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*Ménage Àmour*



# Stolen Desires

Stormy Glenn

# **STOLEN DESIRES**

*Tri Omega Mates 4*

**Stormy Glenn**

**MENAGE AMOUR**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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# **DEDICATION**

To My Love, once again you've given me the freedom and support to pursue my dreams. Thank you. I couldn't have done this without you.

# **STOLEN DESIRES**

*Tri Omega Mates 4*

**STORMY GLENN**

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## **Chapter 1**

Ryce bent his head under the shower nozzle, closing his eyes as the deluge of hot water sprayed down his neck and back. After a few moments, he felt the tension in his shoulders began to relax, the stress slowly draining away with the water down the drain.

It had been a long day, made even longer when he arrived home and found his mate of several years, Saul, getting ready to go out. Saul had been buttoning up his shirt and he smiled when Ryce walked in.

“Hey baby, long day?”

Ryce nodded, trying to swallow past the lump in his throat “Are you going out tonight?” He was almost afraid to ask because he knew the answer.

“Yeah, going to see if I can find me some young thing to play with.” Saul grinned back at him.

Ryce couldn’t believe how much anguish that statement caused him. He and Saul had been mated for nearly five years. In all of that time, Ryce had never once strayed from his commitment to Saul, even if he had thought about it.

Saul couldn’t say the same thing. He had been going out to try and find a piece of ass every Friday night since Ryce had known him.

That was a lot of Friday nights, and each one of them was like a knife in Ryce's heart.

It was something he had grown used to since the day that they had mated. Saul wasn't into monogamous relationships. He told Ryce that from the very beginning. Knowing he couldn't have him any other way, Ryce reluctantly agreed to let him be free.

He almost laughed when he remembered that old adage, *if you love him, set him free. If he comes back to you, he's yours. If he doesn't, it was never meant to be*. He set Saul free and he did come back to him every night, but he wasn't Ryce's and he never would be.

Ryce was slowly beginning to realize that. But what was he supposed to do? Saul was his mate. It was ingrained in his nature to fight with every fiber of his being to stay with his mate, even if that meant turning the other way when Saul went off to be with someone else.

"I thought maybe we could stay in tonight," Ryce whispered, knowing it was a lost cause when Saul began to chuckle. He turned his head away and pretended to get ready for a shower as tears filled his eyes.

"How about tomorrow night, baby? I've got some big plans for tonight." Saul chuckled.

"Yeah, sure," Ryce replied, walking into the bathroom to hide. "I'll see you tomorrow, Saul." He quietly shut the door, leaning his forehead against the cool wood as he heard the bedroom door shut.

He didn't know how much more of this he could take. Saul was a great guy, tall, gorgeous, caring. Except for his need to go out and have sex with nameless strangers that weren't his mate, he was perfect.

For the first few years, Ryce had looked the other way, letting Saul have his fun. Since Ryce's brother, Caleb, had mated recently, it had been harder and harder. He wanted his mate to want only him, to need only him. He wanted what Caleb had.

Saul didn't seem to need anyone. Sure, he seemed to like having someone to come home to, someone to hold in bed at night. But he never seemed to really need Ryce. Sometimes Ryce felt that if they weren't mated, Saul would still be fine.

Ryce, on the other hand, knew he needed Saul more than he had ever needed anyone. Saul was everything he needed in a mate. He just wasn't sure he could last much longer being the only mate in a two-mate relationship.

Turning off the shower, Ryce reached for a stack of cream-colored towels. He wrapped one around his waist, and used another to dry his hair. Setting the towel down on the counter, he looked at himself in the bathroom mirror.

He wasn't a bad-looking guy. At six-foot-four, he was nearly as tall as Saul. He stayed in good shape. The tight, rippled muscles across his chest and abdomen attested to that. He even had a small smattering of dark hair that trailed down his abdomen and below the edge of the towel. The trail to heaven, they called it.

His hair, while a bit curly and unruly, was nearly down to his shoulders. It was a nice dark auburn like his mother's, his eyes a moss green that he inherited from his father. All in all, he thought he could pass muster.

