? Shit. Shit. Fuck me. We have to go."

"Well, we might as well go now, since the Doc's asleep." Cowboy went to get a towel from the bathroom, systematically wiping the room down.

MJ looked at him. "Are we bringing them with us, Sonny?"

"I think we have to, Precious." They didn't, they'd still have people chasing after them, looking for the Doc. He had that itch on the back of his neck.

"Okay." MJ looked at him, lips tight. "Cowboy's my friend, man."

"I know." Sonny stared right back into those too-bright eyes. "That's good enough for me, Precious. I don't have to like him, though."

Cowboy laughed, right out loud. "Still here, y'all."

MJ leaned in, kissed him good and hard. "I'll buy you whatever car you want, Sunshine, when we settle this, and we'll go meet Ma."

"Sounds like a plan." It was kind of amazing, MJ wanting him to meet the man's momma.

"Okay. Let me..." MJ's eyes lit up. "I wonder if they have laundry detergent in the vending machine. We have gasoline..."

No.

No kaboom.

"You really want to advertise where we are more than you did by firing a gun? Shit, I'm surprised the cops aren't here now."

Cowboy tilted his head, staring at Sonny. "You know, Jay-Jay, he's smarter than I would have expected."

"He's a little brilliant. This is Texas. They know guns, and I haven't blown anything up in days."

"Well, time's a-wastin'." Sonny shook his head. Terrorists and assassins. What was a poor redneck to do?

"Sorry you met me yet?" MJ caught the towel Cowboy threw and started cleaning up.

"Never, Precious. Never once in my life." Out of every damned thing that had been said today, that was the God's honest truth.

MJ was worth it all.

## *Chapter Twenty Four*

In the end, he didn't get to blow anything up.

Honestly, Sonny and Cowboy could be high-dollar party poopers. They left the Camry, parking Cowboy's truck in the marina. The professor was still out like a light, murmuring restlessly, flopping around periodically in the front seat.

"Can you control him at all when he goes... however it is he goes? Because wild and uncontrolled on the ship leads to swimming with the sharks, my friend." MJ just wanted to make that part clear.

Cowboy gave him a slow smile, one he knew meant trouble and maybe hand jobs at a rest stop somewhere. "I got my ways, yeah."

He chuckled, shook his head. "Lord, babe. You've got it bad. I approve."

A low grunt came from Sonny, who was toting gear. "We going to move, or sit like ducks?"

"Quack, quack. Can you carry him, Cowboy? I'll grab your shit. We'll re-supply in New Orleans." New Orleans was the easiest place; money talked better there.

"I can." Cowboy was always fucking deceptive. Like MJ himself, Cowboy didn't look that big, but he hefted Duncan like the Doc weighed nothing.

"It's the third one down. Mind the tripwire, fourth step up."

"Gotcha." Cowboy padded off with his weird-assed man, and Sonny stepped up next to MJ.

"I got a bad feeling about this, Precious."

"You and me both, Sonny, but what am I supposed to do?"

"I don't know. Stop calling him babe? No more touching, either."

Oh, growly.



"Do I call him babe?" He hadn't noticed.

"Yes. Yes, you do." Sonny's big hands clenched and unclenched. "It makes me a little crazy. He ever meet your momma?"

His eyes went wide. "God, no. Can you imagine that? Cowboy? In Mom's store?"

"I don't know anything about your mom, Precious." He could feel Sonny; the man was nearly vibrating.

"She's a stoner. She owns a New Age store. She's a nut-burger, but she's cooler than the Colonel." He stopped as they reached the boat. "I never fucked him. I never even kissed him. Hand jobs when we thought we might not get another one, shit like that. That's it." He figured that was a big part of Sonny's issue.

"Good." Sonny grabbed him and pulled him close, planting a kiss on his mouth that threatened to send him off like a bottle rocket.

He got a little lost for a second, blinking up into Sonny's dark eyes, caught like a rabbit in a snare.

They hung there, Sonny's hands all over him like white on rice. Then Cowboy whistled loud, breaking the spell. "Come on, boys. We need to hasta."

Sonny grinned a little, looking like a barracuda. "He's really gonna cramp our style."

"We'll drug him. I need my redneck time."

"Oh, I could so do that, Precious." That seemed to perk Sonny right up, and the man patted his ass, humming a little on the way up the gangplank.

He stopped, deactivated the booby trap, and headed up. The professor was on a deck chair, sound asleep. "There's a bunk on the way down. If the bed's made, you can have it. If it's not, that's ours."

"Got it. Trying to get rid of me, Jay-Jay?" Cowboy still had that amazing grin, the one MJ had seen more men, and women, fall for in bars...

"Nope. Just letting you know where you fit, babe." He grinned back, chuckled. "It's been a long fucking time, Cowboy."

"No shit. We'll catch up once we're out in the water, huh?" Cowboy picked the Doc up again and started hauling him belowdecks. "Y'all have fun, now."

"Don't let him hurt our boat."

"I got it, Jay-Jay." Cowboy's voice floated up before the hatch closed.

"Let's get out of here, Sunshine."

"Shit, yes." Sonny hopped right to it, helping him get their sleek little girl ready to shove off. He reached out, hand sliding out to touch whenever he could. "Mmm. Gonna distract me, Precious?"

"I'm going to do more than that, as soon as I can." He was going to make sure Sonny understood who was whose.

"Yeah?" Sonny swayed close, rocked by a little wave slapping the hull. "What are you going to do to me, MJ?"

"I'm going to thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

"Oh, I like the sound of that." Sonny gave him the first real smile he'd seen in hours. Maybe a day or more.

"I do, too." He reached out, fingers trailing along Sonny's belly. "I want you, Sunshine. Ten or twelve times."

"Good. We can shove off, and then I'll tear you up. And vice versa." Those muscles quivered for him, Sonny's pecs dancing a little.

"That works for me." MJ nodded and took one more kiss, making sure Sonny knew he was serious.

"Mmm." Sonny always just held on, loving him the way he needed.

Oh, hell yeah. Better.

Way better.

Sonny smacked his ass. "Moving. Now. Time to go, Precious." Usually Sonny only put it that way when someone was shooting at them.

"You got it, Sunshine. Let's go." The wind was blowing and it was time for them to get the hell out of Texas.

Thank God.

## *Chapter Twenty Five*

"J23."

The words were foreign, odd, and when he heard them again, they made him jump, the staticky voice was so far away.

"J23. Return to your cell."

Cell?

Something was crackling, burning, and Duncan frowned, trying to see through the smoke. Where was he? It was like some weird filmography about Viet Nam or perhaps one of the students' video games.

Except... he was inside.

In a... hospital? Laboratory? Clean room?

Something.

He wasn't sure.

Something hot and sharp hit his arm, and he jumped, cried out. "Goddamn!"

What was with people *poking* him?

"J23. Return to your cell."

A... soldier? Doctor? Jailer? Man? Extended a sizzling... cattle-prod thing at him, and he took a step back. "Are you talking to me, asshole? Back the fuck off."

"J23. Return to your cell."

"Quit saying that!"

This made no sense.

"J23." The voice was flat. Deadly. "Return to your cell."

"Who are you talking to?"

The prod poked out again, and he screamed, reaching for it, his hands on fire.

"J23. Return to your cell."

"Doc. Duncan!" Now something hit him that felt like a little stinging bee, right in his armpit.

"Doc!"

"Stop it!" He roared, slapping at the sting, things starting to go fuzzy, quiet, distant.

"Doc, it's me. Cowboy. Colby. Come on, honey. Wake up."

"Colby." The hospital and the quiet disappeared in a rush, and his eyes popped open. "Colby."

What the hell?

"Oh, man, I wasn't sure if you were ever going to wake up." Cowboy stared down at him, hand on his shoulder. His armpit still stung like crazy.

"I... I was having a bad dream."

"I know. You had a fit, Doc." Helping him sit, Cowboy gave him a bottle of water.

"I did? I don't remember. Thank you." Oh, cold. Good. Wait.

"Where are we?"

"On a boat, Doc. MJ's boat. We're heading for New Orleans." Colby looked tired, but not unhappy.

"A boat..." Oh, lord.

"A boat. Not with a goat. MJ was asking you questions and you passed out." Cowboy stroked his cheek, thumb rubbing over his lips.

"I'm sorry. It's been a..." He hummed, distracted, lips wrapping around Colby's thumb.

"It's been a tough couple of days, huh?" There was something about those bright, gray eyes staring at him that gave the air a charged feeling, sexy as hell.

He nodded, sucking harder. He didn't want to talk about the hard stuff. He wanted Colby to make him feel good. Laughing softly, Cowboy moved a little closer, body pressing against his, and that hot mouth replaced the fingers, kissing him good and hard. He slid his tongue against Cowboy's, sliding inside before letting Cowboy in, both of them pushing and taking. Moving like the boat.

He was on a fucking boat.

Cowboy made him forget soon enough, grabbing his ass and pulling him up off the little bunk so he draped across Cowboy's knees.

Strong man. He reached up, fingers tangling in Cowboy's hair, the kiss getting deeper and deeper.

Cowboy was so hot against him, skin on fire under his fingers. So good. Perfect. He tugged open buttons, the button-down shirt parting in his hands, letting him at the man's chest.

"Mmm. Duncan. Yeah." Those rough hands landed on his shoulders, holding tight as Cowboy pushed into his touch. He went for the nipples, loving the flare of danger when he pulled and tugged. Grunting, Cowboy smacked up against him, pushing him down on the bunk. His whole body bucked, trying to get more.

His cock ached, his balls throbbed, and he needed. "Touch me. Fuck."

"Love to. Fucking love how you feel." Colby touched him, hand on his belly, rubbing back and forth.

"Good." He arched, pushing into that touch, making that hand dig into his skin deeper. Bruises. He'd let this man leave bruises.

Which was a good thing, because Colby was leaving them, grabbing his hips, thumbs pushing against his hipbones.

"Harder." He spread, desperate to lose himself in this. Now.

"You know it, Doc. Want you to feel it for days." Thank God Colby was right there with him.

Duncan nodded furiously, grunting low as Colby's fingers dragged along his inner thigh. Then one hand found his cock, wrapping around it, thumb slipping down the underside. Hard. Hard enough to burn.

"Fuck!" His head slammed back, throat working as his hips rocked up.

"Soon, Doc. We'll get to it. Want to see you like this, now." The man was relentless.

"Anything. Need it." He didn't bother to be ashamed of saying it.

"Good." Cowboy bent and sucked a mark up on his chest, just over his left pectoral muscle. Duncan watched, his eyes feeling like they were burning in his skull.

"Like that, Doc? Like when I hurt you just a tiny bit?" Those gray eyes laughed for him a little, full of piss and vinegar.

"Yes." He growled low, dragging Cowboy into a fierce kiss. That kiss bit deep, both of them bleeding a little for it. Cowboy's fingers dug into his skin, clutching at him like this might be the last time anyone ever touched him.

Things got a little weird, both of them fighting, struggling, bodies slapping together.

Cowboy finally shoved him down and crawled on top, naked ass pressing back and down against his cock.

"Colby." The word was hard to say, his tongue felt thick.

"Come on, Duncan. Fuck me, huh? Like you mean it." That slow drawl washed over him like honey, making it easier to understand than his own voice.

His hands landed on Colby's - his, his man, his to protect and touch and watch, his - hips and he arched up, doing as Colby asked.

"Uhn!" That lean body arched above his, the tight hole resisting him for a moment, the feeling a little scratchy.

"Mine." He leaned up, teeth scraping along Colby's chest.

"Yeah. Yeah, Doc." Colby sat back, taking him in like it was nothing. Only the heavy moan told him better.

He rocked up in little jerks, his body moving without thought. Hot. Hot. His. Fingers digging in against his chest, Colby took him in and out, in and out, body swallowing him deep.

"Good." He dragged Colby down harder, his muscles going rock hard.

"Jesus, Doc. Love it when you're all caveman. More. Fucking A. Harder."

"Harder." He grunted, slamming up into Colby.

"More. Yeah." Their skin made spanking noises. It would have made him laugh if he had the breath.

Growls and moans poured out of him as he pulled and jerked, his cock feeling almost raw. Colby gave him everything. Hot skin, hotter kisses, that ass squeezing down around him; it all made him ready to explode. He reached for Colby, hands clenching as his balls drew up tight.

"Come on, Doc!" Colby reached down and stroked himself, and the muscles around him clamped down even harder. Tighter.

He grabbed for Colby's prick about the time his whole world exploded, his cock throbbing as he shot inside that perfect heat.

A tight grunt sounded, Colby pushing into the tunnel of their joined hands. Then the world went white hot as Colby's spunk splashed against his belly.

Yes.

Yes, good.

He grunted happily, dragging Colby down onto him.

One lean, brown hand patted his chest, leaving little wet spots. "Good Doc."

"Uh-huh." He concurred.

"You okay, man?" Kissing his collarbone, Colby snuggled close to him, yawning huge.

"Yes. Better." Duncan stroked Colby's back, petting and holding on. "Much better."

"Good. Get some rest, Doc. We'll talk when you wake up." Colby kissed his lips, right at the corner, licking a tiny bit.

Nodding was the easier answer, and the one he wanted to give, so he did. He nodded and closed his eyes, letting himself sink into sleep.

## *Chapter Twenty Six*

There was something almost ballet-like about watching Cowboy and Sonny try to figure out who was going to kill who.

It was fascinating enough that he wasn't bored, and unlikely enough that MJ really didn't have to pay close attention. In fact, it let him be amused and poke idly at Duncan. It was entertaining.

Cowboy skirted Sonny, wandering over, shorts hanging low on his hips. "You know, he's awful strong when he loses it."

"Yeah? Cool. Has he beat you up yet?" Cowboy was looking good, all lean Marlboro man-y...

"Not really. He carried me out of a firefight, though." Grinning, Cowboy slumped down next to him, stretching out in the sun.

"That's fairly high on the cool scale, I suppose. Mine got shot rescuing me."

"So did mine. It healed in, like, ten minutes, though, so I guess I have to give props to Sonny, huh?"

"Yep. Sonny even drove after. It was cool." He lifted up one leg, stretching, showing his ankle and giving Sonny a show at the same time – multi-tasking was a gift, really. "I was hurting and in a closet. It sucked."

Sonny stopped and stared, which was kind of unfortunate, as Cowboy picked that moment to reach out and touch his scar. Oops. Sonny was becoming incredibly weird about that whole Cowboy-touching thing.

He rolled up, pulled off his muscle shirt and showed Cowboy his new tat. "He did this. Not a bad job."

Cowboy blinked. "Dude. You let him ink you? It must be love."

Now Sonny was grinning, looking proud as hell.



He nodded, chuckled once. "I asked him to do it."

He got off on it.

"Shit. That's serious, Jay-Jay." Cowboy gave him a huge grin. "Let Doc fuck me."

"No shit?" He clapped Cowboy on the shoulder. "Damn, babe. You've only kissed me once." He looked over at Duncan, who was glaring. "He's a little skinny for my tastes."

"Ah, thus spake the surfer boy." Ooh. Skinny and bitchy.

Sonny finally came over and handed him a drink, looking a whole lot less grumpy.

"Thanks, Sunshine." He took the drink, patted the chair beside him. "And, Professor Monster, I'll have you know that I haven't surfed in... at least two years."

Sonny nudged him, sitting close. "You should teach me."

"That would be fun. You'd be good at it." That was probably a blatant lie. Sonny was huge and not the surfing type. Still.

"No, I wouldn't. But I'll enjoy watching you." One big hand landed on his thigh.

"What did you say these two did for a living, Colby?"

Oh, MJ had to hear Cowboy's answer to that one.

"MJ's a contractor. Sonny's in stock cars. Right, Jay-Jay?" One of Cowboy's brows went up, that slow grin so familiar.

"Absolutely, babe. My friend Cowboy here? He's into collections. It's a huge market right now, what with all the people not paying their share."

"Why does he call you babe?" Duncan asked, face pinching up a little. Jesus, he'd always hated the academic type.

"Because of the movie. You know, the talking pig? It was popular, at the time." Oink. Oink.

"There you go." Cowboy leaned back, tilting his face up to the sun. "You need to relax, Doc. You and the big guy, both. Me and Jay-Jay are just buds."

MJ nodded, leaned back into Sonny. "Not only that, but one day, one of us will get to kill the other. It makes for fabulous tension."

Sonny went all rigid under his weight, and Duncan gasped, but Cowboy just laughed. "You know it."

They clinked their beer bottles together, Cowboy's gray eyes meeting his, the look serious, sure. He didn't look away, just held the stare. They both knew what was what.

"So, how long are we gonna act like buddies?" Sonny asked, breaking the spell a little.

"I imagine that will last until your compatriot finds a place to drop us off. Surely whoever was supposedly tracking me is off track now, yes?" Man, that little guy got snooty when he was scared.

"I imagine so, Doctor Windbag. Don't think for one minute that I can't out hoity-toity you. My mamma was a Southern belle, not some Yankee." Sonny, now? He did snooty with a drawl.

"Oh, for fuck's sake." MJ poked Sonny in the belly. "You, breathe." He pointed at the professor. "You need a fucking joint. You'd feel better." Then he met Cowboy's eyes. "And you... if you fucked him hard enough, you'd loosen his tight ass up."

"Yeah, yeah. Maybe I should go have a shot at his ass, but who knows when I'll see you again and get to hang out?" Cowboy sipped his beer, looking all casual, but he watched Duncan like a hawk.

Duncan growled a little, shoulders rolling. Oh, cool.

"Well, you know, it's been a while for us." MJ wondered if he could push the professor over the edge.

"Yep. A long while. You know I adore you."

Sonny growled. Hell, it might not be the prof who went over.

"Am I your best friend, babe?" He actually sprawled a little, the blatant laughter in Cowboy's eyes tickling him.

"You are. I mean, damn, who else would show up in Singapore..."

"Oh. Man. Singapore..." He put his hands over his cock in pure self-defense.

"No, shit." Cowboy crossed his legs. "Damn."

They looked at each other, then they burst out into laughter, big deep belly laughs.

Duncan pursed his lips and stood, heading for the opposite rail. Sonny just growled and threw his beer overboard. Lord, they needed to relax.

He leaned, winked at Cowboy. "You deal with yours. I have mine."

Then he turned and wrestled Sonny right down onto the deck. Sonny exploded, fighting him just like he needed the man to, just like Sonny obviously needed, as well. Shit, yeah. He didn't give an inch, pushing hard, slamming Sonny's shoulders onto the deck. Come on. Come on. Let's play. Sonny's fist exploded into his face, the blur of motion just fucking perfect. Unexpected for such a gorilla of a man. He grunted, got his knee square in Sonny's stomach and pushed down. Hard. The man's face went purple, and Sonny bucked, grunting, trying to throw him off. Those hard hands clamped down on his arms, squeezing until he felt bones grind.

"So. Fucking. Strong."

He groaned.

"Mine. You hear me, Precious?" Sonny rolled and slammed him down, bending to lick the sweat off his throat.

He nodded, lifted his head, growling into Sonny's ear. "Prove it, you beautiful son of a bitch. Come on, I can take it."

"Fuck. Fuck." Sonny scrabbled at his shorts, pulling them down and away from his cock.

"Yeah." That was it. Just like that. The cloth slid down over his ass, catching around his knees, and Sonny licked his belly, biting at his hipbone.

"Harder." His fingers dug into Sonny's scalp, demanding.

"More." Sonny bit him harder before moving on to the tip of his cock, licking at it, pushing him back and forth.

He didn't worry about Cowboy or the other guy. He just worried about those lips, those teeth on his cock. Pulling his hips up, Sonny licked at him, sucking him in and pulling with that amazing mouth. Oral motherfucker.

MJ knew when to go with it, too. Sucking. Fucking. Marking.

"Precious." Sonny popped off his cock, backed away just enough to yank MJ's shorts all the way off.

"Yeah. Yeah, Sonny. Come on." He was ready. Now.

"Just let me..." Sonny licked two fingers and pressed them against his hole, giving him a quick one-two to get him ready.

"Fuck, yeah." He pushed up on his elbows, bearing down on Sonny's cock.

"Yeah. Oh, Precious." The sun beat down on them, made Sonny sweat for him, made everything hotter.

"Yours. Do you fucking hear me?"

"I hear. Jesus. Need you." Sonny pushed in so hard that he thought it might split him in two.

MJ grunted, breathed through it, let the stubborn son of a bitch in. Sonny gritted his teeth, thrusting in and out, hips moving like a piston. Fuck, the man was good, felt just right.

"Mmm. Good. Harder. Now." His ass was going to have deck burns. Could you get deck burns? He'd bet he could, the way his butt was trying to set the deck on fire. Sonny was giving him some serious friction. He slapped his hands on the deck, hauling his butt up a little. Sonny grunted, his eyes rolling back in his head, that strong, tanned throat stretching out. The man was fine. So fine. Fine and broad shouldered and hot and... Yeah. Fuck. Yes.

Harder and harder, Sonny pushed him, slamming inside him, making him shake. They were going to slide right off into the water, or hit the rail, or maybe just explode.

Mmm. Explosions.

That so worked for him.

Sonny's mouth crashed down on his, the kiss making him bleed. Focus, Precious. He could hear Sonny say it in his mind. In his mind. Rick. He needed to call... Oh. Oh, fuck him. The edges of the world went fuzzy and gray.

Cupping his chin, Sonny turned his face up, kissing him again and again. His fucking balls were going to explode. Any second.

Sonny pulled back, those damned dark eyes hot on his, that mouth swollen and red. "More, Precious."

"Anything." He pushed up on his elbows, forcing his ass down on that fat prick until his thighs screamed.

"Christ!" Sonny grabbed MJ's cock with one hand, moving so fast that their skin made obscene slapping sounds as it came together. "Oh, Jesus fuck."

"Now. Now. Sunshine. Fuck." He screamed, heels slamming onto the deck.

"Uhn!" Sonny's whole body went rigid, that amazing fucking cock pushing so deep, so hard, that MJ shouted again, his entire frame shook.

Spunk sprayed over his belly, his chest, the world fading away. Sonny was heavy, almost limp, on top of him when he came back down. Only the sweat and the press of Sonny's chest against his as the man breathed gave away any signs of life.