So, what was it about him that Saul couldn't commit to? Was it his looks? His personality? His need to be in a monogamous relationship? Was it just his needy personality? Is that what Saul found so hard to deal with?

Ryce shook his head, resentment and anger filling him as he thought about where Saul was going right at this moment. Saul was his mate, damn it! He should be home with him, not off trying to find some piece of ass to screw.

"Fuck this!" Ryce growled as he threw the towel across the room. If Saul could go out and find him a piece of ass, so could he. He was tired of waiting at home every Friday night, wondering where his



mate was or who he was fucking. If Saul didn't want him, maybe someone else would.

Ryce walked back into the bedroom and stalked across the room to his dresser, pulling open a drawer to grab a pair of faded jeans. Holding them up, he smiled. These should be just right. They were well worn and faded, a couple of rips in each leg. They also fit him like a glove, showcasing his ass like a piece of fine art.

Quickly pulling the jeans on, Ryce opened another drawer and reached for a plain black cotton shirt, pulling it over his head. He pushed his feet into his black cowboy boots, adding his cowboy hat for the last effect.

Turning to look into the full-length mirror on the bedroom wall, Ryce checked out his form. Yep, he looked hot. A splash of cologne and his black leather biker's jacket set off the outfit perfectly.

Grabbing some condoms and a small bottle of lube to shove in his pocket, Ryce picked up his keys and headed for his truck. As he walked through the living room, he waved as he passed his brother, Caleb, and his mates, Thomas and Micah.

"Heading out?" Caleb asked.

Ryce nodded. "Yep. Going to go see if I can find me a cute little mate like Micah."

"Uh, Ryce, don't you already have a mate?" Micah asked hesitantly.

"Yep. Decided I wanted another one," Ryce said as he walked out the front door. "You have two. Why can't I?"

Ryce could see the confusion on their faces as he shut the front door and left, walking to his truck. Yeah, he knew he sounded like he had lost his mind. He wasn't so sure that he hadn't. Two mates? What in the hell would he do with two mates? He couldn't keep the one that he had.

Besides, he wasn't really looking for another mate. He just wanted a way to forget for awhile, maybe find someone who wanted just him, even if it was only for one night.

\* \* \* \*

Ryce walked into the bar, not knowing what to expect or even if he would find someone to be with tonight. It had been ages since he had been to a bar, even a gay bar. And while this bar was known to have people of all orientations, Ryce had never been inside. He was always too afraid that he would run into Saul. He wasn't sure he could handle that.

He had cautiously searched the parking lot for Saul's truck before coming in. He knew Saul wasn't here. He didn't know if he was thankful or disappointed.

Ordering a beer, Ryce leaned his back up against the bar as he surveyed the room. He could see several possible marks in the room, but none that jumped out at him. Nothing that made his cock hard enough to be of any use to him.

Just as he was starting to turn around and grab his beer, a brief shot of bright blue caught his attention. His eyes quickly zeroed in on the bright blue fabric, rising up to meet eyes just as blue, just as bright, with a definite gleam of interest.

Ryce could feel his cock perk right up, wanting an introduction. Ryce nodded his acknowledgement, not wanting to seem over eager, even if he was. He hadn't seen someone that sexy since he had met Saul.

The softest cream-colored skin that Ryce had ever seen framed the blue eyes staring back at him. Collar length, sunlight-blond hair framed high cheekbones and perky pink lips.

The man's stature couldn't have been more than five-foot-seven or eight, but he carried it well. Ryce could see that the smaller man was in shape by the way his tight shirt fit, maybe even muscled, but not overly so. Just enough to not be shapeless.

His legs, however, belied his short height, seeming to go on forever. Ryce could picture in his mind what those legs would look

like wrapped around his waist as he thrust himself into the man. Just imagining it made his cock jump up and down for joy.

Ryce knew he was in trouble the minute the man started dancing in his direction. Each gentle sway of his hips was met by an answering throb in Ryce's pants. He seemed to know just how much to swing his hips as he walked to get the desired effect and getting the desired effect he most certainly was.

The cock trapped in Ryce's pants was so hard he wondered if it would break if he moved wrong. As faded and worn as his jeans were, he was afraid they might burst if the man touched him.

Ryce's hands gripped the wooden bar top behind him as the man sashayed up to him, grinning and showing off perfect white teeth. He pushed himself right between Ryce's legs, pressing his tight body against him.

"Hello, handsome. Where have you been all my life?"

Oh hell, even his voice was sexy. Ryce held his breath as he stared down at the man that stood between his legs. If he smelled as good as he looked, and was truly as sweet as he sounded, Ryce was a goner. He'd pick the gorgeous man up, throw him over his shoulder, and drag his ass someplace where he could find out if the glorious pearly tint of his skin went all the way down.

"Well? Aren't you going to say anything? Or are you going for that strong, silent type of thing? I like strong and silent, especially the strong part," the man purred as he rubbed himself against Ryce. "Silent, not so much. I like to hear my lover when we fuck."

Ryce's eyes widened in astonishment. He didn't know whether to laugh or agree with him. The gorgeous man was as good as saying that they were going to have sex, like the decision had already been made.

Ryce inhaled just as he started to open his mouth, getting a good dose of his heady scent. It was woodsy, manly, virile, and every other addictive scent Ryce had ever smelled all rolled into one. Every nerve

ending in his body went haywire, short-circuiting everything but the deep, uncontrollable need to claim the man standing before him.

Ryce quickly reached down and grabbed the man by his arms, absently noting his strong muscles. "Do you know who I am?" he growled quietly.

"I know what you are, not who you are. I figure we can discuss that after you claim me," the man replied before he leaned up and inhaled deeply, his nose nearly touching Ryce's throat. "You smell really, really good. I want to get naked and roll all over you until I have your scent covering me." *Oh, he is good.*

"What's your name?" Ryce asked as he tried desperately to regain some composure, some control over his raging hormones.

"Honey? Darling? Baby? Lover? Mate? I could go on, you know." The man laughed.

Ryce just growled. He was way over his head and the man in his arms seemed to be enjoying it too much. He was also a huge flirt, something that on any other occasion Ryce would find amusing. Right at the moment, it just drove him crazy. "Your name?"

The little man rolled his eyes. "Fine. My name is Carrington Jones, but everyone calls me Cary. And please, no jokes about it being a girl's name, because believe me, I've heard them all a hundred times."

"Cary," Ryce said.

"Mmm, I like the way you say that. Makes my dick hard. Here, want to feel?" Cary nearly purred as he grabbed one of Ryce's hands and pushed it down to cup him through his pants.

Ryce thought his eyes were going to cross. Cary was right. It did make his cock hard, damn hard, but not nearly as hard as Cary made Ryce. He wanted to bend Cary over the bar right there and then and fuck him. Still, he had to be sure.

"Who am I?"

He watched as Cary's eyebrows drew together in a frown. "My mate," Cary replied, as if Ryce should already know that.

That was good enough for Ryce. Tossing some money on the counter, Ryce grabbed Cary's arm and started pulling him out of the bar. He paused briefly by the door to look down at him. "Did you come with anyone?"

Cary shook his head. "No, I was just passing through town and stopped for the night. The desk clerk at the hotel suggested this place."

Well, that solved one problem for Ryce. He wouldn't have to be explaining to anyone why Cary was coming home with him. He just had to explain it to Saul.

Ryce opened the driver's side door of his truck and let Cary climb in before getting in himself. As he started up the truck and Cary's hand landed on his thigh, he prayed that he would make it home before attacking him. It wasn't looking good, though.

As Ryce started the drive for home, he glanced at Cary out of the corner of his eye. He didn't seem nervous, but anxious. Ryce wondered if he had any experience. He was sure he'd find out by the end of the night.

Ryce nearly drove off the road as Cary's hand moved up his thigh to caress his hard cock through his tight jeans. "How long do I have to wait to get a piece of this?" Cary murmured.

He pressed his foot down on the accelerator, racking his brain for any small dirt road, pull off, or empty rest spot he could think of. He was surprised that his mind was functioning at all as he remembered a small turnoff about a half a mile ahead. It was just a dirt road that didn't really lead anywhere, but it would work in a pinch.