MJ would have done something - pat or pet or comfort, but damn.

His fucking universe was tilty.

"S'okay, Precious. I got you." Sonny always knew.

"Good. Keep me." He was a little dopey. It'd be just his luck if Sonny started shooting Quaaludes out his cock.

"Gonna." Sonny planted a sloppy kiss on his neck. Maybe it was his ass, not Sonny's cock.

Or like a weird MJ-and-Sonny spunk chemical reaction.

Super post-fucking goofball downers.

Something.

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Cowboy would have stayed to watch. Hell, he would have made popcorn and enjoyed the show. Duncan had other plans. The man watched Sonny and MJ whack on each other for a few moments, mouth hanging open. Then he turned on his heel and headed below.

Sighing, Cowboy unfolded from his comfy seat in the sun and followed, coming right up behind the Doc. "You okay?"

"I'm on a boat with two insane monkey mouthbreathers, I have a cut in my thigh, and I missed grading my midterms."

That was a damn fine growl.

"Want me to look at that leg?" That was the easiest answer, he figured. Avoid the hard stuff.

"No. Yes. Fuck, I don't know."

"What's the matter, Doc? That turn you on a little?" Hell, it had given Cowboy wood. There was something seriously primal about MJ and his new guy. Well, new to Cowboy.

"What? Watching those two..." Oh, yeah. Somebody was revved.

"Yeah. A lot of testosterone there. You know all about that, huh?" He pushed against Duncan a little, grinning.

"I haven't the foggiest idea what you're talking about." Little bitch.

"Uh-huh." Cowboy reached around to press a hand to the front of Duncan's pants. "Sure." Oh, man, that pretty cock was full and hard, a little wet spot leaking through the thin shorts. "Nope. You didn't think that was hot at all."

"Nope. Not a bit."

He did love a bad liar.

"Then this must all be for me." He pushed his hand down between the shorts and the skin, wrapping his fingers around Duncan's cock. Oh, now. That was hot enough to brand. He fucking approved, dragging his fist up and then pushing down, making Duncan feel it. "I liked it, Doc. I liked how hot they were for each other. Made me think of how it feels when you fuck me." Time to tease the bear.

Duncan's muscles rippled, cock bobbing hard. "I haven't ever fucked you."

Cowboy blinked, leaning his chin on Duncan's shoulder. "You sure about that?"

"Pretty... I think... I..." Those muscles rippled again, stretching against his belly.

"Huh. Well, you wanna try it?" That had to be the most fascinating thing ever, the dual personality.

"I don't, as a rule, but..." That low rumble was right under the surface, wanting out. "Yeah."

"Yeah? Not a top, huh?" He pulled Duncan around, stripping off the shorts, loving the whole naked and rippling vibe.

"Labels are... limiting." Duncan put his glasses aside, hands solid and hot where they landed.

"Well, sure they are. Cowboy works for me, though." He chuckled, changing his hold on Duncan to get closer.

"I like Colby." Duncan leaned into him, bringing them forehead to forehead. "Quite a bit."

"Do you? I got teased a lot about being like cheese." He grinned, thinking about how that had kind of started his ass kicking days.

"Cheesy Cowboy Man, hmm?" Duncan did have him some pretty damn eyes.

"Mmmhmm. It wasn't pretty. Did you ever get, like, doughnut jokes?"

"Highlander jokes. Lots of them."

"I bet. There can be only one." He'd never even watched the show and he knew about that.

"Uh-huh. There should have been only one. I loved the first movie." Duncan's hands opened his jeans, freed his cock.

"The guy was French..." You couldn't trust a French Scotsman. Oh, damn, that felt good. He pushed into Duncan's hand, loving the heat.

"Mmhmm. Sean Connery was hot, though."

"Yeah." Why were they talking about movies again? Duncan chuckled, fingers working his cock. "Uhn. Feels good. Damn." He pushed his hips up, getting closer. Damn, but he liked Duncan, either way, Prissy Prof or hulking protector.

"It does. Smells good, too." Duncan started sliding down.

"Yeah? Wonder how I taste?" He winked, grinned. Yeah.

"I do. Wonder, that is."

"Well, you're more than welcome to find out, Doc." He put his hands on Duncan's shoulders and pushed a little.

"Pushy bastard." Duncan went easy, cheek brushing his body the whole way.

"You know it. I like what I like." He liked to get sucked, to watch a pretty mouth close around him and pull. He liked the look of smart professor staring up at him, too. He thought that swollen lips from sucking his prick could only make it better. "Come on and suck me, Doc." His cock rubbed against that fine mouth.

Those sweet lips opened right up, tongue sliding over the tip of his cock, flicking at his slit.

"Christ." He did love the amazing and ridiculous idea of mouths on cocks. Goddamn.

"Uh-uh. Duncan." The Professor grinned, licked again.

"Duncan." He stroked the hair back off of Duncan's forehead, watching as the man worked the head of his cock. A moan vibrated around the tip, the sound going right to his balls. "Duncan. That's good. Real good." His skin felt tight, his leg muscles like rocks. Those lips pushed down, throat swallowing hard around the head of his cock. Cowboy jerked and moaned, his hips rocking, his belly going tight. Goddamn, he wanted more.

Of course, that was when Duncan eased up, let up on the pressure, teasing him.

"Don't, Duncan. Don't mess with me. I need." Surely the man could feel the heat pouring off his skin.

Those lips wrapped around the tip of his cock, the suction right there, sudden and sharp. Shit. That was enough to make his eyes roll back in his head, to make his skin tingle. Jesus. Duncan was good. Duncan pulled and pulled, sucking and humming around his cock, tongue fucking his slit. That was what really got him. The fucking attention to detail. Duncan might not be able to remember fucking him, but the man did remember what he liked. Then the pressure went up and down, Duncan sucking, whimpering low.

"Just like that, Doc. You're doing so good." His voice sounded blown, rough as broken glass.

Doc went all the way down to the root, throat grasping at the tip. Cowboy grunted, his hips rocking and rolling, his hands on Duncan's head. He was trying hard not to force it. Then Doc's fingers slid up his thighs, pulling him into that hot mouth, over and over and over again. Gritting his teeth, Cowboy held on for as long as he could, the heat and wonder of it making him moan, hump, and need. Then he came, right into Duncan's waiting mouth, hot and wet and almost painful.

Duncan sucked and groaned, head bobbing, slurping at his cock. Fuck-a-doodle-doo. That might just be the death of him.

That mouth cleaned him off, tongue sliding so easy.

"Damn, Doc. Damn." He petted that dark head, loved on Duncan.

"Mmhmm. Like how you taste."

"Good. 'Cause I hope to hell you'll do it again." And again and again.

Duncan's laugh fucking tickled his belly. "I'll take it under consideration, Colby."

"Yeah? 'Cause I might be willing to ask nice. Real nice."

"Mmm." Those pretty eyes shone up at him. "I need something, Colby."

"What's that, Duncan?" He'd give whatever the man wanted, just to pay him back for making Cowboy feel so good.

"Touch me." Duncan leaned back, cock swollen, dark at the top.

"You know it." He sank to the deck, his knees hitting hard. Then he reached down and grabbed Duncan's prick, stroking nice and easy.

"Oh." Duncan's head fell back, throat working, soft moans filling the air. Oh, yeah. Doc liked that.



"Pretty." He bent down and bit at Duncan's neck a little, leaving a mark.

"Uhn." He wasn't sure if that was an agreement or not. Didn't matter. Not with Duncan pushing that thick cock through his hand, chest and belly hard and tight, muscles rippling. "More. Fuck." Duncan groaned, ass humping faster, pushing harder.

"Anything you want, Doc. Anything." He'd do anything for this guy. It was kind of scary.

"Kiss me." Duncan's lips tasted like him.

"Yes." He bent his head and took that kiss, tasting thoroughly. Damn. Oh, damn.

Duncan opened up, cock sliding on his palm. He pushed his tongue into Duncan's mouth, pressing his thumb against the slit of that fine cock. Sweet, hot man.

It only took one or two more touches before Duncan was shooting, crying out into his mouth.

Cowboy smiled, listening to Jay-Jay out on deck, yelling his head off. Looked like things were good all around.

This whole boat thing had its plusses.

Cowboy leaned his head against Duncan's, hummed a little under his breath. Damn, that had been nice.

"Better." Duncan smiled for him, lips all fuck-swollen and sweet. "Much better."

"You know it. Still going to try to make me believe that you didn't think MJ and redneck boy weren't hot?"

"Until the end of time."

"Uh-huh. You're something else, Doc." He wasn't sure what. But something.

It worked for him.

## *Chapter Twenty Seven*

The email came as he'd finished shoving the last shirt into a bag. They were moving from Edinburgh to... somewhere. God, they'd moved ten times in two weeks, Nick pushing them and pushing them, not sleeping. Not letting him sleep.

"Call. Now, Rick. Right now. Boomer."

"Boomer needs me to call him." He looked over at Neil, snapped the laptop shut. "I shouldn't use the cell, right?"

Neil looked up from his cheap paperback, brows drawing together. "No, love. No cell phones. You go find a phone box, and I'll pack."

"I'm done with everything but your clothes. Why don't you finish up and meet me down there?" He put his duffle on his shoulder, grabbed his laptop. "We'll walk to the train station, get some..." Well, sun was sort of improbable. "Air."

"Yes. Some foggy air." Neil smiled at him, and he laughed. Yeah, the air in Scotland had this... heavy quality.

"I'll go down the road, there's a bank of phones." He leaned over, kissed his lover quickly. "Don't be too long. I'm starving."

"I promise. I'll catch up soonest." Neil hugged him tight for a moment, hands holding him a little when he pulled away.

"Mmm. Okay. I'll call and watch for you." Love. He loved, so much.

"I shall be there." Neil patted him on the ass, sending him on his way with the thought that he was loved dearly in return.

Paddy hurried down the stairs and out onto the street. It was busy, which he thought was good. They'd blend in - so long as he didn't open his mouth, that was. He kept himself small and pushed through the sea of coats. They did like their black coats around here.

The phone bank seemed farther away than it had the day before, but then yesterday they'd only been going to the market, not moving on again.

He missed France - even more than California, which was weird because he'd been there the longest.

Paddy used a calling card to dial the number MJ left.

"Rick?"

"Hey, Boomer. I don't have much time." Overseas calls ate the minutes.

"I know. Listen. Do you have a scar, down by your balls? Maybe under your arm? Something?"

"What?" Boomer wasn't making sense.

"I've found something out. You might have a homing device implanted in you. You have to get it out, if you do."

"A what?" Where? Was it metal? Was it degrading?

"A homing device. They can find you, Rick."

No. No fucking way. "Where is it? Where did you say to look again?"

"Probably under your arm, in your leg. Mine was under my arm." No. No, no, no. There was no way he could be the one leading someone to them. Could he? "This other guy had it at his groin. You have to get rid of it, Rick. You hear me?"

"I do. I'll get Neil to help me. I... They know where we are?"

Neil.

Neil.

They know.

"Get the damned chip out and hit the road, Rick." Boomer's voice warred with Neil's tiny light in his head, a question mark making him smile.

"Hitting the road now. We're..." Something jarred him, hard, inside. "Neil?"

"What? What's wrong, Rick?"

"Neil?" He dropped the phone, took one step before he hit his knees, pain blooming inside him.

There was a great ringing inside his head, like a giant gong had been hit. It rippled and echoed, the sound of Neil's voice loud-loud-loud.

Then it was gone, and the silence made him violently ill.

"Neil!"

He gagged, the people taking a wide berth around him. Then he stood, stumbling forward, running. Neil.

Neil.

Neil.

Please, God. No.

Somehow he made it back to their tiny rented room, hoping against hope that he would find Neil along the way, that his Brit would be coming to him. That it was all a mix up.

The door was open.

There was blood.

Blood.

"Neil."

No.

No.

Neil was gone. There was a syringe laying on the floor and a bloody handprint on the doorframe...

Okay.

Okay.

He could.

He grabbed the cell phone from his pocket, dialing the number MJ had given him. Answer.

Answer.

"Sunshine's Place. How can I help you?"

Oh. Oh, God, he knew that deep, Southern voice.

"They took Neil. There's blood. He's gone. Please, help me."

"Hold on." He could hear the sound of the phone being passed from hand to hand. "It's for you, Precious."

"Lo?"

"Boomer. They came. They got him."

"Dude. Rick, man. Run. Now."

"No. No, I need your help." His mind was going a million miles a minute. "Drugs. There's a handprint. They've got him."

"And they're going to have you. Run, you little idiot."

"NO!" he screamed the word into the phone. "You KNEW! You knew what they'd done to me and you let them find Neil!"

There was complete silence for a long moment, and he was going to scream and scream and scream until his throat exploded, then a heavy sigh came across the line. "Okay. Okay, Rick. Here's what you do..."

He whimpered softly, but he listened. He was scared and sick and empty, but he was going to listen.

He was going to listen and find his Neil.

If it was the last thing he ever did.

## *Chapter Twenty Eight*

Sonny watched MJ pace for a few long moments.

That phone call had been bad. Bad, bad. Hell, Sonny had known it would be bad when it was Red on the line. MJ and Paddy had gone through quite a confab, and when MJ finally hung up, well... The explosion was imminent.

"Bad news, Precious?"

Big blue eyes rolled over at him. "Bad? Why would anything be fucking bad? Barring of course that there's a crazy little firebug in motherfucking Scotland who just had his telekinetic lover kidnapped and thinks it's my fucking fault because it didn't fucking occur to me that they were tagging the lab rats!"

Sonny blinked and corrected automatically. "Telepathic."

"Tele..." MJ stilled, stared at him. "That doesn't make it better. They have him. The English fuck knows things about us."

"Yeah. I know, Precious." This was just not good. Not good.

"Sorry, stupid son of a bitch. Goddamn academic jackoffs." MJ turned, snarled at the little professor, hands waving. "Explain to me how the *fuck* you have a goddamn homing device in you and you don't *know* it!"

Duncan blinked. "You said all the rest of the people like me were dead."

"They are. Rick's not like you. He didn't have to get fucked with. So why did they tag him? Why the fuck did they send Neil for him?"

"I believe the question you really want the answer to is why the fuck didn't you think about it in time?"

Oh, fuck. MJ was going to shoot the professorial little fuck.

Sonny stepped in just before MJ laid hands on Duncan, deflecting him. "So where are we meeting him? Paddy."

"Saint Maarten." MJ's muscles were rippling, jerking, jumping under his hands. "You two are coming with. Congrats."

"No way. You let us off in Florida."

MJ's muscles went hard-hard. "I'm going to kill him, Sunshine. Okay?"

"Okay, Precious." Except he couldn't last time, so they'd end up helping. "I'll help."

"Okay." The gun appeared out of nowhere, the muzzle somehow right in the center of Duncan's forehead. Ah, fuck.

Somehow, he'd lost the thread, because he'd thought for sure MJ meant Paddy, not the Doc. Cowboy was fixing to get postal, and the safety was off, so MJ meant it. Sonny sighed and stepped into the fray, pushing MJ's chest. "Not yet, Precious."

"This isn't helping, Sunshine."

"No? Well, do you want to clean up the mess? 'Cause you'd have to shoot old Cowboy there, too." He blocked the gun with his own body.

"We could wait for a storm." That weird, dead look was fading some, but man, there was some high-dollar worry in those eyes.

"It would draw flies and stink, Precious." MJ was pretty fastidious about their little yacht.

"Flies are an important part of the ecological cycle. I hate maggots, though."

He saw Cowboy, out of the corner of his eye, waving a syringe.

"I know. I remember." There was that whole rotting partner thing. Sonny ignored Cowboy for now. If he needed the drugs, he'd use them, but he'd rather not.

"Rick's torn up. I might have rage. These assholes are starting to really aggravate me."

"Well, all right, then. What do you say we put all that rage to use?" That laser focus could work for them, instead of against them.

"You going to let me blow the boat up?"

"Right now?" Sonny raised a brow, going for coolly ironic. "That might be counterproductive."

"You think?" MJ was going to blow a gasket. It was hot.

"It just might. I mean, I'd hate for you to have to fly to Saint Maarten."

"I could just sit on your ass and let you paddle, really hard." MJ was playing with the pistol now. That was either really good or a sign of incipient boredom.

"My ass isn't that buoyant." They'd figured that out that one time in Barbados, when MJ had decided to drown him. He'd woke up three hours later with salt water still in his nose.

"Yeah, it's all that muscle-mass. Makes you heavy as fuck. I guess we could blow up condoms and attach them to your balls with fishing line..."

"Are you two out of your goddamn MINDS?" Lord, the professor had crap timing.

That gun swung out again, aimed at the Doc again.

Definitely boredom. Waving the syringe-holding Cowboy off, Sonny grabbed the gun, stroking it like he would MJ's cock. "You can find better things to do with them."

MJ's eyes were on his hand. Oh, he had someone's full attention, now. Pervy little fucker. They should go practice yoga - that was supposed to be relaxing, right? Relaxing.

Stretchy.

Bendy.

Sonny had never thought he would learn to love yoga. He had, though, as long as MJ was the practitioner. "Come on, Precious," he said, tugging the gun barrel.

MJ followed him, eyes on his, just one step after the other.

Soon enough they had left the cowboy and Doc behind, heading down to their little bed. Hell, if MJ followed and calmed down, Sonny would fellate the damned gun.

"You know, eventually this 'distract the surfer with sex' will stop working."

"Then it will have to be drugs, food or explosions..." He could do all three, concurrently or consecutively.

"Mmm. Explosions." MJ handed him the Glock, shoulders working and rolling.

"Mmmhmm. I know the way to your heart." Sonny rubbed the barrel of the piece along MJ's belly, teasing a little.

The safety was on, now.



"Mmmhmm. Through my ribcage." MJ didn't hesitate at all. The man had an unnatural peace around weapons.

"Yep. Crunchy." Sonny set the Glock aside, making sure MJ could get to it easy. Then he dropped to his knees and pulled MJ's shorts down. "Course, you like when I suck you, too."

Those bright eyes stared at him, burning up. "Sonny, I'd cut down a redwood tree for your mouth."

Oh, damn. That was... "What, no whales?" Sonny didn't wait for MJ to answer. He just sucked. That was his job.

"Sunshine." MJ wasn't fucking thinking about Paddy or guns or fucking Cowboy or trees now, was he? No fucking way. Now MJ was his.

He swirled his tongue around the head, his fingers drawn to the ink at the base, tracing patterns. He was MJ's, too, lock, stock, and barrel. Sonny loved the way MJ felt, looked, and tasted. He even loved the crazy rage.

MJ arched, hips pumping, nice and easy, eyes on his lips. "Fucking love your mouth on me. It makes me stupid."

He reached back and pulled at MJ's ass, urging the man to move faster. MJ started thrusting, taking him like it was the only thing MJ needed. Sonny figured sometimes his mouth was MJ's savior. That kind of rocked.

MJ's fingers rubbed over his scalp, not pushing, just touching, stroking him. There was something magic in the way MJ loved on him, even in the worst of times. Christ, it was hot as all hell.

"Sunshine." Fuck, yeah. Just like that.

"Mmmhmm." He moaned around MJ's cock, needing more, needing to taste and feel it when MJ came. MJ arched, humping fast and shallow, before that pretty cock swelled, spunk spilling onto his tongue. That was the ticket. MJ was already relaxing, he could feel it. Sonny had what he wanted, too, even if his cock was just going to explode. MJ rode a few seconds longer, then slipped down, pushing him to the floor and yanking his jeans open. It took maybe two seconds before those hands were around his prick, tugging good and hard.

Sonny thrashed, the sudden increase in friction making him buck into MJ's touch, his body needing every little bit of it. Christ. "Like that, Precious."

"Yeah. Look at you." MJ was doing enough of that for both of them, watching every move he made.

His hands and feet drummed on the deck, pushing him up to get more, harder, faster. "Need... Oh, fuck. MJ."

MJ shifted, moved, slid just like a snake before that mouth fell over his cock, dropping on him like a ton of bricks. Sonny shouted, his hips punching up, his hands tangling in that too-long and almost-white hair. "MJ. Precious. More."

Two fingers pushed right into his ass, stretching him, filling him up as MJ sucked.

God Almighty, he was gonna explode. Boom. Then MJ would get orgasms and get to blow things up.

It was damn near a perfect solution.

MJ's fingers quirked, pegging his gland good and hard. Sonny bucked, his body trying to get more, his ass clamping down on those fingers. "Fucking love how you touch me." Blue eyes flashed up at him, and then MJ started working his gland - over and over, pushing him hard. "I'm. Precious. Gonna." He was too hot, too full, his breath heaving in his chest. Sonny grunted, his cock jerking madly when he came, his body shaking like a fucking leaf.

"Mmm." That satisfied little sound around his cock was almost too much.

Sonny stroked MJ's cheeks with his thumbs, rubbing in little circles. "Fucking A. Better."

"Uh-huh." MJ looked at him, eyes serious, all of a sudden. "They're going to do bad shit to the Brit, Sonny, and it's my fucking fault."

"It is?" Neil had been all wrapped up with Rick long before they'd met, right? He wasn't sure how that could be MJ's fault. "What do we need to do?"

"We go get Rick and find the Brit."

"Okay, then, Precious." He nodded, willing to go and do anything to help MJ get shed of these people once and for all. They were retired, damn it.

"Then we kill that motherfucking Greg and lose the cell phones. I'm tired of company."

"We keep saying that." This time it was his turn to stare into those eyes, so like the damned ocean the man loved. "Promise me this time we'll just go."

"You have my word, Sunshine. This time we'll just disappear, like smoke."

That suited him down to the bone. Him, MJ, the open road, and or water. They just had to do this, first. "Okay, Precious. Time to go, huh?"

"Yeah, man. Let's get gone. There's a bad fucking moon rising."

They'd head out, get the job done, and get disappeared.

And they weren't going to take anyone with them when they were gone, damn it.

## *Chapter Twenty Nine*

Okay.

He was in Saint Maarten.

Like, in the Caribbean, but with Dutch people and shit.

Oh, God.

There was this weird, awful blankness in the back of his head, which was better than the periodic spikes of pain that left him puking and shaking, sweating like he'd run a mile and needing to scream in the worst way. That sucked.