Quickly taking the exit, Ryce drove the truck far enough down the road that they couldn't be seen from the main road. Pulling the truck to a stop, he shut it off before looking over at Cary. "Strip!"

Cary seemed all too eager to comply as he pulled his shirt over his head, pushed his shoes off of his feet, and his pants down his legs. He was quick, naked and waiting in mere seconds.

Ryce could feel his mouth water as he took in Cary's beautiful body. He had been right. Cary had pearly white skin all the way down. He was breathtaking, every last glorious inch of him. Ryce knew that if he didn't get a piece of him soon, he just might die.

"Come here," Ryce ordered as he scooted to sit in the middle of the bench seat. Cary immediately complied, moving over to straddle Ryce's legs. Ryce held his breath as he brought his hands up and laid them on Cary's shoulders, letting it out slowly as he stroked down his chest.

"Oh, that feels good," Cary groaned as his head dropped back on his shoulders. "I like the way you feel touching me."

So did Ryce. He quickly yanked his shirt over his head and dropped it on the seat before putting his hands back on Cary's chest. His skin was so smooth and silky, Ryce's hands slid right over him.

"Can I touch you?" Cary asked, immediately placing his hands to mirror Ryce's when he nodded. "Damn, this is nice."

Ryce couldn't agree more. Just one touch of Cary's hands on his body and he was ready to blow. It might be a good idea to get this show on the road. He could explore later. It wasn't like Cary was going anywhere. He was Ryce's mate.

"Lift up."

The second Cary stood up, bent over in the small cab, Ryce grabbed the lube out of his pocket, then unzipped his jeans and pushed them down his legs. He held the bottle out to Cary, his eyebrow lifted in query.

"You know what to do with this?"

"Oh yeah," Cary replied with a grin, grabbing the slim bottle and opening it, squirting a liberal amount onto his fingers before handing the bottle back to Ryce. Ryce nearly bit off his tongue when Cary reached behind himself and started applying the lube.

He wished he had taken the time to drive them home where there were lights. He wanted to see what Cary was doing. But the soft groan

that came from Cary's lips as he rode his own fingers told Ryce there wasn't time. Neither of them was going to last much longer.

Ryce reached down and grabbed his cock in one hand, Cary's in the other, and began stroking both of them in a slow, steady pace. He could hear the effect he was having on Cary by the soft whimpers that came from his mouth. *Damn, he's hot!*

"Now, do it now," Cary begged, pulling his hand free and grabbing Ryce's shoulders as he scooted forward and straddled his thighs once more.

Ryce held his cock in place as Cary slowly lowered himself down, removing his hand once Cary's body had a hold of him to grab his hips and thrust up into him. His eyes dropped closed and a long groan fell from his lips as Cary's tight channel gripped him.

He couldn't help thrusting up into Cary, savoring the feel of him tightening around his cock. The soft moan that fell from Cary's lips made Ryce feel better. He wasn't the only one feeling the intensity of their mating.

Opening his eyes, he looked at Cary, surprised by the flushed cheeks, the half-closed eyes filled with desire, the lips slightly parted. Cary was a dream when he was aroused. If it had been nothing but that, Ryce would have been hard as a rock.

But it was the knowledge that Cary was his mate and they were bound together by fate, and his sweet, masculine scent all rolled together with the awareness that Cary actually wanted to be here with him that had Ryce ready to come moments later.

Ryce gripped Cary's hips, holding him still as he quickly thrust up into him, his fingers digging into soft skin with each thrust. He could feel Cary's inner muscles tightening around him as Cary's head fell back on his shoulders and he continued whimpering.

"Oh fuck, just like that—harder," Cary cried out as he reached down and grabbed his leaking cock, stroking it rapidly.

Ryce was only too happy to follow Cary's demand, quickening his pace as he jerked Cary's body down against his, thrusting upwards harder and deeper. "Like that, baby?"

Cary tilted his head forward, meeting his eyes, nodding rapidly. Ryce guessed that he would have answered him verbally if his lower lip hadn't been caught between his teeth "You going to come for me, Cary?" Ryce asked as he pointedly looked down at where Cary was quickly stroking his cock. His breath caught in his throat as he watched the head of Cary's cock swell, then spew forth streams of white, pearly ambrosia.

The sound of Cary's cries, the tightening of his muscles around Ryce's cock, and the sweet smell of Cary's seed had Ryce following him seconds later. His head fell back against the bench seat as he clenched his teeth together, growling loudly as he pumped into Cary.

As his cock continued to throb inside Cary's tight grip, Ryce leaned forward and grabbed him, one hand clenching his hair, the other wrapping around his neck as he pulled him forward and tilted his neck to one side. It was time to claim his mate.

He looked down at Cary in confusion when he resisted, pushing against his shoulders. "Wait! We can't, not yet. I haven't found my other mate yet. I'm a tri-omega. If I mate you and don't find my other mate—"

Ryce just smiled as he leaned down to lick across the soft skin between Cary's neck and shoulder. "I know who your other mate is, baby, don't worry about that," he whispered just before he sank his canines deep into the same soft skin.

He heard Cary cry out, then groan as the sweet taste of his life essence filled his mouth. He knew from his brother that a tri-omega had to be claimed on a regular basis by both of his mates to keep him grounded and safe.

After tasting what Cary had to offer, he didn't see that as a problem. It might be just the opposite. He wondered if there was a



limit on how many times he could claim Cary. It was something he could see himself looking forward to on a daily basis, if not more.

Ryce swiped his tongue over the small bite, groaning at the heady taste before lifting his head to look down into Cary's dazed face. He smiled, lifting his hand to brush the sunlight-blond hair back from his angelic face.

"You belong to me now, Cary," he said, elated at the words he spoke. "I don't care about your past, but your future is mine. No one else, understand? Saul and I will be it. No other men," Ryce said.

He wanted Cary to understand that he would not have two mates who went out and played around with others. One was bad enough. If he could keep Cary home with him, then maybe he wouldn't feel so bad when Saul left every Friday.

"Saul? Is that his name?" Cary asked quietly.

Ryce nodded. "Saul Hunter. We've been mated for about five years."

"And you're sure that he's my other mate?"

"Yes. My alpha, Caleb, who is also my older brother, is mated to a tri-omega. I know from him that fate would never mate you to me and not Saul also. The three of us are mated together. My bond with Saul won't be as strong as yours, but he is my mate."

"What about your bond with me?" Cary asked hesitantly.

Ryce smiled as he ran his finger over Cary's lips. "That's the best part," Ryce replied quietly as he leaned in and gently kissed Cary. Raising his head, he picked the sexy man up and set him on the bench next to him before reaching into the glove box for a package of wipes, handing a few to Cary.

Once he was all cleaned up, Ryce put his clothes back on and scooted over to the driver's seat. He turned to watch Cary finish getting dressed. He grimaced slightly. It was a near tragedy to cover up all of that glorious skin.

Once Cary was settled in the seat next to him, Ryce started the truck back up and looked around, heading back to town.

“Where are we going?”

“We need to stop by your hotel and get your stuff. I don’t think you’ll need to stay there anymore,” Ryce replied as he drove the truck onto the main road.

“Uh—what the hell is your name?” Cary asked suddenly, turning to look over at Ryce.

“Ryce. Ryce Hunter.” He chuckled.

“Ryce—I like that. It sounds nice.”

“Nice? I was hoping for a little more than that, maybe sexy? Gorgeous?” Ryce laughed back at Cary.

“I don’t think anyone needs to know your name to see that you’re sexy, Ryce. That kind of goes without saying.”

“Oh yeah?” Ryce smiled when he saw the heat flushing Cary’s face. “You think I’m sexy?”

“Hell, yes!”

Ryce was surprised when Cary giggled. He didn’t chuckle or laugh, he giggled. He was absolutely adorable. He could see a lot of fun times ahead as he tried to get Cary to giggle more often. He even wondered if Cary was ticklish. This could be fun!

“So, how much stuff do you have? We’ll also need to make arrangements to get your stuff from your former home.”

“Yeah, about that—um, everything I own is sitting in my car. I don’t have a home or a pack anymore,” Cary replied hesitantly.