Especially when you were on a plane with a bunch of bitchy American suits and stuffy English guys that weren't Neil and were, therefore, neither hot or cool or...

Neil.

His Neil.

Paddy groaned, his knees buckling a little, eyes rolling as an oily film filled his mouth, the rush of guilt and complete and utter panic overwhelming him again. The only reason -- the absolute only reason -- that he didn't scream out loud was because he hadn't slept and he couldn't think and if some policeman came over to find out what was wrong, Padraic was very, very afraid that his mouth would open and all of the sudden he'd tell them the truth -- possibly in pig Latin or Portuguese, but maybe in Dutch -- and he'd just say that his Neil was hurting and lost and it was maybe (or not really maybe at all, was it. No. No, it was most very surely definitely not maybe, but was incredibly absolutely positively) his fault.

Oh. God.

He stood in the middle of Front Street in Philipsburg, which he thought was the major city on the Dutch side of the island, but might as well have been Mars. Paddy was sure it was pretty. There were hills. Resorts. Brightly painted houses and fruity drinks.

Something jostled his elbow, the force of it sweeping him along toward a red shuttle bus. He didn't know the man who was pushing him, but when he opened his mouth to protest, the guy squeezed his elbow, and his whole arm went numb.

"Dude." He was going to lose it -- plop. "No... Uh. Is it money? Guilders? I don't have any and if you rob me, I'll just..." Wasn't it guilders? Maybe it was euros now.

Another spike of pain hit him, and his throat went dry.

"Shut up." The man was American. No native spoke with a Texas accent, so that had to be someone with MJ. "I'm taking you to the guy you want to meet. Just do what I tell you."

"Who? Who do I want to meet? I want a name." He tried really hard to brace himself. There were scary people looking for... well, not him, he didn't think, but somebody, because they had Neil and damn it, he was going to get his lover back.

Cold gray eyes cut to his. "Boomer says hey. Now, shut up and come on. Here's your ticket."

The bus said they were going to Marigot.

"Okay." He didn't flinch, not even a little. He was tired of being scared.

The bus steps were bumpy and squishy and a little weird and incredibly high and Paddy was really, really grateful when the Boomer-friend guy's hands landed on his butt and boosted him up. He was grateful, too, when there was nothing more to it than that. The guy pushed him toward the back, moving to sit next to him on the aisle, staring straight ahead.

Paddy sat and thought non-throwing up thoughts and kept his eyes open because if he closed them, even for a second, he was going to sleep and he wasn't sleeping until he got Neil back. Maybe he couldn't, anyway. Maybe if he did close his eyes, he would just see things, horrible things, and that... Ow.

An elbow jabbed into his ribs. "Stop whimpering. You're drawing attention."

How could the man talk without moving his mouth?

"Back off. I'm not scared of you." He was going to punch MJ in the nose.

"I'm not the one you should be scared of, for sure." He thought... thought he saw a smile for a second.

"No. No, you're not." He shifted his pack down onto the floorboard, keeping one strap around his leg. There were a lot of trees and a lot of clapboard buildings and a lot of weird flowers. Neil would like it here. Neil would like the little houses and the terraced gardens and the weird floweriness of it. Neil would sit out in the garden and read a book and drink tea and...

Neil would.

He shook a little, his jaw clenching, his hand opening and closing where it rested by the window.

The Boomer-dude just stared at the seat ahead of them, like there was nothing wrong at all, like the world was still spinning.

Of course, what if Boomer hadn't sent him? What if Boomer had been kidnapped? What if this guy was from back at school and had known MJ and then followed him to the Caribbean and was taking him somewhere to hurt him? "Why did Boomer send you?"

"I'm taking you to meet him. I'm just the courier, huh? The big redneck wanted to come, but Boomer figured you'd break down on him."

"He's a good guy. Not Boomer, Sonny." He closed his eyes a second, opening them when MJ's face sorta floated up in the blackness, all scarred and scary. God, he used to think MJ was hot.

"You talk too much." A water bottle got handed over. "Try to rest. It's about another half hour on the bus."

"I can't. Thanks, though. I don't even know what day it is." His hands were shaking hard enough that he spilled the water on his fingers, and the little droplets fascinated him suddenly. "Did you know that you can make the neatest bullets from water?"

Or you could make it into steam and run the whole world.

"I did." Those eyes met his again, just for a split second. "You can make them out of old nails, too."

"I don't work with metals, much. I mean, I like them, especially copper." He took a deep drink, the water sweet and cool enough to tempt him into draining the bottle, the liquid hitting his belly with a splash. "Could you hear that? Neil could have, I think. I like copper to use for heating and as a conduit. It's got the pretty factor, too. Some people say that doesn't matter, but I never got things being ugly just to be ugly."

He thought that well-shaped mouth twitched a little.

Huh. The guy was pretty. Like, well made all over. Did Boomer know anyone who was ugly? Aside from Boomer? Who was more scary than truly ugly, he guessed.

"So, do you think Boomer picks friends that are hot because he's sorta scary or because he likes pretty things? I guess it could be that dangerous jobs attract good-looking men. Or because guys that are hot get into trouble? Maybe it's just that you like being around smart men, because mine likes me, and he is. Hot. Well, and smart. Not as smart as me, maybe, at least not in that 'too smart for your own good' way that is more geek and less cool, but still smart." Padraic blinked hard, the world sort of having light trails.

“I think Boomer picks his friends based on what they can do for him, honey.”

Sonny had called him honey, too. He thought. Something like that. Maybe kiddo. That had to be a Southern thing. Huh. MJ wasn't Southern...

“That doesn't seem very nice. Why would you want a friend that did that?” He swallowed hard, the bus bouncing really hard. “He likes, uh, plants and the oceans and clean air and plastic explosives.”

“Uh-huh. He also likes surfing and Scorpios.” Long fingers drummed on the back of the bus seat ahead of them.

“I can't surf. He has the hair for it. I like Pop-Tarts and laboratories.” Oh, he'd had the coolest lab ever. Big and clean and fully-stocked and functional and not-exploded.

“So you were a lab rat, huh?” The guy's voice seemed to come from far away, and somehow Paddy thought he shouldn't answer questions, but Boomer had sent the guy, no doubt.

“Uh-huh. Thermodynamics. Dynamics. Hot and cold, not booming. Blowing. Up. And stuff. Ice and fire.” He shuddered a little, head rolling on his shoulders.

“Well, I can see why he got to know you.” One hand landed on his knee, not weirdly intimate or at all sexual. Just kind of patting. “Put your head back. It will help.”

“Yeah? Can you read my mind, too?” He closed his eyes and leaned back, gasping a little.

“No. I just know where you are right now, mentally.”

Oh, he doubted it.

No one could have a clue how he felt. Only Neil.

“I think I need to get off the boat.” Wait. Where did that come from? He was on a bus, going to see Boomer.

“Yeah. Okay, honey. Too bad we're not on the boat. You hate boats, yeah?”

“Yeah. Yeah, in the worst way. I hate MJ's boat. They're hurting Neil.” Padraic started leaning, his head bobbing. “I can't fall asleep before I find him.”

“I know. Don't worry. Boomer has a plan. I think.” The last part was a bare murmur, one he wasn't even sure he heard.

“I'm worried about him. This is all my fault, somehow.” Except maybe it was MJ's. He blinked, fighting the urge to drowse with all he was and losing the battle. God, he was tired.

So tired.

“Everything is someone’s fault. I’ll get you to Boomer, okay?”

“Okay.” He reached out, patted the guy’s wrist. “It’s going to be okay. I’m going to make Boomer help me.”

If he had to do something terrible, he’d make MJ help.

MJ was good at doing terrible things, right? The last thing he thought, before he stopped thinking for awhile, was how very bright the sky looked out there.

It seemed like it should have been dark.



## *Chapter Thirty*

Somehow, a few years ago, the sight of Cowboy carrying a limp, redheaded rag doll onto their boat might have struck Sonny as strange. These days? Kidnapping was par for the course, as was drugging and stuffing people belowdecks. He'd had to do that to Duncan, because the man had started to get agitated without Cowboy.

Like, his muscles started swelling agitated.

As much as MJ had wanted to poke that bear and watch, they'd only had two hours to get the boat to the French side of the island.

A limp Duncan was way easier to deal with. Just like a limp Paddy.

MJ was still pouting a little, and that was damn near cute. Almost as cute as Mr. Babe running down to rescue his professor.

"Well, I guess we don't get to ask if he was any trouble, huh, Precious?"

"Nope. Rick looks like hell, hmm?" MJ bent over the poor kid, poking a little. "The Brit and running don't seem to have been terribly good to him."

No, the kid looked terrified and exhausted – which, honestly, was basically the way the guy had been for most, if not all, their previous visit together.

"I imagine the last week has been tougher than usual." Man, MJ had the lizard brain thing going. Sonny sighed, rolling his head on his neck. "We should cast off."

"Yeah, I want the chip out of him first. If we put him out a little longer, then he'll only notice when he wakes up. That'll keep the screaming to a minimum."

"Okay. I'll do the dosing, though." MJ might get heavy-handed.

"You're the chief of pharmaceuticals, Sunshine. You want to search for the thing while I get supplies, or vice-versa?"

“I’ll look.” MJ had pretty much taught him where to look, and he was better at the minor surgery stuff.

“Okay.” MJ nodded and headed down, leaving him with tiny, pale, and shaky.

And trying to wake up.

Damn it.

“Neil?” Paddy’s eyes fluttered, red eyelashes moving. Oh, now. That was a bad idea.

“Shh. Just hush.” He put a hand on Paddy’s chest, hoping the touch would soothe. MJ handed over his kit damned quick, and Sonny drew up a weak shot.

“Neil. Neil, I’m coming. I promise. Gonna make Boomer help me.” The kid was starting to thrash weakly, but the extra dose fixed that right up, leaving Paddy limp and murmuring under his breath.

“Man, he wants to come to, bad.” MJ shook his head, working the guy’s jeans open.

“Yeah. Well, who knows what’s going on in his head?” It was kind of fascinating, the idea that Neil and Paddy had a psychic connection. Scary, but fascinating. “I need to get to work, huh?”

“Yeah. Let’s do it quick.” Tough old MJ. Sonny hid the smile. The man couldn’t resist a wounded animal, not even for a second.

Sonny supposed that was a good thing. That was what had gotten him into MJ’s low-slung sweats. “Yeah. It’s here at his groin.”

“They like that spot. Fucking pervs.” MJ’s snarl was enough to set the hair on the back of his neck on edge.

“I’ll get it. I need the alcohol and the scalpel.” He kept his tone light and his hands steady.

“I’ve got your back.” MJ handed over the alcohol packet. “It shouldn’t be too deep, but it won’t look metallic anymore. It’ll just be a weird-looking lump. The flesh grows around it, to protect the body.”

“Gotcha.” Gross. He liked tattoos better, that was for sure. That was what he ought to think on; tattooing MJ. Yeah. Much more pleasant than cutting into Paddy like he was.

Thank God MJ was about as good a field medic as he was at stripping a gun and getting it clean. His Precious kept the goo factor down to a reasonable level, dabbing the blood away and holding the skin open.

“I think it’s there, Sunshine. Right to the left of the scalpel.”

“Here. Mop a little.” He needed to be able to see, not just feel. There. Oh, man, that was like removing a weird tumor. Ick.

“See that? It’s a blood vessel; try not to cut it.” He froze, and MJ’s free hand slid over his arm. “Just like hunting, hmm? I know you’ve done that. It’s little. I’m just trying to keep the bruising down to a minimum.”

Right. Reduce bruising. Maybe he should Superglue the cut closed, too.

Sonny took a deep breath, ignoring the little voice in his brain that insisted he was crazy for being a part of any of this. Hell, he’d known he was crazy for MJ from the get go. “There. Better?”

“You’re good at this.” MJ’s breath was on the hollow of his ear. “I wish I’d had you around to take mine out. I thought Paula was just going to use her teeth.”

“She sounds kind of like a barracuda.” He didn’t like to think of his Precious in that container, with the rotting partner. Blegh. The sound as the chip came out made his stomach flip, made sweat bead up on his forehead.

“I got it.” MJ grabbed the little thing, rubbing the goo off and looking as he pressed down with a little square of gauze. “It’s pretty standard. We have a few options – I can break it, dump it into the ocean. I can see if Paddy and I can’t fuck with it, although it’ll give them more time to find us. Of course, I’m not entirely opposed to just letting the fucking bastards find us.”

MJ rambled on, not helping, just letting him slap a butterfly bandage over the little cut.

“We need to find his man first, though, huh? They find us, we kill them, this one will go crazy on us.”

There. All fixed. His hands weren’t shaking a bit, but he was a little queasy. Not a bad field medic, him.

“Good point. So, do you think I should just break it or find another boat to slip it onto?”

“Oh, that’s a good idea, Precious. Maybe one of them tourist boats.” That would keep the bastards going in circles.

“I’ll be back in ten. Get us ready to go?” MJ kissed him, and then, poof, the little son of a bitch was moving, sort of disappearing.

He sat with Paddy for a moment, hand on the kid’s hip. Then he covered the poor, pale body with a soft blanket and stuck his head through the door down below. “We’re about to shove off, man.”

“You drug Jay-Jay, too, man?” Cowboy’s head popped up, faster than he’d thought it would. “You need help?”

“No.” No, he was just fine, thanks. “MJ went to get rid of the chip. And you need to keep your guy on a leash, huh?”

“Yeah, well, when you and Jay figure that one out, y’all let me know. I’ll be on it like white on rice.”

Laughing, Sonny relented, nodding a little. “I hear that. They’ve been touched by something shitty, huh? Good thing they have us.” He raised a brow.

“You know it.” Cowboy’s eyes just twinkled. “And just think of the mass destruction we can wreak on the world with them...”

“Stop. MJ has pondered this a lot.” He still shuddered, thinking about the diagram on the napkin when he and Neil had gone to the bathroom together once. For five minutes.

“Yeah? That could be a world of fun.” Cowboy motioned toward Paddy with his chin. “That one’s a loose wire, huh?”

“Right now and always. Worse now.” Cowboy might as well know. “He’s damned complicated.”

“Worse than MJ?” Now that question was loaded with a thousand different things.

Sonny tilted his head. “Less self-aware.”

“That could be a blessing or a curse, man.” No shit.

“Yeah. Well, he’s usually not mine to worry about.” One last look at Paddy and Sonny was moving, checking gauges and shit.

MJ was back in short order, pulling ropes and being useful. “Your boy went very growly and bulgy, man. It was almost hot. He was almost as strong as Sonny.”

Sonny was fixing to be growly when MJ’s hand landed on his ass, touching just enough. “Almost,” Sonny finally said. “Not quite.”

“Not quite.” MJ slipped by, humming low.

“Hey, Jay-Jay! You still do that thing where you bend backward and crawl down the front of a guy?”

MJ chuckled, winked over. “Ask Sonny.”

Sonny grinned wide. “He only does it for me, now.”

“Lucky bastard.”

MJ headed up to the wheel, steady as a rock. “You ready, Sunshine?”

“Ready and rarin’.” They needed to get moving.

“Weird-assed married old bastards.” Cowboy sounded absolutely gleeful. “Will you two get this boat moving, please?”

“Fuck off, babe.” The engines started up, roaring to life.

Lord. Sonny moved automatically, helping MJ get them going, casting off lines and shit. This was going to be hell, he just knew it.

## *Chapter Thirty One*

Cowboy watched Jay-Jay and Sonny glower at everything and smolder at each other, and he pondered reminding MJ that he knew how to captain a boat. He was pretty amused, though. Really. And Duncan was out cold.

At least for now, anyway. He had no idea how that weird-assed goddamn metabolism would deal with the drugs. God knew that Duncan's seasickness had lasted about half an hour, and the skinny son of a bitch could eat like a horse. Or a rhinoceros. Hell, he didn't even know for sure what Sonny'd given Duncan.

Of course, worrying about that led to a little growl on his part about how somebody'd drugged *his* Professor.

Damn it.

Sighing, Cowboy finally just decided to go check on the doc. That seemed to be the best option in this whole mess.

He met Duncan -- or the anti-Duncan, he guessed -- coming up from below with a roar, all bulging and wild-eyed, bellowing out his name.

"Well, hey, Doc." He put his hands on Duncan's arms, knowing his touch would soothe.

"Mine." He was swept up, wrapped in those huge hands, and dragged down the stairs, Duncan protecting him with all those pretty muscles.

It was cute. Demented, but cute.

Cowboy patted Duncan's chest. "Yours."

Duncan nodded, rumbling in that broad chest. "Mine."

Then his mouth was taken in a deep, hard kiss that made sure that he got Duncan's point, one hundred percent, no question. Jesus Christmas.

Cowboy had always considered himself a quick study. He got the point. He grabbed Duncan with both hands and held on as his head swam. His lips were going to bruise, with the force of the fucking Duncan gave them, tongue pushing in and in, those green eyes holding his gaze.

Green. Lord, that was still so weird, yet so fine. Cowboy had always been about the weird. Hell, MJ was his best friend.

Duncan's hands slid down, fingers curling over his hips, digging in and pressing into his skin. Duncan was hard and hot, cock throbbing, noticeable even through the too-tight jeans.

"Well, come on, honey," Cowboy murmured, smiling a little as Duncan pulled at his clothes. "Come and get me."

"Get you." He heard the seams on Duncan's shirt give way as the man flexed, the fly of his own jeans going next. Then his cock was surrounded by pure strength, fingers squeezing and working him from base to tip. His back arched in a hard curve, his throat working. Jesus. So fucking strong. He could go anywhichways and Duncan could hold him.

Duncan pushed him against the wall, huge arms flexing, lifting him up and up until his head touched the low ceiling and Duncan leaned down. His hips were cradled in the curve of Duncan's arms, his cock lifting to that open, hungry mouth. Grunting encouragement, Cowboy worked his hips up, thrusting as much as he could with the angle. Come on, come on...

Fuck, that mouth was like a furnace, sucking him in like a Hoover picking up Cheerios from the carpet. A man could live on dreams of that for the rest of his life. Not that Cowboy intended to. He planned on keeping the real thing alive for a good while so he could have it at will. He got his hands tangled in Duncan's hair, encouraging that head to bob, up and down, hands dragging him deeper and deeper. They found a damn good rhythm, in and out and in, just enough to make his eyes cross.

His balls drew up, his skin tight and prickly, his cock about to blow. So hot. "Duncan... Doc. Good."

Duncan growled low around his prick, the sound deep and dangerous, echoing right up along the bones of his spine like a predator to its prey. Fucking hot. Gritting his teeth, Cowboy took more, thrusting hard, needing Duncan's special brand of want. It made him feel tall as mountains and twice as bulletproof.

The tip of his cock pushed into Duncan's throat, and he felt Duncan swallow, damn near heard the click of that flesh around his prick. Much as Cowboy wanted to hold on and make it last, he couldn't. That little noise was the most erotic thing he'd ever heard, and that was after weeks on a boat with Jay-Jay and the redneck.

Duncan swallowed him down, grunting happily around his cock, hands gripping his ass convulsively. Those green eyes stared up at him, so serious, still a little wild. Cowboy gave it all up, coming hard, letting Duncan know how good it was. How necessary.

They slowly slid to the floor, Duncan easing him down like he was something precious.

Grinning, he stroked Duncan's cheek. "I'm right here, honey."

His jaw was nuzzled, kissed, then that mouth landed on his throat, the suction sudden and sharp, Duncan sucking up a mark.

"Shit!" He arched, his heels drumming on the deck. Christ. When was the last time... "Again."

He didn't get an answer, just a grunt, and those lips slid a little lower, fastening on again, tugging the blood to the surface. He felt each and every pull in his fucking balls, his prick doing its best to recover.

Wiggling, Cowboy got one hand over Duncan's prick, pushing the heel of his hand against it through the cloth still covering it. Those seams were gonna give way soon. Oh, somebody liked that. Duncan surged against him, teeth on his shoulder now, spine curling so the man could hump against his hand.

"That's it, honey. Come on. Look at you." Those eyes were still green, their expression desperate, needy. Fucking addictive.

"Good." He could live a long fucking time on that sound – all raw hunger and all for him, that fat cock leaking, making the denim wet.

"You know it is. What do you want, honey? My mouth or my ass?" He was more than willing to offer either.

Duncan rippled, groaning low. "Suck me. Need. Need you."

Yeah. Yeah, he kinda got that.

Nodding, he spread Duncan's legs just a little bit more, and the shorts ripped right in two. Easy access. Cowboy bent, nudging the ripped boxers out of the way, licking at the base where Duncan's balls drew up. He heard Duncan's fingers, creaking and cracking on the floor, the wood groaning. The scent of sex and male surrounded him, flooded him.

Damn. Everything about the man was double or triple strong when he was like this. The taste, the feel of that thick cock, it all made Cowboy want more. He kissed the tip of Duncan's cock, swirling his tongue around the underside.

"My cowboy." All those muscles flexed, moving him off the floor, but still managing not to choke him with that prick, not hurt him.

He wanted to smile, but he couldn't, not with his lips wrapped around Duncan's cock, moving up and down. Licking, sucking, he gave all he could, loving on that prick for all he was worth. Salt



dropped on his tongue, rich and heated, one drop, then two, then a constant taste. Moaning, Cowboy worked harder, sucking his way down, trying to get as much of Duncan inside him as he could. It wasn't as much as he really wanted, but damn, that thing was big.

"Good." It was just barely a word, really, that snarled sound, but Cowboy knew what it meant -- it meant fucking soon and hot and now.

He reached up, cupping Duncan's balls in one hand, rolling them in their sac. That drove the doc crazy. Yeah. Damn. A wild roar filled the air, then Duncan was coming for him, shooting good and hard, cock spreading his lips wide open.

Cowboy closed his eyes, letting Duncan have him, letting the man just work that thick cock in and out of his lips until it was spent. Then he opened his eyes and glanced up, wondering which Duncan he'd see staring out of those eyes.

Bright green stared down at him. "Poked me. Him."

Oh, there was a bald redneck that had best watch his ass.

"Uh-huh. He was, uh, worried about you, honey." Not that he was defending said redneck, but Duncan didn't need to go off on a tear.