Ryce slowed the truck to look over at Cary in curiosity. When he saw the dismal look on Cary’s face, he became concerned. He quickly pulled over to the side of the road and put the truck in park before pulling Cary across the seat and into his arms.

“Want to tell me about it?” Ryce asked as he rubbed his hands up and down Cary’s back.

“My pack kicked me out last week after my father caught me kissing another guy. They don’t tolerate gay men at all. They kicked my older brother out several years ago because he was gay. I haven’t seen nor heard from him since he left.”

“Oh, baby, I’m sorry. I’ve heard of things like that happening. Not everyone understands the way we live our lives, but you don’t have to worry about that here. Our alpha is mated to two men, and they’re accepted here. You will be, too.”

“Really?” Cary lifted his head from Ryce’s chest to look up at him. “Your alpha is mated to two men?”

Ryce nodded. “Yep. Caleb is mated to Micah and Thomas. We all live in the same house together. Saul also lives there. Being a tri-omega himself, I’m sure that you and Micah will get along very well. He’s pretty nice.”

“Two tri-omegas in the same pack? Isn’t that unusual?” Cary asked as he sat back in his seat.

Ryce shrugged as he drove the truck back onto the road. “I guess. I don’t know that much about tri-omegas. But if it was meant to be, it was meant to be. Maybe your extra abilities aren’t the same as Micah’s.”

“I won’t know what my abilities are until after Saul claims me. What are Micah’s tri-omega abilities?”

“He can feel other people’s emotions, especially Caleb’s. It’s like he’s hard-wired right to Caleb. Drives my brother right up a wall. He can’t get anything over on Micah.”

He saw Cary smiling out of the corner of his eye. “Of course, Thomas comes from another pack. His former alpha, Jake, is also mated to a tri-omega. Leyland, Jake’s mate, can do all sorts of things. He can levitate things, freeze people in their place, and even talk to people in their minds. It’s a little weird, actually.”

“You don’t—you won’t think I’m weird when I get my abilities, will you?”

Ryce reached across the seat to pat Cary’s thigh. “No, baby. You’re mine and I’ll take you any way that I can get you.”

Cary smiled again, reassured. “What about Saul?”

“Saul? What do you mean?”

“Will he think I’m a freak?”

“No, of course not. Saul is very understanding about these things. He’s going to be surprised when I bring you home, so you will have to give him some leeway for that. But as for you being a tri-omega, he won’t care.”

“Is he going to have a problem with me coming home with you?”

Ryce thought about it for a moment. He didn’t think Saul would have a problem with it. He seemed to like playing the field. With Cary, he just got one more plaything at home. He wouldn’t mind, would he?

“Look, Cary, there’s something you need to know about Saul. He’s a great guy, he really is, the perfect mate, in fact.”

“But?” Cary asked when Ryce didn’t continue.

“I care for Saul very much, just as I know I will care for you. But Saul is different. He has different needs. It’s been hard, but I’ve learned to live with it. It was the only way that I could get him to stay,” Ryce tried to explain.

“Just tell me, already! You’re really starting to freak me out here.”

“Saul goes out every Friday night,” Ryce said quickly.

“Okay. What’s so bad about that?”

“Alone.” Ryce knew he wasn’t explaining himself very well. How was he supposed to tell his new mate that his other mate wouldn’t be faithful to him? He was also afraid that Cary would see it as an opportunity to be unfaithful to him as well. If Ryce was willing to put up with one unfaithful mate, why not two?

“Okay, and?”

Ryce took a deep breath, closing his eyes briefly. Shit! He really didn’t want to discuss this. Opening them again, he stared out the front window of the truck as he gripped the steering wheel tighter. “Saul goes out every Friday night to find someone to fool around with.”

## Chapter 2

Saul quietly closed the front door and tiptoed across the floor, heading for the stairs. He was getting home later than usual, hell, a lot later. The sun was already starting to come up. Ryce was sure to give him hell for this.

Lately, it seemed that every time he came home after being gone for the evening, Ryce gave him the silent treatment. He knew Ryce hated it. He did, too, but if he told Ryce his secret, he doubted Ryce would stay with him.

It didn't take a genius to know that Ryce would flip out the moment he knew about Saul's little secret. If he hadn't been the one in the situation, he probably would have done the same thing. There were just some things a man couldn't accept or ask his mate to accept. Saul's secret life was at the top of the list.

It was just easier to let Ryce think he was out playing the field every Friday night. He knew it hurt Ryce, and he hated that part, but the truth would hurt him even more. Saul would do anything to keep that from happening, even let his mate think he was being unfaithful.

Opening the bedroom door as quietly as he could, Saul stepped in, waiting until his eyes adjusted before shutting the door. Ryce had obviously opened the curtains to let the morning sun come in or Saul would have been able to see better. Werewolves had great eyesight in the dark. Faced with the bright morning sun, he was blind as a bat.

He carefully set his boots down next to the door and walked over to stand next to the bed. He unbuttoned his shirt and dropped it on the floor before reaching for the buttons on his jeans. Just as he got the first two buttons undone, he heard a soft whimper come from the bed.

Saul froze, his eyes instantly glancing to the bed in shock. He had been with Ryce long enough to know every sound he made and that whimper had not come from him. Hesitantly, Saul reached down and tugged the covers back, hissing slightly when he saw the small, naked man curled next to his mate.

For a brief moment, he thought he was having a heart attack. The pain in his chest hurt so bad, he was afraid he was going to pass out. Ryce was cuddled up in bed with another man, albeit a gorgeous man, but another man just the same.

His arm was curled around the stranger's waist, the blond man's head resting on Ryce's arm. Ryce's body was pressed so close to him there wasn't even any space between them. Both were as naked as the day they were born.

Saul couldn't believe how much it hurt. Was this what Ryce went through every time he went into town on Friday nights, this agonizing, overwhelming heartache? Was this Ryce's way of paying him back?

Pulling the covers back up, Saul turned away from the bed, closing his eyes as they filled with tears. He felt like Ryce had just ripped his heart out of his chest, but hadn't he done the same thing? He knew he had no right to be angry, but he could feel it coming.

Ryce should never have brought his boy toy home. At least Saul had never done that. As he reached down to grab his shirt, Saul's anger began to overtake his heartache. Ryce had actually brought a stranger into their bed, their haven away from the world.

How dare he! How could he betray his mate that way? Well, if this man was what he wanted warming his bed, Ryce could have him. Saul wasn't about to let Ryce see how much he had hurt him.

Saul stalked across the room and jerked the door open, walking through it before slamming it behind him. He quickly went down the stairs and headed for the study, going straight for the liquor cabinet. It took a lot of alcohol to get a werewolf drunk, but he was going to do his level best to try.

Pulling the lid off one crystal decanter, he poured a fair amount of whiskey into a glass, quickly drinking it down before pouring another one. Grabbing his glass and the bottle, he went through the double doors to sit on the porch.

Before he knew it, the bottle was almost empty. Saul stared down at it for a moment before setting it on the floor beside him. Getting drunk wasn't the answer. It wasn't going to make him feel any better. Probably just give him a headache.

No, drinking wasn't the answer, but damned if he could figure out what was. That he wasn't going to be sleeping in that bed again was a given. By bringing a stranger into their bed, Ryce had defiled something that had been precious to Saul.

Ryce was his solace, his escape from the harsh realities of the things that he had to do in his life, things he was ashamed of. As much as he regretted having to leave every Friday night, letting Ryce think he was going to be unfaithful, he looked forward to coming home to Ryce at the end of each agonizing night.

Being with Ryce, being his mate, wiped away all of the heartache Saul went through every Friday night. Ryce made him feel clean again, as if his life was normal and sane and not the chaotic hell it really was.

Now, all of that was gone. He'd never be able to come home again and find the happiness with Ryce that he had before he left tonight. He'd never be able to look at Ryce in the same way again.

Saul swiped his hand across his eyes to wipe away the tears that were forming as he realized that he would never have what he had with Ryce again. He would always see him curled up in bed with that other man.

He wondered if he would even be able to look Ryce in the face without feeling the agony he was going through right now. Would he ever be able to even be intimate with Ryce again? Or would he always see him curled around that small, sexy blond?

"You must be Saul."