Duncan rumbled softly, then dragged him up into a fierce, wild kiss. Better. Much better. Cowboy wanted that man thinking about him and only him, at least until they got moving and got the pale redhead settled. If the poor guy could be settled.

If they could manage that without Duncan tearing the boat apart or Jay-Jay blowing something sky-high or him and the redneck killing each, it'd be a fucking miracle.

Too bad Cowboy didn't believe in miracles. Sometimes it would be nice to go on a little faith.

## *Chapter Twenty Two*

Motherfuck.

Jackoff asshole fucking bastard.

MJ paced the deck, periodically looking down into the belly of the yacht where big, bad, and bulgy was defending Cowboy, then peeking in at Paddy before walking past Sonny.

He was going to get the Brit back, then he was going to drop Cowboy and the professor on a deserted island, get Sonny really stoned at Ma's, and then blow the Program so high that there wouldn't be so much as bone fragments left to identify the bodies by.

Then he'd go back, pick Sonny up, and they were going to buy an island -- not the same one that he left Cowboy on, either -- and they were going to make homemade rum and fuck and drink and smoke dope for fifteen or twenty years.

God damn it.

Sonny reached out and snagged him about the eighth time he walked by. "Making a plan, Precious?"

"Yep." Not that Sonny would approve of his plan, he imagined. Sonny was oddly bitchy about plans that involved staying behind and waiting.

"Swell, you can just wipe the part about leaving me somewhere right off your mental dry-erase board."

Case in point.

He stopped, looked at Sonny. Now, if everyone on this fucking boat started reading minds, he was selling it to the circus and buying a Cessna.

"Precious, don't look at me like that. I know you." Sonny winked, thumb rubbing his wrist.

“I know. It’s going to happen, you know. I have to... Uh...” He caught himself relaxing, eyes caught by the way Sonny’s thumb moved, nice and easy. It was like some weird redneck meditation exercise.

Like NASCAR, but with fewer tires and closer proximity.

“I know what we have to do. I have my own dry-erase board. Don’t you worry.” That felt good, especially when Sonny brought his hand up and kissed his wrist.

“Mmm.” His eyes got droopy. “I think you’re cheating. I was having a pace.”

“All’s fair. Why wear yourself out alone when you can do it with me?” Sonny licked, then bit, just a tiny sting.

“You may have a point.” His fingers curled, instinctively. Oral bastard. Beautiful, strong, oral...

“NEIL!”

The scream had him jerking around, the ship actually seeming to roll a little at the sound of Rick’s voice. He started running as the screams got louder, more hysterical. “Get the med kit, Sonny!”

“On it.” Sonny had his back. He could hear the big guy right behind him.

He could hear footsteps coming up the steps from below, but he ignored them, heading right for the wheelhouse. “Rick. Rick, come on. Wake up, man!”

The problem was, it didn’t look like the little geek was asleep. Fuck, no. It looked like the kid was wide awake, fingers tearing at his face, eyes wide open. “NEIL! Stop it! Stop it!”

“Fuck me raw.” He launched himself onto the man, slamming both of them down onto the deck as he grabbed Rick’s wrists. “Come on. Come on, man. Focus. Focus on me. Sonny, I need you, man!”

“I’m here. Hold him still.”

“What do you need, Jay-Jay?” Cowboy pushed up next to him, helping him hold Rick down even as Sonny pulled up a syringe.

“That helps. Jesus, he’s not *in* there. What did we give him, Sonny? Nothing we didn’t do before, huh?”

That fucking scream just kept going and going, Rick fighting them like they were torturing him.

“I don’t think it’s him, Precious.” Mouth set in a grim line, Sonny jabbed the needle into Rick’s hip, pushing hard enough that he heard the scrape.

He tried to get Rick's attention, shaking the man hard enough that Rick's head bounced off the deck. "Rick. Kid, come on. Come on, now. You're going to rip your vocal chords, and then you can't help him. Do you hear me?"

MJ could feel it in Rick's muscles, the second the drug started to take hold.

"Hold him, damn it." Cowboy growled it at Sonny, and him, then stiffened fingers jabbed right into Rick's solar plexus, and there was no more waiting for the drugs. Kid was out cold.

"Thanks." He pulled back, blood running ice cold in his veins. Fuck.

Fuck.

Okay.

Fuck.

They pulled Neil from England. It had been, what? Four days? Five? The son of a bitch could be anywhere, and the one man that could actually have any contact at all was out cold.

Okay.

Think.

What did they want? Why take the Brit? MJ was fairly sure he knew the answer to that. In fact, MJ'd have to say that he knew that answer pretty damned well, and any and every person that he worked with would be compromised. Rick. Sonny. Cowboy.

The Colonel. Ma.

"Precious?" Sonny's hand landed on his shoulder. "I think we need to get moving, honey. What's the plan?"

"We get the hell away from here. I make some phone calls, and we figure out how to keep Rick awake long enough to find the Brit." If it made the kid insane, Neil could deal with it later.

Hell, the little firebug might be way more fun insane.

Maybe.

Christ, his head hurt.

"Okay. Okay. You and the cowboy get Rick out of my way, and I'll get us on a good course."

Sonny was good to have. No matter what.

He nodded and grabbed Rick's feet, letting Cowboy get the head end. "We're going to have to use him, babe. He's obviously still connected to the Brit. You'll love him, by the way. He reads minds. I'm going to shoot him, some day."

"Who reads minds? Not this one." Cowboy was a good thing to have, too, even if his man was a freak of the highest rank. What was it with his old buddies and their genetically altered boyfriends?

"No. His boyfriend. I think the guy's in your line of work, but I never could be sure." They got Rick onto a deck chair and started strapping the man down, for his own protection. "They've got a bead on each other, though. I don't know why."

"Huh. Well, after what I've seen with the Doc, I'm willing to believe the unexplained." Cowboy winked, hands moving slow and sure over Rick's body so MJ didn't have to frisk the man.

"Yeah. He knew my real name. As in, the one I was born with." He opened one of Rick's eyes, looking in. The man was still trying to fight, in his head.

"No shit?" Now Cowboy sounded impressed. Asshole.

"No shit. Where's your boy? He got impressively puffy." MJ could think of a number of ways to use that. "Hey, did you contact that job via email? Do you have any clue of a base?"

"He's sleeping off the puffy. Once he crashes, you can do a brass band imitation..." He could see Cowboy calculating. "I got a call. Through a source I only use occasionally."

"Huh. I have a hunch that your client may have just stolen something that belongs to our buddy, here."

"I swear, Jay-Jay. We need to clear these guys out. They got a real hard-on for you."

"You know it." He lowered his voice. "I think they'll be going for my mom next. She's the only one left, barring the random tattoo artist."

If they got to Dad, he could cope. The man's brain had been gone for ten years, the Alzheimer's taken over. Mom, though...

He'd have to send Cowboy after his mom. Sonny wouldn't do it, not and leave him, and he needed Sonny to deal with Neil, if the man was still in one piece. Growly as it made him, Sonny had a way. His Sunshine was a stud.

"What I can't figure is what I have that they want so bad. There are other flash-bangs out there." Maybe not many that could work a job like he could, but they did exist.

"Are they from your program? Did they manage to escape being left for dead how many times?"

Man, sometimes he forgot how much Cowboy knew about him. The man could be deceptively forgetful, and then, boom, he remembered everything.

“No. No, there aren’t many of us left. Shit, Cowboy, there weren’t many to begin with. Paula, Greg and me -- we were the beginning. Your boy came at the end, when they were altering...” He stopped, tilted his head. “You figure they did something to Rick? Maybe to me? No, it was too new, then, although the Russians were experimenting in the Fifties, the CIA in the Sixties with shit...”

His brain started going a million miles a minute. What had they done to him? What the *fuck* was going on?

“I don’t know. You’re a little unnatural sometimes, Jay.” Cowboy stared down at Rick, one finger tapping on one leg. “What about this Brit? You think he’s like the Doc? Genetically engineered?”

“I don’t know shit about him, but he didn’t seem to know about the Program, and would it reach to the UK? I mean, this feels like NSA or Defense. He called it the Foundation. And what did your boy call it?”

“Duncan called it some sort of school. Like a university.” Cowboy nodded once, sharply. “If we had a program, then it’s not a reach to think the Brits did, too. That Greg might know about it when none of y’all do. You said he was the only one still in deep, yeah?”

“Yeah. If he’s still alive. I tried really hard to blow him up a few months ago.”

“Huh.” He could see the wheels turning again. “Well, if he’s still alive, we need to take him out.”

“Yes. I want to watch it.” He wanted to finish it. For good. “So, we have Mom in California. Rick was in California. Duncan was in California. If it was me, I’d’ve moved what was left. You?”

“Yeah. But you can’t move an operation that big without leaving a trail.” Cowboy clapped him on the back. “I’ll get on it. I don’t like people knowing who I am.”

“I hear you. I hate having a target painted on my ass.” Worse than almost anything.

Almost.

Rotting in a box was worse.

“This one is pretty much out. I can tie him, you want. Go see your man. Make your plans.”

Cowboy was a good buddy. Really.

“Okay.” He clapped Cowboy on the shoulder. “You’re good to me, babe. We were careful with your professor. No bruises. No violence. He didn’t even feel the shot.”

See? He was trying to be nice.

Sort of.

“He’s fine.” Winking, Cowboy pushed him on the butt, the touch friendly but not too familiar. “Go on, huh?”

“Yeah.” He headed up to Sonny, brain working. Why now? Why him? Where did they go? Where did they take the Brit? Were they going to grab Mom?

He could hear Paula’s voice in the back of his head, all smoke and whiskey and fury. “MJ, baby. Fucking focus. He’s smart. Smart as we are. Smart and mean. Like a snake. Where does a snake go when he’s wounded?”

“To ground. They go to ground, Paula.” He chewed his bottom lip, a thousand scenarios playing out for him.

“Who are you talking to, Precious?” Sonny was at the wheel, staring out to sea, but one hand reached for him automatically.

“Myself. Sort of. I was just remembering someone. Paula. You would have loved her. She was an evil, hard bitch.” He’d loved her, a little desperately.

“I don’t know. Sometimes I’m not fond of people you’ve had a thing with.” Sonny smiled a little, the corners of his mouth lifting, those amazing eye-lines crinkling. “So, what’s the plan?”

“Cowboy’s doing some research. I think they’re going after Mom. Maybe my dad, although that’s less of an issue. I’m going to find that smarmy bastard, and I’m going to cut his throat and watch him bleed out.” Oh, that sounded like fun.

“I’ll help.” Sonny gave him an unreadable look. “Might have more than one person to do that to, huh?”

“Probably. Although I’d be satisfied just getting rid of them. I need to cut the head off -- at some point, whoever’s funding them’s going to take notice and drop them.” Right?

“Something like that.” Sonny reeled him in a little, settling him against one hip. “How you doing?”

“I’m fucking freaked out, Sunshine. What if they started the shit with the professor as early as Rick?” As early as him? What had they done to Greg? What if they had more things in him? What if things weren’t like he thought they were? Damn it, he’d been out of their reach for fifteen years, almost.

“Well, you’re not the Hulk, huh? You got out. Rick and the Doc didn’t.” That sounded so reasonable. Reassuring. Until Sonny snorted. “Likely, you’re the reason they upped the security and the level of control.”

“Undoubtedly. You should have seen the mess I left behind. I destroyed four buildings, leveled one completely without even singeing the surrounding foliage.” It had rocked.

“Better than you did with that terrible fire you set when you met me, huh?”

Oh, asshole. “It was controlled.”

Sort of.

Besides, they were loggers.

“Of course it was. It was when I blew my cabin that we went up in flames.” And Sonny had kidnapped him...

“It was a good trick, though, hmm? We went to Wilmington.” He still didn’t eat Sonny’s eggs.

“Uh-huh. It was. So was the way I got you on that plane.” That was still a sore point, and Sonny knew it. Rubbed it in.

“Fucker. I don’t fly.” Just the thought of being trapped in a metal tube in the air without windows that could open made his stomach clench.

“No? I was thinking we should go to Switzerland or something. Someplace with snow, since neither of us is used to it... You want morphine or ketamine?”

Asshole.

“Fuck you. No planes.” He goosed Sonny hard, relaxing a little. “None. Zero.”

“One plane? That’s almost none.”

“Almost only counts in C-4 and cyanide gas.”

“Grenades. Don’t forget grenades.” The man did know how to make him smile, damn it.

“I’m sorry they found me, man. Fucked your life up a little.” Of course, it was that ex of Sonny’s that gave him up...

“It’s mutual. But it works for us, huh?” Sonny squeezed his hand, thumb rubbing across his skin.



“Yeah.” He nodded, smiling a little. Just a little. “You sure you won’t let me drop you off at Mom’s while I fuck up the bad guys?”

“No. We can send your buddy to your mom.” Sonny’s dark eyes burned into his, serious as a heart attack.

“Yeah. That’s the plan.” Mom’d love Duncan. That would amuse the fuck out of her.

“Cool. Then I come with you. Solid.” Sonny was solid. For sure.

“Okay. You come with me. We do the job, get the Brit, create mass chaos and get out. Deal?”

“Sounds like a plan, Precious. You know I always know when it’s time to go, huh?” Sonny sounded so sure. So ready.

“You are my best getaway plan. Ever.” He meant it.

“Then that settles that.” Sonny leaned against him a bit, an expert at driving with one hand. “I got your back, Precious.”

“How about my front?”

“That too. I do love all of you.”

“Well, then. Let’s get this shit done.” He wasn’t sure exactly what the next step was, but between all of them, he’d figure it.

Somehow.

## *Chapter Thirty Three*

Cowboy settled next to a still sleeping Duncan, his hand on one lean hip. No more bulgy. That was probably a good thing. Sighing, he rolled his head on his neck and tried to figure out how to get a hold of his contacts. Email might be out for a while. Satellite phone might piss MJ off. No way was his cell going to do it...

Duncan's eyes popped open, dark as night. "Mmm. Colby. You're back. I was worried. I have an evil headache. You okay?"

"I'm fine. I have some calls to make, but it's okay. How are you?"

"I'll live. I... Did I have a migraine or something?"

"More like an anxiety attack, honey." Cowboy patted Duncan's hip. "We got separated for a while."

"Oh, I don't tend to anxiety. Still, it's good to see you. Your friends are a little... intense." Duncan scooted closer, hands mapping his chest, his belly.

"You think?" Yeah, he thought so, too.

"I know. Did you go pick up the guy you were supposed to? Is he okay?"

"I did and not really. He's in tough shape." Barely coherent, then not at all.

"What are we in, situation-wise? I'm feeling extremely Alice through the looking glass here, Colby."

Cowboy grunted, knowing he'd never get the Doc to believe him. "There's a whole conspiracy thing going on, Doc. You and Jay-Jay and the redheaded kid were all part of some government experiment."

"Our government?" Duncan tilted his head, want lines appearing between his eyes. "Why? I mean, what on earth do I have to offer a government? I'm a queer lit professor. My talents include Baudelaire, Miller, cooking Tuscan food, and giving blow jobs."

Grinning wide, Cowboy nodded. "Fuck like a dream, too."

"This is not a skill searched for by the United States government, you know." Duncan pinched him, chuckling under his breath.

"No? Are you sure?" Look at that blush. "I bet the Marines would beg to differ."

"Oh, God. Can you imagine that?" Duncan rolled his eyes, but Colby got himself another laugh. "Me and a cadre of Marines humping like mad."

"No." Cowboy growled. "I can't. Not at all."

The flush got deeper, and Cowboy felt the way Duncan's cock leapt, growing against his thigh. "No?"

"No. I think that sharing is a very bad idea." He pulled Duncan closer, nipping at that swollen lower lip.

"I. That is unreasonably hot, Colby. I am not into possessive men." Uh-huh. Right.

"No?" Man, this guy was a serious study in contradictions. "Your cock likes the idea. That's all I need to know."

Duncan looked for a second like he was fixin' to get all pissy, then Cowboy got those heavy balls in one hand and squeezed a little and *sproing*, Duncan spread like warm butter. Man, this whole fuck-me-fuck-you thing? Incredibly handy.

Cowboy took a kiss, needing to get his head right before he got back in the game. A good orgasm would do that. The man opened right up for him, hands wrapping around his hips and yanking him closer. Looked like he wasn't the only one thinking fucking might be a good plan.

They did real good at that, usually. Growling some more, Cowboy arched up against Duncan and rubbed, needing fierce all of a sudden. Duncan rolled and he landed on top, pushing between the lean, long legs.

Cowboy pressed down, his cock slamming against Duncan's, making them both grunt. There was that pesky cloth thing to deal with, but it was okay. Fortunately, dark-eyed Duncan was as good at getting him naked as green-eyed Duncan -- as good and easier on the clothes.

They wiggled and wriggled and got all bare, and Cowboy got all greedy with that smooth, pale skin. Damn. Just damn.

His fingers were fascinated, sorta, with the differences -- flat bellied, lean-muscled, yielding bottom versus rough and tumble, bulgy, gonna-fuck-you-now growler. It was like having the best of both worlds.

Cowboy pushed down and wrapped his fingers around Duncan's cock. There were some differences there, too. Not as much, though.

"Colby." That whole arching and spreading thing, though? That was only Doc.

"Uh-huh. Want, huh?" Okay, now who was the incoherent grunt and click guy? He just needed to escape, just for a little while.

"Yes." Duncan nodded, one hand wrapping around his neck to tug him down into a fierce, wild-tasting kiss.

They rocked, both of them slapping and pulling, his hips moving faster and faster. He bit at Duncan's lower lip. Hard. Duncan's cry was shocked, hot, cock throbbing hard against him. "Fuck. Colby."

"If that's what you want." God, yes. He could fuck that ass ten ways to Sunday.

Duncan's answer was one leg sliding up along the outside of his thigh, the offer clear as a summer day.

Uhn. They needed slick for this, though, so he moved off for just a second, hunting through MJ's shit in the little storage compartment. Bingo. Jesus, did the crazy son of a bitch keep detonators everywhere?

Note to self. Never leave sex toys anywhere Jay-Jay could find them.

The tube of lube was almost used up, but there was enough. He got his fingers good and slick before sliding them behind Duncan's balls. Duncan was hot for it, pushing toward his touch, the tiny little ring right there, needing to be fucked. Cowboy slid a couple of fingers inside, pressing deep, getting Duncan good and wet. He wanted in, and soon.

"Colby. I won't break. I like to feel it, man." Duncan bore down, pushing right down deeper on his fingers.

"Yeah. Okay, honey. Yeah." He moved deeper, harder, slipping his fingers in and out.

Fuck, look at that pretty little body move. The Doc rode him like a jockey on a prize pony.

"Hot as hell, honey. I could do this forever."

"Eventually, I'm going to need your cock, Colby. You have lovely hands, but..."

"Oh. Hell, yes. How about now?" Doc sounded so... reasonable. So educated. He crooked his fingers, pegged that gland.

Duncan's head slammed back, throat working as a dull flush started crawling up that flat belly. "Please. Oh fuck. Colby. Please."

"I got what you need." He pulled his fingers free, getting more slick on his cock. "Time to ride."

Dark eyes ate him up, watching his cock appear and disappear between his fingers, shiny and damp.

Cowboy grinned, grabbing Duncan's hips with his slick hands, putting him into place. Goddamn, that was one of his favorite things in the world, just recently acquired. A warm hand wrapped around his prick, rubbing the tip over that tight little hole, the deep ache of sensation enough to make his toes curl and get him to bucking up, driving right in. Hips rising, Cowboy slid home, a little rough, a little hot and scratchy. Jesus. Duncan was made for him.

"Yes." Duncan rippled all around him, then stretched up, almost letting him free, and then sinking back down and taking him in.

"Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. More." He needed more. Deeper. Harder.

His hands landed on Duncan's hips, driving the man down as Duncan's hands landed on his chest, bracing them and joining their strength together.

They rocked, Cowboy pushing up and up until he thought something might snap. There was only so much stretching he could do. Each time they met, their skin slapped together, both of them grunting with it on each thrust.

He reached for Duncan's cock, wanting to feel it between his fingers while he felt Duncan from the inside, too. Stiff and wet-tipped, hot and throbbing -- that fine prick fit perfectly in his hand, pushing right over his fingers.

Cowboy moaned, stroking and fucking all in time. "Good, Doc? This okay?"

"Good. Don't stop."

Demanding little shit.

"Not going to." Nope. He was going to give the doc his all, slamming his hips up, pushing his cock deep. That pretty cock was leaking something fierce, dripping clear come just for him.

"Sweet." Cowboy swiped one drop up with his finger, licking it clean a second later.

"Do you know how incredibly hot that it?" Shit, if Duncan could speak that coherently, he wasn't doing his job.

"Tell me." He'd see how far the coherent went once he reached down to tug on that sweet-as-fuck cock, rubbing up and down.

"Mmm. You're like a walking wet dream, Colby. Oh. Oh, right there." Colby shifted, a sharp cry barking out.

Still too talky. He pushed his thumb into slit at the end of Colby's cock, wanting to see the flush that would rise under that fine skin. He got it, too. Duncan's head slammed back, that fine, lean body bouncing on his cock like nothing going.

That was more like it. Hoo yeah. Cowboy grinned up, his cock aching when Duncan clamped down on him. Damn. Yeah.

"Colby." Duncan bit his name out, entire body going tight.

"Yes. Doc. Come on, honey." Those muscles made him want to scream, the way they went so tight around him.

"Uhn." There it was. Incoherence. Bingo. Duncan jerked, then heat sprayed over his hand, over his belly.

"Goddamn. Doc." Cowboy bit his lower lip, riding it out, trying to hold on just long enough to see Duncan finish coming.

"All. All yours." Duncan bent over him, staring down, cheeks blushing dark.

"Mine." He let go of Duncan's cock so he could bring one hand to his mouth, the taste of Duncan pushing him over the edge.

Duncan's cheek slid alongside his, smooth as a baby's butt. "Mmm. Not bad. Not bad at all."

"No." Now he was the one who could hardly speak, his breath coming hard and fast in his chest. "Not bad at all."

The hollow under his ear got a soft kiss; Duncan's ass squeezed him tight.

"Doc! Watch that, huh?"

"Hmm? It doesn't feel good?"

"It feels amazing. I'm just not sure I can do that again." He was man enough to admit it, huh?

"It doesn't have to be about fucking, Colby. It can just be about feeling." Duncan squeezed again.

"I like feeling." Okay. Go Doc for pointing that out. He grinned up, patting one lean hip.

"I thought you might. I have to admit that I'm a fan, myself." Duncan shifted a bit, went all heavy-lidded and lazy against him.

"I figured that out, Doc." There was a lot he still had to figure out, but the way Duncan responded to his touch was no mystery.

Duncan nodded. "I wonder how many idiots make the mistake of thinking you're a fool."

"A good many, Doc. Last thing they ever do." Good thing Duncan was smarter than that, wasn't it? The man had hit him with a paperweight, after all. He figured Jay-Jay was betting the guys after them wouldn't be that bright.

"I'm sure I'm supposed to be offended by the violence." Duncan's eyes were a lot like a bird's. "Remind me to work on that later."

Little shit.

"I'll try to keep that in mind, honey." Cowboy stretched. "You might have a lot to be offended by, later."

"Mmmhmm. I'll work on it."

"I'm serious, babe." He hated to let serious intrude, but Sonny and MJ could be damned offensive. Okay, amusing to him, but still.

"I'm fully aware of that." Near-black eyes met his, deadly still. "Fortunately for you, I appear to have an incredible ability to adapt, where you are concerned."

"True enough." That stare sent a little chill through him, which was ridiculous. He could hold his own, and Doc had a thing for him.

He saw it, just for a second, a bright flare of pure green in those eyes.

Jesus.

He pulled Duncan's head down against his shoulder, deciding to go with the whole feeling and not thinking thing for as long as he could.

That thinking thing was dangerous for a cowboy like him, that was for sure.

## *Chapter Thirty Four*

"Paddy."

He blinked and looked around. It was dark.

Really dark.

"Neil? Neil, is that you? I can't see you."

Paddy stumbled around, hands held out. Why was it so dark? Where were they?

What was going on?

"Yes, love. How are you? You seem... distressed."

"I'm... Neil, it's really dark in here." He was scared. Why was he scared?

"It is? You're like a beacon, Padraic. I miss you so." Neil sounded so... normal.

"I miss you." Neil was gone. That was it. Gone. "You... you're not dead, right? Because I'm coming. I got Boomer, and he's going to help me. I'm coming, Neil. I promise."

"I'm... well, I don't think I am. There's this pain." A flash of light lit his dream, just like lightning. He couldn't see anything in it. Nothing but light.

"I'm sorry, Neil. I'm so sorry. This is all my fault." It was important that Neil know that.

"No, no, love. No one is at fault. Not really. Well, perhaps your Manning." That made him want to smile.

"I'm coming. I promise." His cheeks were wet, and his heart hurt so bad he wanted to scream with it. "Do you know where you are?"

"I'm not entirely sure. If I can glean anything, I shall let you know." Neil paused. "I do love you, Padraic. No matter what."



"Underground? Are you under the ground? In a hospital? A lab?" He took another step forward.  
"I love you, Neil. I'm so sorry."

"It's damp. You know, after London, I vowed I would never go anywhere damp..."

"No. No, we're going back to the beach. It's wet, but not damp." Don't leave me, Neil. I need you, so badly.

"I liked the beach. The bicycle. Your hat." Neil had laughed and laughed at his hat.

"I know. I brought you books. You read to me." His heart was breaking.

"I'll read to you again soon, love. They haven't hurt my eyes, hmm?"

"Oh, God." Oh, God. OhGodohGodohGod.

No. No, fuck. Please. Please.

"Paddy? Paddy, I need you to focus, love. You're not doing either of us any good when you're running off in all directions. I know they took me across the ocean. I know I'm below ground."

Another flash of white light seared his eyes, making him cry out.

"Neil, I'm coming! I promise. I promise you." Underground. Across the ocean. Neil was in the States. "Did they drive you?"

"They. They're coming, Padraic. You ought to go. I don't want you to... I want you to be awake, love."

"Neil. Neil, please. Please, no. Don't hurt him anymore! Come get me!"

The light flashed on then and didn't go off, and Paddy screamed and screamed. No. Not his Neil. Not strapped to a chair like a broken doll, head lolling, blood on his fine, pale skin.

"Rick! Rick! Wake the fuck up or I swear to God I'll toss you overboard!" Somebody was slapping him, over and over and over again.

He screamed again and again, lashing out, needing to get to Neil so badly.

"Paddy!" The voice was wrong, but at least the name was right, and it came roaring right next to his ear, making him blink, making the image fade.

Sonny.

He opened his eyes and saw Boomer, the ugly, scarred face pale, eyes huge and wild, like a sick dog. "Good. Good job, Sunshine. I can't take that sound."

"Hush." Sonny whapped Boomer with one big hand. "Paddy, look at me, okay? I'm gonna run out of drugs, y'all keep this up."

"They have Neil in the US, underground. They've hurt him, so bad. Please. Please, we have to go right now." The words just poured out of him.

"Where in the US?" Sonny was calm, easy, those big hands closing on his shoulders.

"There were chairs. He's hurt so bad. Under the ground. Please." He stared up at Sonny, begging. "Please, help me."

This was all his fault. All of it.

"Okay. Okay. We'll help you. But we can't if MJ clocks you, or makes me drug you." Those dark, dark eyes bored into his. "Got it?"

"Uh-huh. Anything. Please, Sonny. Help me."

"You know it, kiddo. You know it." Sonny had never lied to him. Sonny liked Neil.

He nodded, slapped the tears off his cheeks. "He's underground. Here. I mean, in the States. Not here."

"Then we need to start looking for entry points. MJ knows their MO."

He looked over at Boomer. "This is our fault. They've hurt him, so bad."

"It's not our fault. You blame those lousy motherfuckers, not us. Can you still see him?"

He shook his head, the room... room?

Boat?

Ship?

Something.

Whatever it was, it was spinning.

"Hey. Hey, now. Head down between your knees, huh?" Sonny's hands cradled him, pulling him down.

"Do we have any Atarax, Sunshine? That'll even out his world a little."

"No. No more drugs. Please. I'm okay."

"Shh. It'll be fine." He could feel Boomer moving, could hear another set of feet, but Sonny never budged.

"He's hurt so bad." Paddy shook himself a little. Cope, Padraic. Cope. You have to get your shit together and help Neil. "What can I do to help?"

"You can tell us everything you can see in your head. You can tell us everything he said to you."

Paddy nodded. "I can do that."

He had an eidetic memory.

He could do that.

## *Chapter Thirty Five*

Paddy wasn't drugged again. Yet.

Cowboy and Duncan were making him food. Paddy. Food to eat. Not making Paddy into food.

Lord.

Sonny sighed, rolling his head on his neck. "So, where's the most likely place, Precious? They got a bunker in the desert somewhere?"

MJ was starting to look like an addict, and Sonny made himself a mental note to check the stash because, damn. MJ was a shitty junkie, but the man worked the uppers like nothing good. "No. I don't think so. That's military and... But it's more stable than by the coast." He bent back over a bunch of maps, muttering under his breath.

"The coast." He knew he could prod MJ into sharing if he worked it hard enough. Details, not drugs.

"Yeah. The coast has more people, fault lines... I wonder where Duncan was. I wonder if he knows when he's bulgy."

"Well, you have to wait until Paddy calms down some to test that theory." Jesus, he could just see poking Duncan now and having Paddy melt down.

"Yeah." MJ was starting to jitter, moving the maps around idly.

Sonny grabbed his hands. "Hey. Look at me."

"What?" Those blue eyes were huge, staring at him.

"We need to concentrate. Who do we know who would know about their entry? It couldn't have been soft, right?"

"No. No... And Neil would have been torn up. They'd want to keep him as far from other people as they could."

"Right. So somewhere, a wave was made. We can find the ripples." Shit, they were good at that kind of wet work.

"Yeah. Yeah, I need to log in. See if the satellite feed is working." MJ stood, headed in for his laptop, passing Paddy by without a look.

"That's it. That's good. I'll get with your boy Cowboy, see if he can make some inquiries. Huh?"

"Uh-huh. Good. Yeah." Boom. No more MJ.

Damn, they needed this shit over.

Sonny turned on his heel, heading for the little galley, hunting down the cowboy. He jerked his head when those gray eyes lifted, and Cowboy came sauntering over. "Look at California and on up the coast."

"I'm not going to California." Duncan's words were flat. Sure.

He glanced over, taking in the way the Doc's eyes went a little green at the edges. "Yeah? Why not?"

"I don't go there." Man, that was a growl.

Cowboy stared at him, then at Duncan, eyes bright with something like mischief. Evil man. "No shit, Doc? Why don't you?"

"Because I..." That weird-assed panicked look hit Duncan again, eyes rolling like dice. "Because I don't."

"Tell me why." Cowboy advanced on the man, way closer than Sonny would have gotten when the man was looking that twitchy.

"No." Duncan took a step backward. "What's wrong with you, Colby?"

"Not a damned thing. You're the one twitching."

"I am not." Duncan snarled, stepped forward, shoulders rolling.

"Yeah." Cowboy moved up, bumping chests with the guy, whose chest had... expanded. Cool. Man, MJ should be seeing this. It was like drive-in movie cool.

Duncan snarled, head ducking, those eyes going bright green. "Don't push."

"I will if I want." That slow-talking friend of MJ's was either really brave or really stupid.

He heard Duncan's knuckles creak, then the seams on the man's shirt started going. Sonny tilted his head, watching and waiting. Damn. It was like a movie. Or a TV show.

"Not going." Duncan growled this time, leaned down and snarled low. It was weirdly hot.

Cowboy reached up, one hand sliding around Duncan's neck, and damn. They were suddenly in a clinch. Sonny sighed. So much for information.

MJ popped his head in. "Did you find out... Oh, for fuck's sake. No fucking in the galley. Jesus. Cowboy, I think your ass is getting saggy."

Cowboy broke away from the bulgy one, staring over his shoulder at MJ. "You could bounce a quarter off it."

"Do you have a quarter, Sunshine?" MJ didn't look the slightest bit stressed out by big and bulgy.

"Not on me." Yeah, considering he was wearing his boat pants. "Is anyone else wanting to do some legwork here?"

"Yeah. Right. Maps. Babe, quit playing with your monster. He's burning the eggs."

Shit. When had MJ gotten into the uppers? Sighing, feeling like a babysitter, Sonny went and turned off the eggs, sliding the slightly brown mess onto a plate for Paddy.

Cowboy grinned. "Looks like your man is grumpy, Jay-Jay."

MJ flipped Cowboy off on his way out the door. "Yeah. Your point? We're sort of in fucking loony land here."

"Shut up, all of you. If you can't say somethin' nice, my momma always said." Sonny grabbed the toast and headed over to Paddy, giving him a plastic fork.

"Thank you." Paddy's hands were shaking like leaves, the kid looking like hammered shit.

"No problem." Hell, he hadn't even slipped anything into the food. Yet.

"Is... I mean, is Boomer okay?"

"Yeah. He's just in jitter mode." He tried for a smile, figured he almost made it.

"Yeah. What can I do? I have my laptop. I'll log in and research."

"That might not be the best idea, honey." MJ had ways of not being tracked. He doubted Paddy knew that shit.

"I need to help. He's..." Oh, shit no. No more freaking out.

"Okay, then." Sonny sat down and pushed the plate at the kid again. "Eat, then."

"Uh. Okay?"

There were a bunch of serious crashes from the galley, then a puff of smoke from up near the wheel.

"Shit." Sonny pondered his next move. Wheel. MJ needed to not blow up their only transport and shelter.

Paddy arched an eyebrow. "Smells like cordite, except cordite doesn't smoke..."

"Shit." Sonny headed for the damned wheelhouse, hoping to hell they weren't completely fucked.

MJ had one of the spare laptops cracked up, sparks flying, the crazy asshole muttering.

"What the hell are you doing, Precious?"

"Building something."

"Um." He stared. It looked more like dismantling. But then, bulgy boy and the Texan were supposed to be helping, and they were fucking in the galley. Suddenly, he wondered how stoned he had to have been when he tripped and fell in *this* damned rabbit hole.

MJ didn't have pupils anymore. They were just irises. "Don't stress it, Sunshine. I won't blow up the boat. I'm trying to get to the zero track, see if there's something I missed."

"What does that even mean?" Shit. This was all getting too complicated.

"I..." MJ looked at him. "It means I'm scared and fucking desperate and willing to fuck around with electronics to try to find information that's not there."

"Oh." Okay, he could deal with that. They were making progress if MJ could tell him that. "I think we need to get you and Paddy together now that he's not so shocky. He thinks he has some sources to check."

"Okay." MJ stood up, jittering a little. "Did you feed him? Paddy. Not Cowboy."

"Yeah. Cowboy's getting a mouthful of something else."

"Oh. Ew." MJ turned a little green.

Well, at least that seemed to snap Precious out of it a little. "Come on. Let's get with Paddy. You can hook him up, and he can look."

"Yeah. Yeah, sounds good." MJ grabbed one of the less smoky laptops.

"Cool." By the time they got back to Paddy, the sounds from the galley had stopped, which suited him just fine.

Paddy was looking less calm, but it didn't take long before MJ and the kid were head to head, muttering and typing like fiends. That might be a really bad thing, but it looked better than what MJ'd been doing before, so Sonny went with it. He went looking for Cowboy again.

He didn't get a step or three before Cowboy was stumbling up the stairs, a hickey the size of one of those East Coast states on his throat.

"Jesus. Can't you two keep your hands off each other for a minute?" Sonny snapped it out, fully aware that Neil had said something similar to him and MJ once.

Maybe two or three times.

Cowboy tilted his head, lips twisting. "No, son. I don't believe we can. That boy fucks like a dream."

"I'm sure. We do have a situation here, though." He tried for a glare, but couldn't quite get it to stick.

"Tell me about it. Mentioning California has Doc swelling up like a toad. I vote that's where they're headquartered."

"That was where we picked up Paddy, too. We think they have to be underground somewhere, too, so nowhere too near the coast."

Cowboy nodded. "Yeah. I reckon Duncan's going to point our way. I have to get him over this California thing, if I'm going to get Jay-Jay's momma for him."

What? What the hell was MJ planning?

Sonny gripped his aching head, fingers scratching against stubble. "I need to... I think I need to eat."

"Okay, son. You sit. Jay-Jay! Your boy's not feeling good!"

MJ's head whipped around, eyes flashing. "Sunshine?"

"Shit." He summoned a grin. "My head hurts, Precious. I think I'm hungry."

"Okay. I'll be right back. You sit." Poof. MJ was gone.

Alice. Rabbits. Caterpillars. Lalala.



Something soft and sweet pressed between his lips. "You know it's love, when a guy shares his Ding Dong stash."

Sonny licked at the chocolate and cream, humming happily. "I deserve more love than this. But it's a start."

"You have this, then there's a sandwich and a big glass of tea." MJ was right there, straddling his thighs.

"Oh. It must be a forever thing." Somehow his head was feeling better already. Chocolate. MJ.

"You know it. Fucking eternal. I need to shave you."

"You do. I was just thinking I was all fuzzy." Okay, maybe he was the one who had been too tense, who had needed a bit of TLC.

"Mmm. You are. I'll take care of it." A sandwich was pushed into his hands, then MJ's fingers landed on his temples.

"You. Oh, damn, Precious. More." He wanted the sandwich, but he wanted the touches more. God, that made him all melty.

"Eat. I have you. I keep telling myself that we'll go, rescue the Brit, blow something up, then retire."

"How many times are we going to retire?" He was tired of retiring. It was costing them a boat every time.

"We could just quit."

He rested his head against MJ's, their foreheads pressing together. "They'll keep coming. It's you they want, Precious."

"Yeah. Regret kidnapping me yet?"

"No. Never." He meant that with every fiber of his being. Grinning, he rubbed noses with MJ. "I mean, I'd still be in business with Woody."

MJ's eyes rolled. "Right, because that dead weight gave you a challenge."

"No, he gave me a headache. And occasionally a blow job, but that was long before I met you." Sonny thought a moment. "He's dead, right? They would have killed him, back when we blew up the boat."

"I hope so." He almost got pissy, but there wasn't any heat in MJ's eyes. "That's got to be easier than what they'd do to him alive."

"Yeah. Yeah." Hell, he had no love for Woody, but no one needed to go through that.

MJ nodded, pushed the glass of tea into his hands.

"Thanks, Precious." He ate his sandwich in a few quick bites, gulping down the tea. "I might live."

"Good." There was a wealth of shit in that one word, wasn't there?

"Mmm." He put one hand behind MJ's head and pulled the man in for a kiss, ignoring Cowboy's chuckle. MJ leaned into him, kissing him like they were alone.

He held on, knowing that was what he needed to cure his headache, the terrible hunger, and the niggling sense of worry that lingered in his gut. Just MJ. All day. MJ held the back of his head, fingers teasing the stubble at there. Sonny finally closed his eyes and sank into the kiss, holding on, his mouth open to let MJ in. Damn. Yeah.

That hot tongue pushed into his lips, fucking his mouth like they didn't have an audience.

Moaning into the kiss, he wrapped one leg up around MJ's hips, letting his body do exactly what it wanted to do. Jesus. He needed.

"Mmm. We've been too busy." MJ started moving faster, almost humping against him.

"We have." He pushed up, rubbing like crazy, needing. Wanting.

MJ slipped down, pushed between his legs. "Want."

Rip.

Too bad he liked those shorts.

"Now." On second thought, fuck the shorts. There had been a distinct lack of naked lately.

"Now works for me." MJ grabbed his cock, started sucking good and hard, just like that.

"Christ!" His belly went tight and hard, his cock aching and hot and... Goddamn.

MJ moaned all around his prick, the sound vibrating against him. Pushing his other leg out to brace against the deck, Sonny went to town, letting MJ have him. His balls felt like stones, they'd drawn up so hard.

MJ's mouth was like a little vacuum, working him like nothing going. Hoover man. That was his Precious. Though, really, Sonny was usually the one to suck. He liked it. Love it, when it was MJ, and it hadn't been anyone else in a good long time.

One of MJ's hands cupped his balls, fingers sliding behind to scratch that little strip of skin.

"Uhn!" Hips bucked up, his spine snapped straight, and Sonny came so hard he saw stars.

"Mmm." MJ hummed around his prick, tongue hot on him.

"Precious." That hair curled around his fingers, warm and springy. That ridiculous hair made him happy as all hell.

"Yeah, Sonny." He could feel MJ's smile.

"Better. Way better. I could do you, too."

"Mmm. Okay." So easy, his Precious.

"Down." He pushed MJ down on the deck, sliding down on his knees. He needed that fucking amazing cock. Now.

MJ blinked at him. "Love when you want me."

"Always want you." Reaching into the soft board shorts, he pulled MJ's cock out, thumb rubbing over the tip, pushing at the slit.

MJ groaned, thighs parted. "Fuck, yeah."

"Fuck, you smell good." Sonny bent down and licked. "Taste good, too."

"For you. Come on, Sonny, I'm buzzed."

"Mmmhmm." Humming, sucking, Sonny went all the way down, lips sealing tight around the base of MJ's cock. Right there at the ink.

"Oh, fuck yeah." MJ's shoulders rolled up, those eyes burning down at him.

He had this. He knew this. Yeah. Damn. He sucked harder, deeper, loving on that fine skin.

"Yours. Yours. Fuck, Sonny. Want."

Yeah. Shit, he knew from want. He knew how it could grind, how much it ached. His hand came up, cupping MJ's balls, pushing a little. He felt MJ's thighs go tight under him, knew MJ's toes were curling. Come on, Precious. That kept replaying in his head. Come on, give it up.

"Fucking love you, you redneck bastard." The way MJ said it, it was like a prayer. Then that heavy cock pulsed, spunk splashing on his tongue.

Sonny closed his eyes, licking MJ clean, showing how much he loved that man right back.

"Mmm. Damn. Damn, Sonny." MJ moaned, damn near humming.

"Mmhmm. That was what I needed, Precious." Pulling back reluctantly, he smiled into those blue eyes, loving MJ with all he had.

"Yeah. Yeah, I want this over, Sonny. Bad."

"I hear you." He glanced around, but they were alone now. "We just need to get it done, once and for all."

"Yeah. Make them understand our position."

"You know it." Their position was that this was over. Period.

And they'd either get the message or they'd get dead.

Either way worked.

## *Chapter Thirty Six*

No.

No.

He wasn't going to go to the West Coast.

He hated California.

He couldn't breathe there.

Duncan paced, nervous energy weighing on his shoulders.

No.

No.

Not that he could breathe on the boat. There were crazy people and having sex people and... And there was Cowboy, right there, hands coming to rest on his shoulders.

"Hey." He tried to relax, to get his shit together.

He could do this.

He could.

See him get his shit together.

"Hey, honey." Colby squeezed, making his muscles tense, then ease. "How's it going?"

"Better now. I was a little freaked out." Did people still say 'freaked out'?

"I noticed." They were alone now, in the little bedroom below, and Colby was warm, leaning against him.

He let his eyes close, let himself relax a little more.

"Mmm. Better. You know, I have to say, I've never seen Jay-Jay quite so... open."

"He's... different." Which was a really nice way of saying psycho.

"Aren't we all? So why don't you tell me why you hate California?"

"I." His brain went all static, the sound of bees in his ears.

"Come on. Tell me." He could barely hear Colby through the roaring.

"Stop it." He shook his head, trying to shake the static out.

"No. You need to tell me, Doc. Otherwise, I'm going into this thing blind. I need to know." Colby was relentless.

"I can't go back there. They're waiting. J23." He blinked. What the hell did that mean?

"J23." Colby moved around to stand in front of him, hands on his shoulders. "Who's waiting?"

"The..." The soldiers. The doctors. The doctors. Wait. Wait. That didn't make sense. "Stop it."

"I can't." Those serious, gray eyes bored into his, almost hypnotic. "I have to know, Duncan. I have to."

"I can't remember. They're just dreams. They aren't even looking for me. They're looking for him."

J23.

That's who they wanted.

Him.

"Baby, please." Pushing him down on a bench, Colby stepped between his legs, stroking his cheeks. "Tell me. Who are they?"

"Doctors. Soldiers. Both. Doctors with guns. I keep dreaming about them. It's driving me crazy."

"Oh, man." Moving in close, Colby straddled his legs, much like MJ had done to the big redneck a few moments ago. "Okay. It's okay."

"There's a... hospital with no windows. Doctors with guns. Smoke. They keep asking for someone else, calling me someone else. It's ridiculous." Yes. Ridiculous. That was a much better answer.

"I bet it is. You know what, though? We're not going to California." Colby kissed the corner of his mouth.

"No?" That horrible, tearing tension disappeared with an almost audible pop. "Good."

"Well, at least not your part of California."

"What?"

Colby made his head swim.

"Well, I wasn't completely truthful. We do have to go to San Diego. Ish." Colby grinned, the look as winning and fake as could be.

"Ish." He wasn't going. There was no way. He hated California. Hated it. His shoulders rolled, pressure growing behind them.

"We have to get MJ's momma, honey. Then we can scoot, get as far away from California as possible." So very earnest.

He nodded, but he couldn't stop the rushing of the blood in his ears.

"Doc? You okay with this?" That look told him that Colby knew he wasn't, but needed him to say he was.

"Sure. I'm good. Solid." He'd be fine. He'd hit solid ground and...

*Take him and run.*

He wasn't sure whose voice that was, but for once he just agreed with it.

"Cool. I owe Jay-Jay one, you know?" That grin made him blink. Cowboy could be so... mercurial.

"Yeah."

*Take him and run, Duncan. We take our man and we go.*

He almost nodded.

Almost.

## *Chapter Thirty Seven*

"Mom. Mom, stop crying." He closed his eyes, counted to fifty.

"Manning, someone stole your father. How does someone steal your father?"

Like he knew. Except he did.

"I'll find him, Mom." As if there'd be something to find. Jesus, Colonel, did you have to lose your fucking mind?

"Manning, I'm scared. What do I do?"

"I'm sending someone, Ma. A friend. You just get ready to go to ground, okay?"

He was going to kill something.

"But."

"Just do it. I have to go." Two minutes. That's all the time they had. "You'll know him. He's not like anybody else." She started talking again, and he sighed, shook his head. "Bye. Love you, Mom."

He hung up the phone and sat, counted to eighty four, then put his fist through the wall.

Dude. Fiberglass stung.

Sonny was right there when he turned around to find something else to hit. "We need to dock, huh?"

"Yeah." He snarled a little, his bones creaking with it.

"I'm sorry, Precious." The words were quiet, real quiet. Sonny completely understood family, for all the man had none left.

"They have my dad."



"I heard." Yeah. Sonny heard everything. "Better him than your mom."

"Yeah. He's... not there anymore." The man wouldn't understand why they were hurting him.

"Doesn't make it easier." Sonny put a hand on his shoulder, rubbing the thumb against his muscles.

"No. I need to hit something."

Maybe Duncan would play with him.

"So, come on. I'm a good blocker." Something dangerous glinted in Sonny's eyes for a moment.

"You are. You ready?"

"I was born ready, Precious."

"I'm sorry." He hauled off and took his swing.

Sonny ducked, coming up with a fist headed right for his gut. Sunshine gave just as good as he got, every time. He stepped back, going for the leg sweep. Sidestepping, Sonny teetered, but he didn't go down. Then the man rushed him, coming right in for his belly.

"Fuck!" He tensed to take the shot, knowing he couldn't duck this one. Of course, taking that blow left Sonny's kidneys wide open. Wham.

They hit the deck, both of them rolling, moving away from each other. Sonny circled him, hands up and ready. He stepped in, heading in with his shoulder. It hit Sonny square in the chest. Those big hands came down on the back of his neck, clenched into a double fist.

"Uhn." He hit the deck, knees cracking. Fuck him raw.

He got no quarter, Sonny punching at his ribs, fist like a Christmas ham.

He bit the hell out of Sonny's thigh, hands almost - almost - going for the balls. Grunting, Sonny rolled him right over, breaking his tooth hold. A stunning blow caught him on the calf, making a charley horse pop up.

"Fucking hell." He grunted, legs drawing up, and this time he did go for the balls.

"Jesus!" They broke again, then bounced back in, fists flying. His lip split, and a cut opened up over Sonny's eye.

"They have my dad, Sonny. He's an old man, sick."

"I know, Precious. I'll kill them. I swear I will." Sonny bent, hands on his knees, breathing hard.

"Hurt them first." Sonny was so good to him.

"Yes. I swear to God. We got to get to land, though. Get Cowboy off to get your momma." He nodded, then stopped short, his head screaming.

"Did I addle anything, Precious?" Now Sonny sounded more normal, taunting him a little.

"Only a little. How're your balls?"

Asshole.

"Tender. Want to look and make sure they're okay?" Sonny bent, helping him to his feet.

He reached out, cupped the balls in question, holding them as careful as he could.

The man attached went up on his tiptoes, moaning. "MJ. Precious. Good. Warm."

"We're going to fuck now, and you're going to make it good enough that I can sleep." It wasn't a question or a fucking request. It was just what it was.

"We are. Come on. Bed."

He hoped they still had a bed, and that it was empty, or he'd be cranky.

"I'm right behind you, Sunshine."

## *Chapter Thirty Eight*

Cowboy watched the marina grow out of the dark, taking shape slowly, looking like pick up sticks, all strewn around. Yay for small ports in the Everglades that had seen their last hurricane season.

MJ had come awake full of plans, ready to go. Cowboy and Duncan would go get Mom. MJ and Sonny would go kill the dude who had Neil and MJ's dad and... Yeah. He had no idea what Paddy was supposed to do. That part was still unclear.

Man, he wanted a cigarette.

Paddy was pacing, muttering under his breath, and MJ and Sonny were snarling, fighting idly over the wheel.

"God damn it, Sunshine, I'm going to drive something, sometime in this fucking relationship!"

"We got any smokes?" Cowboy asked the crowd at large, just as idly. "I could murder one about now."

Sonny glared back at him. "MJ tosses them overboard."

"They're bad for you!" Jay-Jay was fixin' to blow a vein.

"So are bullets," Sonny snarled, slapping a big hand down on the wheel.

"I rarely, if ever, shoot at you, asshole."

"Do you two mind, exactly?" Paddy was staring at the two of them, white as a sheet, eyes huge. "It would be quite pleasant if you two chaps would stop bickering and come effect my rescue."

Cowboy tilted his head, the accent catching him off guard, clipped and British as it was. "What the fuck?"

Jay-Jay stared. "Rick?"

"For an intelligent lad, you're not incredibly bright, are you, Manning?"

"Oh, now. Rick, don't make me hurt you."

"I haven't enough time to argue, Manning. They have me underground, but I have been able to pick out a few details in between beatings." Man, Paddy was managing to sound wry and dry and witty. Weird.

Jay-Jay's eyes were sharp as fuck. "Give it up, Brit. I've got a guy feeding me bits and pieces, but we can be there in hours."

"Right." Paddy's chest swelled with a deep breath, and his voice became almost sing-songy. Kinda made Cowboy's skin crawl.

"There's a laboratory, much like my dear Padraic's, I'm afraid. Deep beneath the sands. They think about Lake Havasu; they go to Las Vegas. They aren't military..."

Sonny stared at Paddy kind of like he was a striking snake. "How big is the lab, English?"

"Quite large, I think? There are a number of men who..." Paddy winced, swayed, started shaking his head a little, side-to-side.

"How many guards do you have. Just you?" Cowboy knew they were running out of time. They could get a good idea of how many men the place would hold by how many they put on one prisoner.

"They want you, Manning. They want you. That's all he thinks about. You."

MJ was pale as milk himself, now, eyes like holes in a blanket, so dark you couldn't tell they were blue. Sonny was shaking his head, reaching out to Jay-Jay with one hand.

"No. They can't have him."

"I do hope you're right." Paddy gagged, eyes rolled up until there was only white.

"Shit! Catch him!" Cowboy leaped at Paddy, but it was Duncan who caught the kid, staring down with wide eyes.

"J23." Paddy stared at Duncan, then started that high-pitched, ear-shattering screaming again.

"Goddamn it, Cowboy, get my kit!" Sonny was there in a heartbeat, holding the kid down, treating him like someone having a seizure. He ran for the stairs, noticing that Jay-Jay was just standing there, like he'd been shocked or some such.

'Time he got back, Duncan had a split lip, Sonny had a bruise coming up under one eye, and they were way off course.

"Jay! Would you steer the fucking boat?"

"What? Yeah. Okay." Shit, MJ wasn't fucking in there. Those scarred hands took the wheel.

Cowboy tossed the kit with the syringes at Sonny, ignoring Duncan's pale face and wide eyes, too. He went to MJ first. Jay-Jay looked up at him, lips tight enough there wasn't any blood in them. "Jay-Jay. You got to hold it together and tell me what the hell just happened."

"If I had to guess, Rick and the Brit have a connection that they can't break. I could be wrong. I thought your professor was dead, and he's alive."

"Well, shit." This whole thing was just getting weird. Weirder.

"Indeed. Fairly exciting, huh? Bet you wish you'd never met me."

Cowboy pondered that a moment, tilting his head. "Nah. I wouldn't have missed Singapore for nothin'."

Jay-Jay grinned at him. "Yeah, that rocked pretty hard. You go get my mom, babe, and I'm going to go create a vast, desperate type of trouble."

"I'll catch up with you as soon as Mom and the doc are safely tucked away. I've got a guy, one I trust almost as much as you." He could leave Duncan and Jay's momma with Duke. The old fart was as like a father as anything Cowboy had.

"That works. Tell her..." MJ's mouth tightened again, almost brutally. "Tell her I'll take care of the Colonel."

"I will, Jay-Jay." He clapped MJ on the shoulder, glancing back at Sonny, who'd finally subdued Paddy. "You have a good one there."

"I know. Should shit hit the fan, you take him with you. No matter what." MJ's eyes were like ice. "And I swear to you, I won't let them take you or the professor, either one."

"We're good, Jay-Jay." Cowboy grinned, baring his teeth hard. "Might as well go out in a blaze of glory."

"You fucking know it." MJ nodded. "Lights and motherfucking fireworks."

"Ka-boom." There. That was more his Jay-Jay.

"You know it." MJ pulled up into the marina.

"Okay. You know how to get a hold of me." He and MJ had more than one failsafe. They could get in contact.

"I do." MJ clapped him on the arm. "Go on, man. See you soon."

"Yeah. I got your back." He didn't look back when he turned toward Duncan, going to grab the man by the arm. "Come on, Doc. Get the duffel."

"It's time?" There was something dangerous in Duncan's eyes, something shifty. Too bad for the Doc that he was well-versed in fucking up folk's plans.

"Yep. We're off to save Jay-Jay's momma." That was his job, and he always did his job.

"Right." Duncan picked up the duffel, hefting it easily, refusing to meet his eyes.

Rolling his eyes, Cowboy headed out after the man, ready for anything Doc could throw at him. He might talk slow, but he wasn't stupid.

"You're sure you want to go to California, Colby?"

"Hell, no. I got to, though. Don't make me drug your ass, Doc. I have a lot to do."

"I have no intention of having you drug me." Uh-huh.

"Well, good. You try something hinky, and I'll have to beat you." That might be fun, but he'd bet that cave Duncan wouldn't approve.

"Colby." There was a bare growl there, a threat.

"Hmm?" Now, they had to get to a likely car. They'd steal one for now, then pick one of Sonny's stash up at a pre-arranged location.

"Not going." A just barely too-large hand landed on his shoulder.

Cowboy stepped away slowly, letting Duncan's hand slide off gently, letting the capped syringe slide just as gently out of his pocket. "I promised Jay-Jay I would go get his momma, Doc."

"Not going. Can't." The big guy almost sounded sorry. "Come with."

"Duncan. Doc." Jesus, he didn't want to have to drug the man. It would be tough to get him into a car. "Please."

"Colby, he promises that we'll take you somewhere safe. I can hear him, now. I can... he talks right to me now." He wasn't sure if that was progress or not.

"We can go somewhere safe when I get Momma." MJ had said once that he could outstubborn anyone. "We got to compromise here, Doc."

"I'm trying. I have to compromise with two of you."

That had him chuckling out loud. What a fucked-up mess. "Okay. Look, I can leave you someplace until I get her."

"No." That one word held a thousand things in it. "No. They'll hurt you. I can protect you."

"Babe. No one can protect me but me. Thing is, if they knew where MJ's momma was, they'd have her by now. We'll be fine." He held out the hand without the syringe in it, trying to solve this with no stabbing.

Duncan's eyes were on his, so dark, trying so fucking hard to be brave. "Yeah? I don't think this is wise, Colby. Nothing about this feels right."

"I know, babe. I know. It's a freaky thing." Even for him. Shit. "We got to, though. I promised, and I'm a cowboy, huh?"

"My own personal archetype."

There was his Duncan.

"You know it." He squeezed the hand Duncan had given him. "We all... all three of us. We all want the same thing. Sooner we get Momma, the sooner we go hide."

"Okay. I'll try. I can't promise he will. What do we do first?"

"We need a car. One that can get us to the vehicle we have stashed. Can you get us in a door?"

Duncan chewed his bottom lip, then nodded. "I think so. Which one?"

Cowboy did a quick scan. "The black Jeep Cherokee." They were commonly stolen, and this one was old enough not to be shiny anymore.

"Okay." Looking very much like he belonged, Duncan walked up to the Jeep, closed his eyes, and started muttering. They'd been working on it, on Duncan letting the beast out, getting a little bit of control. It was tentative, at best, but sometimes it worked.

A few moments later, the back passenger door was open, and yeah, okay it was missing a handle, but they could close that with duct tape. Luckily, he'd chosen well. No alarm.

Green eyes stared at him. "Car."

"Thanks, honey." He'd have to move carefully now, the big guy all to the fore.

"Good. Good car." Muscles rippled, those eyes on him. "My cowboy."

"You know it. We're just gonna take a little trip, get the safe car." He winked. "Bulletproof glass."

The low, huffing laugh eased him a little, and so did the fact that Duncan slid into the Jeep. The control was fairly new, and fairly amazing, but this kind of life or death situation made old 'had to' work in mysterious ways.

Cowboy popped into the driver's side. He set about hotwiring the Jeep, happy as a pig in shit that Duncan was working with him here.

He could only hope the rest of this damned mission went as smoothly.



## *Chapter Thirty Nine*

Okay.

Okay.

Okay, what the fuck to do.

They could head toward Louisiana or Texas, dock and drive. They could dock here. They could stay together, split up.

Something.

Anything.

MJ chewed on his bottom lip, staring at his maps.

"Cowboy got off good with Duncan, Precious. Rick is sleeping." Sonny came up behind him, one hand warm on his back.

"Excellent." He kept looking at the maps. Here or Texas.

Here.

Texas.

"MJ. What do you need me to do?"

"I have to figure out where we're going. I mean, I know where we're going, but how we're getting there."

They were waiting for him.

Was Greg dead?

Did someone else take over?

"Okay. So. We have to dock somewhere. You think Texas?"

"Yeah. We'll dock and drive. Head to Nevada. Make a camp. Go in."

"Sounds like a plan." That hot hand was moving up and down his back, slow and easy.

"This is stressing me out, Sunshine. This whole thing." Scaring him.

"No shit?" He looked up, and Sonny was giving him that lopsided grin, sun shining on that stubbly head. "I hear you. We have to finish it."

"Yes. For once and for all."

No matter what.

"Scorched earth." Sonny bent and kissed him, hard. "So, you want me to drive while you plan the route to Nevada and figure what we need to pick up?"

"Yeah." He grabbed Sonny's neck and pulled him back in, kissing the man hard enough that his lip split.

Sonny moaned, grabbing him up close and loving him, lips firm and hot against his. They didn't have time for this, not at all, but... He worked open Sonny's jeans, dropped to his knees.

"MJ. Oh, fuck." Sonny gave him just what he wanted, cock hard and hot for him, rubbing his cheek, his lips.

He didn't have shit to say, so he sucked, focusing on that heat and need, making Sonny serious promises. Sonny's hands sank into his hair, holding him in place. The man fucked his mouth like he was the hottest thing on earth. He didn't stop, spreading his thighs to keep his balance. Don't stop. Don't fucking stop, Sunshine.

"Damn. Oh, damn, Precious. More. Come on. Suck me." No, no, Sonny wouldn't stop.

Yes. Fuck, yes. He swallowed hard, pulling Sonny in, deeper and deeper, throat closing around the tip every time Sonny thrust in. Grunting, Sonny slid in and out of his mouth, balls pressing against his chin. His Sunshine knew how to give and take, knew him so damned well.

He scraped his nails down Sonny's thighs, scratching hard.

"Uhn. Christ. More." That ass flexed and the thighs bulged and Sonny was thrusting harder, more. His tongue slapped the tip of Sonny's prick, knowing that would sting the tip.

"Fuck!" Sonny shot for him, just like that. Boom.

Yeah. Salt and bitter and hot and his.

He could feel Sonny's thighs shaking, those big muscles trembling like a leaf in the wind.

He rested his hand on Sonny's thigh. Okay.

Okay.

Time to get this shit done.

"You ready to head for Texas, Precious?" Always reading his mind, that Sonny.

"I am. Let's go."

Sonny nodded, pulling him up for a quick, bracing kiss. "I want this over with." He got a glinting grin. "I bet English does, too."

"If they've left anything in there, yeah."

"We better hope they have, Precious, or we'll have to kill Rick."

"Yeah. That would be kind of shitty."

"Uh-huh." They bumped hips one more time, and then Sonny left him to go make for shore. They were ready.

One way or the other.

## *Chapter Forty*

"Boomer, are you going to give me a gun?"

Paddy thought that he needed one. There was a long list of people he wanted to shoot, and anyone hurting Neil was at the top.

Maybe a flamethrower.

Maybe a bullet-shooting flamethrower.

"Do you know how to shoot a gun, Rick?"

"In theory." Oh, maybe he should have said yes.

"In theory? Jesus. No gun for you, honey." Sonny could be an insufferable jerk.

"I could practice. I could have a flamethrower. I could make one." He met MJ's eyes. "You know I can learn."

MJ stared at him, just stared him down, then he got a nod. "I do. Sonny, find him a piece. Show him how to break it down. He'll put it back together."

Sonny glanced back and forth between the two of them before shrugging, nodding. "Come on, Rick. We'll start simple."

"No." MJ shook his head. "Don't baby him. He's not stupid."

"No." He knew that. "I'm not stupid. I can learn things, quickly."

"I never said either one of you was stupid. I just don't want to get shot." Sonny gave MJ a dark look. "I just meant the fucking thirty-eight instead of the Glock."

"Don't snarl, redneck. I'm not pissed. Show him the Glock. Once." Then MJ looked at him. "You learn it the first time, you get one. You don't, then you're fucked."

Paddy nodded. "I can do it, Boomer."

For Neil.

Sonny nodded again, tapping him on the arm and jerking that bald head. "Come on, then. Let's get this over with."

"I promise only to shoot you where the scar won't show, Sonny." He was mostly joking.

"Ha. Here." Sonny led him to one of the built-in boat seats, where a piece of cotton toweling was laid out. "Your basic breakdown on a Glock."

Paddy watched, relaxed, brain taking picture after picture after picture. This goes there. Slide. Click. Slide. Click.

Right.

"Got it?" Sonny slid the clip into place, the last thing on the reassembly.

"Yes."

He reached for the gun, hands following what his brain remembered. He was good at this.

Sonny watched him like a hawk, but he could ignore the dark, careful stare until he was done. When he looked up, Sonny was nodding.

"Okay. Show me more." Show him everything.

Sonny nodded again, once, showing him how to load a clip, maintain the gun so it wouldn't jam. Working up to a shotgun and a long-range rifle. No flamethrowers.

"I could add flame." He looked up at Sonny, hopeful.

"Not to this. It's not rated for that kind of heat."

"Oh. Maybe I could make one. This will kill a man, yes?" If he shot it. He wanted to find Neil and kill the men that hurt his lover.

"Yes. It surely will. Be very, very certain you want to pull the trigger." Sonny put a hand on his shoulder, looking into his eyes. "Got it?"

"I do. They have my Neil. I'm going to get him back."

"Okay. I can get that. I just have to be sure you won't shoot me. Or Boomer."

"I won't." Not unless they decided to stop helping.

"Then we're good to go. Show me one more time." Sonny let him go and stood back, waiting.

He nodded, let his hand and his brain work together. Apart. Together. Apart. Together.

For his Neil.

Anything.

For his Neil.

If the steel and oil got slick with tears, Sonny never said so.

## *Chapter Forty One*

The pounding in his head was almost unbearable. Neil thought it was almost unbearable as opposed to completely so because, somewhere out there, Paddy was still alive. As long as Paddy was alive, Neil had hope. He might see his Padraic again.

Paddy was worth any amount of pain.

Indeed, Neil had managed not to tell the men who had him anything they did not know, just to keep Padraic from being caught. He'd rambled, at length and while drugged, about Manning's past, about Padraic's preschool, and about monsters with green eyes, but he'd never told them about Sonny, or about the new boat.

Most of the time he was simply lost in the wash of voices inside his head. Lab workers made for bored people.

Someone, somewhere, was singing 'Itsy Bitsy Spider'...

He felt the nervousness, the disgust, the honest, unadulterated fear moving through the lab outside his cell like a wildfire in a dead forest.

Something quite unpleasant was coming.

Sighing, Neil rolled his head on his shoulders and closed his eyes, breathing deep. It always went better if they thought he was asleep when it began.

The door opened, the mind that walked in ice cold. For half a second he was tempted to open his eyes and see if it was Manning.

It wasn't, though. There was not a bit of the annoyance that Manning usually mixed into his thoughts about Neil. Only cold calculation.

"I know you're awake. Let's not play games, shall we?"

Neil let his eyes open, slowly, as they were swollen and sensitive to any light he might be given. Really, they acted like the government had never gifted them with billions...

Dear God.

The man was... a monster. There was one eye, peering from a face that seemed to be nothing but a wax figure, attacked with a blow torch to make it melt, covered in a mask of clear plastic, distorting everything ever so much more.

Neil blinked, fearing for a moment that he'd lost his mind and was hallucinating.

No. The... thing... didn't alter. Didn't move. Simply stared at him.

The sound of his dry swallow echoed in his head. "No games? But I've had such fun with your underlings."

"Yes. They said you haven't been helpful when we've asked you a very, very simple question. Where is he?" The voice was bubbly, somehow, as if the words were pushing up through porridge.

The idea of them breaking at the surface like little boils made him shudder. "I have no idea."

"That is very bad news for you."

Pain. They were going to hurt him, more.

"Yes, I suppose it is. I mean, honestly, don't you think I would have said by now?"

The hunched man moved, shifted, and Neil got a sudden, sharp flash of amusement. They knew MJ was coming. They knew. He was bait.

"Bloody hell. I suppose I ought to be happy you'll keep me alive until he gets here, hmm? God, I hate bureaucrats."

"Don't make me put your eyes out until he arrives. I want your lover to watch that."

"Oh, yes. I'm sure you want everyone to be as horrified as possible, you twat." Maybe he ought to just... implode. He could do that. If it wasn't for Paddy, he could just bust a vein.

"How did MJ manage not to kill you?"

He got a quick flash, an old man, beaten and bloody, with Manning's eyes.

What did the man's father have to... "You have his father, as well? Then what on earth do you need with me?"

"Stay out of my mind." The blow almost didn't hurt, the man was so weak.



"I wish I could." He really, really did. It was like swimming in a river of filth. "Sadly, I cannot control anything at the moment. You have only yourself to thank."

One hand gripped his balls. "I'll rip them off."

No. No, he didn't think so. Not right now; not yet.

Neil stared right into the monster's eyes, letting a slow smile stretch his torn and bruised lips. "You need me. Now, let go, or I will show you what I learned from your Manning."

"That selfish bastard wouldn't teach you a fucking thing. I'm going to destroy him and everything he's ever touched."

He kept smiling, focusing all of the energy he could muster. Perhaps he'd pass out when he was done. That would be pleasant. Neil shifted all of that power, all of that focus into a single piercing thought. "OUT."

## *Chapter Forty Two*

Duncan sat in the bottom of the tub, holding his head, rocking as the water beat down on him.

You can't get out.

You can't get out.

You can't get out.

California.

They were in California.

They'd flown into Nevada, driven in a couple of huge circles, and...

They were in fucking California!

"No..."

He groaned, turning the water up even hotter.

"Doc? Are you in there?" Colby. Colby was calling him.

He closed his eyes tight. You can't come out.

You can't.

Stay in.

The doorknob rattled. "Babe. Come on. Let me in. I can help."

He groaned, judging the distance between the tub and the door. "Kay."

Eventually.

"If I break the door, you can't lock it again."

Asshole.

He growled, "I'm coming."

Sort of.

"Well, come *on*, then." Colby rapped sharply on the door.

"Stop PUSHING!" He growled, fighting so fucking hard as he stumbled to his feet and careened toward the door.

"Someone has to push you, honey. Someone has to teach you to control it. Let me in, and I'll suck you off."

"I'm the teacher here." He was going to scream, going to explode. He wrenched the door open, fighting with all he was.

"Not in this, you're not." Colby smiled at him, gray eyes watchful, not smiling with that pretty mouth. "You like the sucking."

He could eat Colby up. So fine. So beautiful.

"Mmm." Cowboy smiled, reaching for him. "Hey, Doc."

"Colby. Help me. He's right there."

"Shh. I got you." Colby took his hand, leading him out to the bed in their little room. "Come on and sit, honey."

He wrapped his hands around Colby's waist as he sat. "He's right here."

"I can feel it, babe." Stepping close, Colby smiled down into his eyes. "You just concentrate on this."

Colby kissed him. Hard.

His Cowboy.

Duncan groaned, lips parting to let Colby in deeper. Climbing into his lap, Colby straddled him, giving him more pressure, giving him something solid to rub against. Oh. That pressure helped him relax, let him breathe, and he bucked up.

"Better, Doc. Much better. Wait until I get my mouth on you." Hard hands framed his face, Colby holding him still for another kiss, then another.

Duncan's world tilted a little, hands sliding up along Colby's arms, testing the muscles.

They rocked together, both of them grunting, rutting against each other a little. Everything else went away. Everything but Colby.

It was an addiction, Colby's tongue pushing in, fucking his lips, Colby all around him. The taste was all man, all heat. The feeling of that lean, hard body made him moan. He wrapped around Colby, bringing their hips together.

"Uhn. Doc. Good." Writhing, Cowboy pushed and pushed, loving on him.

"Uh-huh. Harder." He couldn't help growling.

"More." Colby obviously agreed with him, bending to lick at his throat, then bite at it.

"Fuck." His muscles clenched, and his chin shot up, giving Colby more.

"Love that, don't you, Doc? Love how that feels." Colby bit down again. Harder.

"Yes."

*My Cowboy.*

"You can't come out. This time it's mine."

"Don't think so much, Doc." He got a wild grin, and he wanted to growl. Colby enjoyed his torment far too much.

"That's easy for you to... Uhn. There."

"There? How about here?" Colby pushed a hand between them, pressing against his cock.

"Harder." His heart was slamming against his rib cage.

"Definitely hard." That grin came again, Colby's eyes flashing pure fire.

"Bastard." His bastard. His. He rolled up, rubbing into the hand.

"You know it. I take what I want." Colby bit him again, licking to ease the sting. Perfect.

"You took me." Kidnapped him. Asshole.

"I did. You fascinate me, Doc. Make me need." That hand never let up, pushing down, rubbing it in.

"Want you." Duncan growled low, stopped fighting it, just let himself go.

"How. How do you want me?" Those fingers pressed down farther, finding his balls. "Want me to suck you?"

"Suck me. Fuck me. Just let me come."

"You got it, babe." Colby slid down his body, undoing clothing, getting to skin in no time. Then that mouth dropped over his cock like a ton of bricks. Bam.

A groan tore out of him, low and raw and almost broken.

Cowboy.

Fuck.

Tongue working him, Colby sucked hard, licking on the way up. Every time. Oh, the man could suck so well. His toes curled, hips bucking up, slamming into Colby's lips. Moaning, hands on Duncan's hips, Colby held on and bobbed with him, working him over good and hard. He thought the man might just suck his balls up through his cock.

"Cowboy." That wasn't his voice. "My Cowboy."

Those gray eyes snapped up to meet his, Cowboy almost grinning around him. Then the suction seemed to double, Cowboy going back to work.

His heels hammered against the floor, his balls tight, feeling hard as stones.

Everything in him was stretching, taut as a rubber band about to snap. Cowboy knew where to touch him, Colby knew what to do to both of them... oh.

He snarled, the pure pleasure ringing out of him.

"Mmmhmm." Cowboy's approval echoed around him, buzzed against his skin, making him shake.

He shot so hard the room went dark, the power of the monster, the beast moving under his skin.

Cowboy licked him and sucked him afterward until he was so sensitive he thought he might scream. Maybe he did scream, he couldn't tell.

"Cowboy..." The word slid out of him.

He could feel the grayness surrounding him.

"I got you, Doc. Duncan. Lover." He liked the sound of that. Lover. It made him want to purr. There was a tiny prick at his hip, a bright, cold pain, and then the world went blue, not gray.

"Colby?" He blinked, shook his head a little.

"Shh. I'm sorry Doc. I know it's sneaky. I have to get MJ's momma today, though, so we have to have you calm. We'll be in Arizona in no time."

"I was..." He blinked again. "I can't protect you like this."

"Don't worry, honey. You'll get your chance. I promise, I'll be around a long time." Kissing his hip, Colby stroked his thighs, easing him toward unconsciousness.

Something inside him growled, deep and low. "Miiiiine."

"Yours. I swear." Well, that was definite.

He nodded, cupped Colby's face. "Yeah."

His. His Cowboy.

## *Chapter Forty Three*

Sonny gripped the steering wheel a little tighter, trying not to growl when MJ changed the radio station. Again. For the third time in two minutes.

Being on the open road was usually one of his favorite things, and he loved California highways, as long as they weren't in a city. Too bad this was not the best of circumstances, that MJ wasn't willing to blow him, and that they had to have Paddy with them.

Maybe it was better than the last time he'd had Paddy in the car, though. No one was puking, and no one was in the trunk.

"Precious, if you touch that dial one more time I will snap your fingers."

"You'll try." The words were flat, not even angry, just... matter of fact.

Sonny glanced over, glad his mirror shades hid his worry. MJ wasn't just in work mode. He was turned off. Paddy was restless in the back, too, driving his ass crazy a little bit. The closer they got, the more psycho the kid got.

"So, are we any farther along on the plan?" Guns blazing, Butch and Sundance might not be such a good idea.

"We have coordinates. We go in at a shift change. Rick says Neil can get him access codes." MJ stared out the window. "We grab the right guy, use his eyes, his code, get in and get the Brit. Set charges. Run."

Uh-huh. Something was hinky, though. There was none of the wild adrenaline he usually saw in MJ just before a job. It was making him edgy, too. No adrenaline. No fire. Just dead, cold ice.

There was some heavy-duty hoodoo going on here.

"We're getting close." Paddy slid around the seat. "We need to hurry. He's hurt."

"I'm aware he's hurt. I'm waiting on Cowboy's call."

"Boomer."

"Rick. Stop." That was razor-sharp.

Sonny wanted to scream. The steering wheel creaked under his hands, he was holding it so tight. Goddamn, he needed Cowboy to call.

Rick opened his mouth, and MJ moved, so fast Sonny never saw it, hand around the kid's throat. "I. Said. Stop."

"Urk." Rick stared, eyes wide and horrified.

Thank God the damned cell phone rang.

MJ settled back in his seat like nothing had happened. "Yo. Yeah. Uh-huh. Good. You know the rules, man. Yeah, you too. Later."

The phone was clicked off. "It's done. Let's go. We need to find a place to wait."

"Tell me where, Precious." He could make an educated guess, but MJ knew the roads, knew it all.

"Needles. We'll set up, load up, attack. Take 95."

"Got it." It would be up to him to find the hideout, and up to MJ's gut to say yea or nay. Jesus, he was tired. Sonny scrubbed a hand over his head, wondering where the hell his gimme cap had gone.

MJ watched him, silent as the grave, It was fucking unnerving. About the time he was fixin' to lose it, MJ grinned. "You are the best thing that ever came out of North Carolina, redneck."

"Yeah? Well, I guess I'm lucky you stepped out of the fog." Grinning back, Sonny shook his head. Nut-burgers. They were all nut-burgers.

When they reached Needles, he started scanning their options, knowing they needed something far enough out that they could have some privacy, close enough in to town that they wouldn't be the only car in the lot.

As soon as he picked a place, MJ hopped out, heading for the office.

"He's losing it, Sonny. He's going crazy. You know that, right?"

"No. I mean, I know he's on edge." No, MJ was gonna be fine. If Sonny had to kill everyone they knew to make it so.

"On edge. Yeah, right, and Neil's got a booboo."



"Oh, shut up, kid." He hated to be nasty to Rick, as Neil was heavy on the kid's mind, Sonny was sure. He'd be the same way, and his man wasn't psychic.

"I just... so long as you know." Rick leaned back, closed his eyes.

"I know this is seriously fucked up, okay? We just need to get your man and get gone." Soon. Now.

"I know. Today. We'll go today. I'm... I'm trying to get to him, to let him know."

"Well, just don't let him let them know." He could talk in circles. Go him.

"Uh-huh." Rick almost grinned.

Almost.

"Yeah, yeah." Sonny rolled his shoulders, the itch between them all but making him crazy.

MJ walked out of the office, headed for a room without even looking at them.

Sighing, he jerked his head at Rick. "You go first. I'll cover you, just in case."

"I'm okay." Rick got out, walked over to MJ. MJ talked to the man a second, then pushed him into a room, shut the door, and opened the next door over. Everyone was so okay that he wanted to pound his fists on the dashboard until they bled. Maybe he would just sleep in the car.

MJ leaned on the door frame. Stared at him.

Sonny finally got out of the car, grabbing his Glock out of the console and sticking it under his waistband. They didn't say anything until they got inside.

"So..."

MJ's mouth crashed down on his - or up, really, but he didn't give a fuck, because damn.

Hot.

Sonny grabbed MJ's hips and turned, smashing the man up against the door. He needed. Now. MJ took his mouth like it was the last fucking time this was ever going to happen, like the goddamn world was screaming to an end. Sonny didn't fucking think so.

No. No, sir. They'd make it through this, and they'd go native someplace like Bora Bora, eating coconuts and drinking from monkey heads.

"Hurry up. We're almost out of time." MJ bit his bottom lip, hard.

"I know, Precious." Not that he was going to let MJ get away with thinking that for long, but they did have to mount the rescue soon.

MJ nodded, hand on his fly. "Love you, Sunshine. Come on. "

"God. MJ." They staggered to the bed, and he didn't even make his usual crack about magic fingers. He didn't want to waste the breath.

MJ was fucking focused, pushing him down on the bed, yanking his shirt from his jeans, before that hungry mouth landed on his chest. His fingers curled into MJ's hair, and for a moment the image of MJ without it flashed through his head. Then he growled and shook it off, letting his hips rise up.

Dull teeth scraped across his pecs, even as MJ's fingers scrabbled at his jeans. Sonny moaned, his thighs shaking, his hands pulling at MJ's shirt. He needed skin, too, hot and vital and alive.

MJ was moaning, words he didn't understand muffled against his skin. Half of him wanted to hear them. The other half of him knew better. The mood MJ was in, it would just kill the groove.

And he didn't want the mood killed. He wanted that mouth. That hot ass.

They broke for air, both of them panting, staring. Then they clashed again, both of them groping and kissing. MJ jacked his cock, the edges of his open zipper zinging his skin. His thigh muscles threatened to snap, they went so tight, and his balls drew up hard. "MJ. More."

"Yeah. More." MJ worked him harder, that hand moved faster, almost slapping his prick.

"Not your hand. I don't wanna come in your hand." That was... He needed this to be about more than that.

"You want to fuck me?" MJ wiggled out of his jeans, fast and furious.

"Fuck, yes. I want in. Want to watch your face."

He watched MJ strip down, piece placed on the bedside table along with his. "Anything you want, man."

"I want you." I want you to stop acting like a man on death row, he thought, but managed to keep from saying that out loud.

"Something I'm fucking excellent at giving you." MJ straddled his hips, stared down at him.

"You are. I swear." He got one hand on MJ's skin, pulling down, trying to get lined up.

MJ took him in, dry and hard, without a fucking sound. Jesus.

Jesus.

Sonny's whole body shook, his muscles going tight like he'd stuck his finger in a light socket. Fucking A. He pulled at MJ's hips, needed to move.

"Fuck me. No playing." MJ stared at him, eyes laser-sharp.

"No. No playing, Ride hard, Precious." All he had to do was stare back and move his hips, up and down. Hard.

MJ took him like marines storming a fucking beach. Their skin slapped, the heat blistering him.

They rutted like there was no turning back, like they were never going to do this again, and he refused to believe that. Period.

"Come on. Come on. Want to feel this forever."

"MJ." All of a sudden he wanted to stop, wanted to just grab MJ and run and never look back. He was way too gone for that, though.

"Yeah, Sonny. Come on." MJ was right there, all his, eyes hot as fire, fucking burning into him.

"Precious. Need you. Don't do anything stupid." Now was probably not the time, but when would there be a better one?

"Shh. We're fucking. Nothing stupid. I promise."

"No." His hands clenched on that sweet skin, and Sonny moaned, humping hard.

"No what?" MJ ground back down, fingers on his nipples.

"Nothing stupid." He rolled up, begging a kiss.

"Uh-huh." MJ's lips crashed down on his, shutting his happy ass up. That was probably a good... wait. Was he talking? No. He was a redneck about to come. Those kinds of folks couldn't form words. MJ's ass clenched around his cock, milking his prick, forcing him right over the edge.

Sonny shouted, body arching, hands scrabbling at MJ's skin, his head threatening to explode. Damn. Damn.

MJ grabbed one of his hands, brought it down to that hard, leaking cock.

"Yeah." He kissed MJ again, hard enough that someone's lip split, pulling at that cock, needing to feel MJ come for him. Heat poured over his fingers, spreading over his belly. Fuck, he felt that all through him.

Sonny hung there, his belly and chest heaving, his thighs shaking. He held MJ in his hand, thumb rubbing almost idly.

"I love you, you redneck son of a bitch." MJ's ass clenched down on his prick, teeth sinking into his bottom lip.

"Mmph." He loved MJ so much it hurt. Right then and there he would do anything for that beautiful man.

Of course, he had the feeling he was fixin' to have to.

## *Chapter Forty Four*

"Rick, I need you to do your thing. I need the access codes."

The time for playing had stopped. Dead. Greg wanted him, and MJ wanted this shit to cease. He'd rescue Neil, because he should have said something about the fucking tracer. He should have remembered. He should have thought.

He shouldn't have gotten lazy.

MJ pushed that shit aside. He'd go in, get Neil, get them out, and send the place up.

"I'm trying, Boomer. I swear. I can't reach him."

"You don't have a choice, Rick. Wake his ass up."

"He's *hurt*, you asshole!" Rick stood up, hands going for the Glock on the bedside table.

"Rick. If you touch it, I will shoot you between the eyes and leave Neil to rot. Do not believe that I won't." He didn't even bother tensing up.

Rick froze, eyes panicked. "Please, Boomer. He's hurt so bad..."

"And he'll die if we don't get him. Your call, man. I don't really give a shit. I can turn around and walk away."

He couldn't, not now. Not without killing Greg, but the little brat didn't know that.

Sonny had been watching, mouth a hard line, not a bit of the usual humor in those dark eyes. Now he went to Rick, big paws on the kid's rounded shoulders. "Rick. Paddy. He doesn't want to be stuck there, either. He'll wake up and help. Shout in his head."

Rick looked up at Sonny, actual tears in his eyes. "I hate you. I hate you both, and I will make you both pay for this, I swear to God."

That was enough. He stepped over, popped Rick in the jaw, good and hard. "That's your first warning. Neil, you fucking wake up and quit being a pussy."

Paddy jerked back, eyes closing, and when they opened he would swear they weren't Paddy's anymore. They were dull green. "Do stop that."

"Give me the information, Brit. We're here." He met Neil's eyes, serious as a heart attack.

"I've been waiting. Fifteen, forty-three, ten. Star."

"Fifteen. Forty-three. Ten. Star." He nodded. "Got it. You be ready to go, man. An hour."

It was going to be half an hour, but Neil didn't need to know that.

Not yet.

"They change them every hour. You have fifteen minutes."

"Good to know." Fuckhead.

He held Neil's eyes. "We're coming. You get yourself together."

"I'll be ready."

He nodded, then turned on his heel and headed for the car without waiting for Sonny or Rick, either one. His pack was in there; he had his piece. He was ready.

## *Chapter Forty Five*

Neil.

Neil.

Neil, I love you. I'm coming. I'm coming. I promise.

The gun was heavy, really heavy in his pocket, and his pants were too big.

Way too big.

Guns were greasy, too. Oily. And they smelled.

Paddy never knew that they smelled, really. His pants were going to smell, and what if they killed Neil? What if he wasn't fast enough, good enough, smart enough to do this?

The car rocketed along the highway, going so fast he couldn't bear to watch outside, watch the heavy shapes of cactus (cacti, cactuses, cacteronis) just blurring past the window. There wasn't any music, there wasn't any talking, there wasn't anything.

Neil.

Sonny glanced over the back of the seat, but there was nothing there, either. Not for him.

No, Neil was up ahead and they had... three minutes. "Hurry. We're out of time."

"We'll make it. There's the front gate and the main holding facility."

Sonny seemed so... sure.

"Stop the car here." MJ was moving already, grabbing a bag and pulling his hair back tight.

"Rick, you're pushing the buttons. Remember, fifteen..."

"Forty-three, ten, star. Don't. I remember."

He remembered everything.

They all did.

They *all* did.

"We have two and a half minutes." Sonny didn't check his piece, which Paddy remembered he always seemed to do before, like a nervous habit.

"Move, Rick. Now." MJ's fist shot up, busting out the light on the inside of the car, making everything dark as the door opened.



## *Chapter Forty Six*

Cowboy stared at Jay-Jay's momma, trying to ignore Duncan. Doc was pacing, and Momma was twitching, and it was about to drive him nuts.

Somehow, he'd been hoping he'd hear from Jay by now. Either Jay or Duke. It seemed to be taking too damned long. Duke always answered him.

Always.

Seemed like things might just be getting out of hand. He had a feeling.

Cowboy hated it when he had a hunch.

About the time Momma opened her mouth to say something, probably about how she really needed her medicinal weed, Cowboy's phone rang. He flipped it open and turned his back, glad for the distraction.

"Joe's Bar."

"Is it, indeed? I'm selling security." Well, fuck a duck. He knew that smarmy, oily, so-not-Jay-Jay voice.

"Yeah? I might be in the market."

Shit. Shit, he had to watch the clock. Make sure they couldn't capture his signal.

"Excellent. I have someone working the Arizona territory. Can you meet with them, say, this evening?" How the *fuck* did they know he was on the west coast?

"No. I can meet someone in southeastern California, though, in the same timeframe."

No way. No way was he meeting anyone anywhere near Momma and the Doc.

"That's satisfactory. I will forward you the meeting details at the usual address. This meeting is extremely vital."

"I'll be there with bells on." He hung up, knowing he had to get Duncan to move Momma somewhere even he didn't know about, find a way to make contact when it was all said and done.

Duncan looked at him, eyes sharp, too damn smart, just a little wary. "What's up?"

"The men who hired me to take you out. They want a meeting. You have to take MJ's mother somewhere, Doc."

To his surprise, Duncan nodded. "I will. How will you find us?"

"I'll give you an address. You go there and tell Duke that Cowboy Jim sent you. If things feel hinky, you just keep going and set up an email. Docdunc at either of the big free servers.. I'll try both. I'll email you when I'm ready to meet up with you."

"Okay. Cash only, right?" Duncan touched his wrist. "You'll come for me, yeah?"

"You know it." He turned his hand, grabbing Duncan and pulling him close enough to kiss. "I had to kidnap you once, huh? I can do it again."

"I'll hold you to that. I can get incredibly grumpy."

"I know you can. They come for you, you get so grumpy that they'll be finding the pieces for weeks. You hear me?" He kissed Duncan hard, needing the taste and feel of that fine mouth.

Duncan fucked his lips, hands squeezed his arms, hard enough to bruise.

The thrill of that went straight to his toes, shooting down through his cock. Jesus. He moaned, knowing they couldn't do this now. Couldn't let it get out of hand.

"Mine. My cowboy. You remember." Those black eyes flashed green.

"I will, Doc. I swear." He was a cowboy, after all. His word was as good as law.

"I do, too. I'll take her, keep her safe." He got one more kiss. "Give me some cash. I'll worry about transportation."

Jesus, his blinky little professor was getting good at this shit.

He nodded, went to his bag and handed over a wad of bills, and then went to MJ's momma. "Hey, lady. I have to go help MJ. Duncan's going to move on with you. You'll like him. He plays Scrabble."

Bright blue eyes that looked just like Jay-Jay's looked at him. "I want you to tell him that they have his father."

"I will. I'll tell him." He cupped her wrinkled cheek, feeling as many smile lines as anything else.  
"You be good for Doc, huh?"

"I will. I have my bag, my books. Manning is always telling me I need a vacation."

"There you go." Smiling, he bent and kissed her cheek, the tingle on the back of his neck telling him they all had to hit the road.

Duncan handed him his hat, opened the door. "Go, Colby. Hurry."

"I'll come for you, Doc. You just hang in there."

Before he could get all mushy, which would just be bizarre, he headed out, intent on putting a safe distance between him and Duncan.

MJ had better damned well appreciate all of this.

## *Chapter Forty Seven*

Cowboy shifted from foot to foot, wishing he had a damned cigarette. That would be stupid, would dull his senses, but that didn't stop him from wanting one. He checked his danger areas again, making sure no one could get the jump on him. Meet the bastards. Tell them what they wanted to hear. Then go help Jay-Jay. That was the plan.

A tall man walked up, straight at him, like they knew each other. Okay then. Hello, Mr. Bastard.

Cowboy straightened up, figuring the casual slouch wouldn't fool anyone anyway. "You got something for old Jim, Mister?"

"Ayup." Well, now. That was deep Yankee. "Gotcher this."

A paper bag was handed over and, he swore to God, if it'd been Jay-Jay, he'd've run. Jay-Jay could blow lots of shit up with a bag that size.

They weren't about to blow him, though. They needed him too much. As far as they were concerned, he'd sent in the live blood sample and gotten a little energetic with disposing of Doc on the dead one, so he was still their best bet. After all, he was a fucking pro, right? Fucking right. Cowboy took the bag and nodded, staring the man down when he would have waited.

"You know where to call." The guy turned tail, walking away.

Yeah. He knew where to call, and he'd gotten a new, disposable cell registered to Joe Easy. Cowboy waited until the guy was gone, then headed out to the second vehicle he'd had parked at the bar, one he hadn't driven up in.

The bag had a .33, a cell phone, a picture of MJ, and directions.

Well, he'd be damned.

That might actually make it easier for him. If MJ was the target, then he wouldn't have to show his hand until the very end.

That worked for Cowboy.

Man, it was a shit picture, too. Jay was *way* prettier in person.

He checked the .33 over, making sure it was clean and in working order. No exploding in his face.

Cowboy had five hours to get two hundred miles and into the desert. He didn't know how they knew that Jay was hitting them at a certain time. He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

He just knew he had to move his ass, and he wasn't allowed to stop and call the Doc, or fret about it. Damn it.

He'd always been able to do his job. It was time to go finish this one.

## *Chapter Forty Eight*

"Boomer, what if there are metal detectors?" Paddy was scared.

Really scared.

He was going to do it; he wasn't going to let Neil down, but...

He was scared.

"Just do it." MJ handed him a badge, a key card, wiping them clean. He could see the shape of a lump, a lab coat, bound hands. "Just walk up, use the card, punch in the number."

Paddy nodded, licking his lips. Sonny wasn't right there. He was back far enough to lay down cover fire.

"Listen. You walk up, you punch in the number, you open the door." Boomer stared at him. "I know you're scared, but they're going to kill your man."

"I know. What... What if there are metal detectors, though?"

"You walk. You just walk, straight through and don't look back. I'll take care of it."

"I just get Neil."

"Yes. If they try to stop you..." MJ looked at him, the scarred face hideous and blank.

"I shoot them."

"Yes, Rick. You shoot to kill. Do you have the keys?"

That was another thing that he didn't want to know about. He had keys to a little Corolla. Sonny'd given them to him.

"I have them. I know where the car is. I'll take Neil and go."

"Good man. He'd better be ready. Go now, or I'll shoot you myself."

"Fuck you, Boomer." He headed for the door, hands in the too-big lab coat pockets.

Walk.

Walk straight through.

Don't look back.

Coming, Neil.

I'm coming.

## *Chapter Forty Nine*

Neil tried to shift, a tiny motion that sent stabbing agony through every muscle. He couldn't see, could barely breathe, but for the first time in days, he could *hear*.

Psychically. There was no feedback noise, no muddy mess in his head. He could hear Padraic, as loud as if he stood right there. His poor love was worried. Scared, even.

*Coming. Coming, Neil. I'm coming. I love you. I'm... Oh, God. Please don't shoot me. Neil. Where are you?*

Oh, sweet heaven. Padraic was *here*.

Neil thought he might be hallucinating, but that voice... he knew that voice. There was no way it could be that close and be a dream, so he focused all his energy on helping Paddy find the right path.

*Yes. Yes. Neil.* Padraic was coming. Paddy had keys, a gun, money. Paddy was coming for him.

His hands clenched and unclenched, blood running from stretched, broken skin. The straps around his wrists creaked. Yes. He tensed and released every muscle he still could. *I'm ready, love. Ready.*

Paddy moved fast; he could feel his lover, the thoughts getting wilder and louder.

*Focus, love. Focus. I know you can.*

He knew Paddy could be calm in the moment when he had to. And he rather had to. Neil felt Padraic's agreement, felt as those lovely, bubbly thoughts turned hard, icy. Almost as if someone flipped a switch that he didn't know Paddy had.

Three shots popped off outside, in quick succession, then the doorknob turned.

Neil bit his lip, feeling how swollen it was, feeling it split once more. He didn't make the sound that tried to burst from him, though. He stayed silent, trying to will it to be Paddy. Not someone else.



The door swung open, Paddy running in, eyes and face hard. "Neil."

A knife came out, flashing as Padraic cut the leather straps holding him.

His mouth opened, but his tongue was huge, heavy, so he said it in his head. *Hurry.*

"No matter what, we're getting you out." Paddy met his eyes. "I have a shot for you. It'll give you a boost. Do you want it?"

"Yes." Yes. He could pay for burning past his reserves later. Now they just needed to get out.

Paddy nodded, and Manning's head popped around the door. "Rick. Hurry. Come on, kid."

Manning. They were going to take Manning. Neil held out a hand when Paddy reached for him, offering up a vein.

"I don't care." Paddy slipped the needle into his arm, plunged the drug in.

His left eye opened enough for him to see, and he nodded, trying to keep from tearing up. "All right, then. Up and out, hmm?"

"Yes." Paddy wrapped one arm around his waist and tugged, hard. He stumbled up onto his feet, screaming, his entire body on fire.

"Sonny! Help me!"

Ah, the very large redneck. Neil slipped on something slick, something he didn't want to contemplate, and big hands landed on his other arm.

"Time to go, Brit."

"Come on. Come on. They're coming." Manning was glaring, fear pouring off the man in waves.

"I got it, Precious." Sonny did, indeed, have "it." In fact, he picked Neil up and flung him over one shoulder.

Padraic drew his gun, and Manning started laying down cover fire. "We're out of time here. They've closed off the front."

"I'm out. Plow the road for me, Precious." Like a moving mountain, Sonny started forward, heading for the brightly lit hallway.

Every motion hurt, every step bounced him. He could see Padraic, watching their backs. Manning went flying past, gun popping off round after round, and he heard a high scream, the sound of bullets in flesh.

"Hurry. Hurry." Paddy sounded panicked.

"I'm going to set a charge. Go around the corner."

"No! We have to go up first, this is underground!"

"Rick, I'm not discussing this. Run."

Paddy ran ahead, the pop-pop-pop telling him that his love knew how to shoot a gun now, knew what to point at and how to squeeze the trigger. Neil closed his working eye and gritted his teeth against the pain. His innocent love with thoughts of ice. Pure ice. It made him...

*Neil, stop it. We have to get out. We have to...*

Manning went streaking by, grabbing him off Sonny's shoulders. "Run!"

He went flying through the air, his body catapulting past Manning when Sonny gave him one last shove. The sound of a door clanging shut made him blink, trying to see what was happening.

"SONNY!" Manning spun, running back toward the metal door. The sound of the explosion rocked the whole building.

Neil crawled, trying to get to Padraic, his hands slipping on cold tile.

"Neil." Paddy grabbed him, hauled him up. "Please. I have a car. I have a way out. Please. Hurry."

His brave love.

"I'm coming." He was. The shot was working, and his legs were churning, actually starting to move. Rather like a riverboat wheel.

*Love you. Love you. Hurry. Hurry.* "How do we get out?"

There were stairs and... There was a window.

A window.

Right up at the top.

"Window." He pointed, or thought he did, his legs pushing toward that hole.

Paddy nodded, dragging him up the stairs.

They had to get out. Had to get out before Manning blew everything up. Everything. Just to get to Sonny.

They managed the top of the stairs, the moon right there, shining in. Padraic reached for the lock, slamming the window open and...

God, no.

No.

A man was staring in, gun in hand, a hard face and vicious thoughts slamming into him.

Paddy, though... Paddy grinned. "Cowboy. Help?"

"This your guy?" The hand not holding the gun grabbed him, and he flew through the window, just as if Sonny had thrown him again. Really, Manning's friends were so strong.

"Hurry!" Paddy was beginning to panic.

"Shut up and drag, kid. To the car and don't look back." They got a shove, Neil clinging to Paddy like there was no tomorrow.

"He's still in there." Paddy grabbed his arm, pulled hard. "I have a car. I have a car and we're going to run. I love you. I came."

"Yes." His lips moved, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. He was running, wasn't he? The world was moving fast.

Padraic pushed him into a car that he'd never seen before. "We have to go. We have to hurry."

"Drive, love." Neil leaned back against the seat, his burst of energy starting to fade. "Sorry, Padraic. Sorry."

He was so sorry. For everything.

"I came. I love you. You're safe. No one will hurt you again." The words were fierce.

"I believe you, sweet." His heart was pounding, his head throbbing. "Love... you."

"Love you. Do you think you can drink? I have water."

"I don't..." He didn't know. Neil didn't know anything.

"Here." Paddy handed him a bottle, driving like a mad man. "You don't have to know. I'll know for you. I promise. I'll know."

Yes. Paddy would know. His love was so strong. For him. It made Neil want to scream.

"Shh. Drink. I'm going to make it better. I promise."

He drank, trying to get the dry fibers of his throat and tongue to soak in the moisture, trying not to choke. He had to trust that Padraic knew what to do, where to go.

Neil simply had to trust. With Paddy, that was the easiest thing in the world to do.

## *Chapter Fifty*

Sonny.

Sonny.

Sonny.

Fuck.

MJ banged his fists against the metal wall.

Okay. Okay. Okay.

What to do?

The sound of footsteps echoed behind him a half second before the sound of a pistol cocking cleared the last of the ringing out of his ears. The bore pressed just under his right ear. "Where's the redneck?"

Cowboy. Thank God.

"Fuck you, asshole." He slapped one hand against the metal door.

The gun pressed a little harder, easing around to the right, like Cowboy didn't know he was left handed. Good man. "Oh, now. We don't have time for that. Hands behind your head, thumbs up."

"We've got nothing but time. What are you, the hired help? Hell, I had to walk in here for you to catch me." Did Rick and the Brit get out?

"I'm just the guy who caught the one who really matters."

Score.

"Well, then, let's get this show on the road."

Cowboy patted him down, slipping a piece into his back pocket while making a show of pulling the one out of his ankle holster.

"Good boy. Now, move away from the door. Slow-like."

He nodded, keeping his breath slow and even.

They were under the fucking ground and they had his Sonny.

Fuck.

Cowboy, though. Cowboy knew what to do. They had discussed this. At length, and Cowboy was keeping to the script.

He could do this. He could. "Tell me, how much are they paying you for this? I hope it was worth it."

"I never discuss money with a mark." Cowboy sounded cold, cold, cold. Icy. It worked. Hell, at one time, MJ would have thought it was hot.

He laughed. "You mean I don't even get to know what I'm worth? My last job, I took half a mil, bought my mom a new house."

Tell me Mom's okay.

"Trust me, I bring you in, I'm set for life. I could buy your mommy five houses all over the place. You'd never find her again."

Good deal. "Oh, I don't know. She'd think you were hot, but she'd miss her baby boy." They walked through another set of doors, then another. Where the *fuck* was Sonny?

Cowboy chuckled. "I can make anyone forget someone like you. In there, *Precious*." Cowboy prodded him toward a steel door, preparing him.

"I imagine there are a number of people who want to forget me. I wish you the best." He tensed, focusing on what was coming up.

"Just don't forget yourself and do something stupid, huh?" He knew he was the only one who would mistake that tone for fond and regretful, but it was. No, Cowboy. No regrets now.

"I'm a lot of shit, dude. Stupid isn't on the list."

The door swung open and there was Greg, half-melted and bowed, standing with a couple of goons and a handful of lab rats. There in the center of them, on his knees, was Sonny.

"Manning, how very nice to see you. It's been so long."

## *Chapter Fifty One*

Shit, fuck, goddamn it all to fucking hell.

Sonny figured he had to be the stupidest redneck in the history of Alabama crackers and Mississippi mud-bugs, and there was a long history of stupid there.

At least the Brit and the boy had gotten out. They had to have, or they'd be coming through the door right now with MJ and Cowboy. Thank God for Cowboy. Oh, Sonny hated the man with a fiery passion, but he was MJ's man, through and through.

He would help MJ kill everyone, including Sonny, and get the hell out.

Cowboy had *better* help MJ get out.

MJ quirked an eyebrow. "You've spent an enormous amount of money and personnel for one little surfer boy, Greg. You would have been better served hiring a plastic surgeon."

He felt the ugly fuck growl, one scarred hand creaking.

"You have something we need, Manning. We don't let sheep stray from the flock."

"I did. Paula did. Rick did."

The wet, sloppy sound of the man's voice, of his breathing, made Sonny's skin crawl. Come on, Precious. Get this over with. They needed to get this over with, once and for all. Sonny stared at MJ, willing him to understand. Willing him to see that Sonny damned well understood.

MJ met his eyes, calm as all get out. "Sonny's not your flock, asshole."

"No, but he's going to die. Like your father did, screaming."

No. No, he wouldn't put MJ through that. He gathered his strength, intent on making his move. If no one else did it, Cowboy would have to shoot him to maintain his cover.

"Haven't you gotten new material yet? It's been years." MJ rolled his shoulders, pulling away from Cowboy a little. "You never did have the creativity to make it outside the grid."

That hand on his shoulder clenched again, shook him a little. "Would you like to see my new material, Manning? Would you honestly? Pieter, please, do show our compatriot some of my new material?"

Somebody behind him moved, drew a curtain back, and when he looked...

Fuck.

Fuck.

Fuck.

There was an old man - what used to be an old man - hanging in a glass case. There weren't no eyes, no clothes, no fingers, no... Well, there was a prick, just not where it was supposed to be. It was jammed down the old fucker's throat.

"What do you think, Manning? I have the entire experience on tape. I have copies. I thought your mother might be quite interested in seeing how things ended up."

Sonny blinked. He blinked again. Hell, it took him three blinks to realize that was MJ's daddy hanging in there, and that? Well, that was a little too much.

"You rotten fucker." Sonny didn't say it and then move. He moved while he screamed it, not wanting to give the bastard time to react. Two guards went flying, and his head hit Greg right in the belly, and that burned skin on Greg's hand felt like tin foil you used on a barbeque.

He heard the shots ring out, saw two men go down, then somebody came up from behind him, something hard knocking the wind out of him. His knees buckled, the room swam, and his fucking hands hit the floor, hard enough to sting.

Someone was right there, something sharp against his throat, a hand grabbing his balls.

"Let him go, asshole." MJ's voice was ice.

"I don't think so, Manning."

He heard the hammer cock. "I'll blow your brains out."

"Not before they infect him. How does a full dose of botulism sound?"

That hand squeezed again, trying to bust his balls, and he groaned.

"We can tear his testicles off, before or after, your choice."



His eyes watered, but he blinked hard to clear them so he could find MJ's bright blue stare. Kill me, Precious. Come on. Now. If Neil had been there, that psychic British head would be exploding with how loud Sonny was thinking it.

"You hurt him, and I'll make you all pay."

Greg's chuckle was nasty, thick, the foulest fucking thing. "I'm going to hurt him, Manning. I'm going to destroy him and make you watch."

The squeeze came again, and he couldn't not grunt. MJ never looked at him, held that bastard's eyes. "What do you want?"

"What I've always wanted, Manning. I want you to come home."

MJ's fingers tightened on the gun, knuckles white. "I can't let you have him."

Look at me. Come on, Precious, look at me one more time before you do it. Let me see your eyes.

Just like MJ heard, those blue eyes met his, dead serious. "Sorry, Sunshine."

He nodded, not closing his eyes a bit as the gun moved, MJ putting the muzzle to his own temple. "You give him to the merc. Now. You let him walk, or you lose."

His jaw dropped so hard he thought it might break, and Sonny bucked, forgetting the knife at his privates, struggling like a madman against the syringe at his throat. "No. No, it doesn't work that way. No!"

"I mean it, Greg. You give him to the merc. Now. Or all you get to take to your boss is my brains spattered on the floor. "

"Sure. Jim, would you mind, terribly, escorting Manning's friend upstairs?"

"Got it." Giving MJ a wide berth, face carefully blank, Cowboy came to him and screwed the muzzle of a gun into his temple. "Out, redneck."

MJ's eyes never shifted from the burned fucker. "Go on, Sonny. It's all done now."

"No, Manning, for you it's only just beginning."

His muscles tightened, and Sonny sucked in a quick breath, ready to tear everyone limb from limb, including that goddamned fucking traitor, Cowboy. That was as far as he got, though. He heard a muttered, "Oh, fuck this shit," and felt a prick in his neck, sharp and cold and hard.

The drug started to work in the blink of an eye. Pretty fucking ironic, really, because it had to have come from his own stash.

Cowboy started backing him out, and the last goddamn thing he saw before the world went black was MJ putting his pistol on the table with a click that was so fucking loud it echoed.

## *Chapter Fifty Two*

He drove.

Paddy kept going and going, heading down the highway as fast as he could. He had a name in his pocket. A Doctor Neumann outside of Vegas. That's where they were going, so Neil could get some help.

Neil. His Neil was... Torn. Bloody. It seemed like all the parts were there, but it was hard to tell. It was hard to see anything, and he'd just tossed a blanket over the poor beaten body.

"We're going to get you help, Neil. I promise. We're going to get you help." Paddy kept talking, kept making noise.

Anything to keep himself from panicking and doing something stupid.

Anything at all.

Neil didn't answer, but Paddy didn't expect the man to. Hell, he just needed to make noise, to talk, to not think anymore because he'd held a gun and shot someone, then watched the someone's face sort of... dissolve, and he'd do it again, to help his Neil.

The light caught his attention, the flash sudden and bright and unmistakable. Plastique.

"Boomer."

That was. Wow.

Wow.

Boom.

He pushed harder on the gas. Whatever police that were around, they'd be heading toward the blast zone.

He was heading to Vegas.

"Do you hear me, Neil? We're going to the doctor's in Vegas."

Vegas.

Vegas, where they were going to be fine.

## *Chapter Fifty Three*

"Ma'am, you need to sleep."

Duncan logged in, staying away from the window as he typed. Miss Gregory was more than a touch upset, and her constant fretting was not helping him stay in control, especially after so many fucking days. The woman didn't look a whole lot like her son. Of course, MJ was a... special case, he guessed. Especially after he'd gone to Colby's friend's house and found... an abattoir.

"I'm trying. I can't. I'm worried about my baby boy. I have feelings, you know? Feelings."

"I'm sure he's fine." He checked Yahoo. Nothing. Then he went to Gmail.

Oh, holy fuck.

An email from John Wayne, Jr.

He clicked on it, half expecting it to be some sort of ridiculous spam, but his racing heart and sweaty palms told him he hoped otherwise.

"Doc. Keep package safe. Find red rocket man. I'll be in touch. We got a problem."

There was no signature. No sign. Nothing but that Doc, which no one else called him.

He looked over at MJ's mom. Safe. Right. "Everything's going to be fine. How do you feel about Vegas?"

## *Epilogue*

One Year Later.

He crouched down in the bed of the old pickup, hiding between two crates of chickens and a little señorita who looked approximately twenty months pregnant. The explosions had left his ears ringing, and there were burns on his hands, on the bottoms of his feet.

He'd stolen a guard's shoes.

"¿A donde va, señor?" Her voice was scared, maybe a little sick.

He shrugged. It didn't matter where he was going. What mattered was that he was leaving. "En cualquier lado."

He scrubbed his face with his hand; the scar there was old, bumpy, rough, fascinating. He'd bet the story of how he'd gotten it would be fascinating.

"Lo siento."

"Pah." He waved his hands. She didn't need to be sorry. Once he got his bearings, he'd be dealing out invoices, assuring that each one of his screams were duly compensated. "No hay de que."

"Mariposa." She held out one hand, and he shook it. "¿?Como se llama?"

His name? Now that, that was a very interesting question. "No se."

As a matter of fact, he had no idea at all.

end

*Look for book four of the Road Trip series, Walking on the Sun, Fall 2009*