Saul's head swung up, shock blasting through his body when he saw the stranger standing in the doorway dressed in nothing but a pair of faded jeans. Even his delicate little feet were bare.

He leaned back when the man stepped forward and held out his hand. "My name's Cary."

"I don't give a fuck what your name is," Saul grumbled, jumping to his feet. He pressed his hands against the side of the house as he swayed just a bit. Maybe he had drunk more than he thought he had.

"I, uh, Ryce said—" Cary began.

"I don't give a damn! Whatever he may have said to you, Ryce belongs to me. You need to leave," Saul growled as he took a few stumbling steps past Cary.

"But you don't understand. I'm—"

Saul swung around and grabbed Cary by his arms, slamming his body against the wall. He growled deep in his throat, lifting his lips so Cary could see his long canines. He jerked Cary forward just a bit and slammed him back against the wall again. Satisfaction filled him when he heard the small man cry out.

"I don't care who in the hell you are. I want you gone. You don't belong here, you never will. Ryce belongs to me and I will not give him up for anyone. Do I make myself clear? You've had your fun. Now it's time to leave!"

He watched as the color drained from the man's face, his eyes widening slightly before falling so that he wasn't looking up into Saul's angry eyes anymore.

"I understand," he whispered.

"Good! I want you to leave before Ryce wakes up," Saul said as he pushed the man into the wall once more before turning to walk back into the house. He felt slightly guilty when he heard the man start to sob, but not enough to share his mate with him.

It was better this way. Once the sexy man was gone, Saul could go about trying to work things out with Ryce. He didn't know how he was going to accomplish that when he was so angry, so hurt, but



having Cary here to remind Saul of what Ryce had done wouldn't help.

"I—I need to get my clothes," came a small voice from the doorway.

Saul didn't even turn around. He knew he couldn't. His regret over the way he had treated the man would override his indignation if he saw the tears he could smell falling down the man's face.

"Just go!" Saul growled quietly. "And don't ever come back."

There was a moment's hesitation. Then Saul heard a small sob followed by quickly retreating footsteps as Cary ran to his car. A minute later, he heard a car start up and drive away. He didn't start breathing again until the sound faded away.

Now, all he had to do was deal with his mate when he woke up. Ryce was sure to be unhappy that Saul had chased away his pretty boy. Saul really could have cared less about that. He just hoped that Ryce got over it. He knew it was going to be quite some time before he did.

Saul decided he wasn't going to be able to get any sleep any time soon. He needed coffee before he spoke to Ryce. His mind was foggy and he wanted to be in full control of himself before he confronted his unfaithful mate.

Walking into the kitchen, Saul went about making a pot of hot coffee. When it was done, he poured himself a cup and prepared it with some extra sugar before sitting down at the dining room table.

As he drank halfway through his first cup of coffee, Saul realized that he had been impressed with Ryce's choice in boy toys. If he was going to be unfaithful, at least he had picked someone worth being unfaithful with. Cary was gorgeous.

If he had been single, he would have gone for the man in a heartbeat. Maybe that was why he was so upset with Ryce. After everything he had let Ryce believe about his weekly trips into town, he shouldn't be getting upset over Ryce having a fling of his own, but Cary had been so sexy, Saul had just seen red.

Was it because of how adorable Cary was or because Ryce had been with someone, anyone, other than him? Or was it because he had brought the man home to their room? Their bed?

Saul shook his head as he set his cup down on the table and gazed out the tall dining room window. How was he going to come to terms with the fact that Ryce had been unfaithful when he had given his mate every indication that he was unfaithful every Friday night?

Hearing footsteps coming down the stairs, Saul looked back down at his cup of coffee. He knew those steps. He had been listening to them for nearly five years. Ryce was coming. Saul took a deep breath, readying himself for the coming confrontation.

He continued to stare down at his coffee cup, not saying anything as Ryce came into the dining room. He could feel his stare, his hesitant steps.

“Saul.”

“Ryce.”

“Have you, um, have you seen—”

“Your pretty little boy toy?” Saul finished for him.

“Saul, he’s not—” Ryce said quickly, coming over to stand across the table from him.

“He left,” Saul said, finally raising his eyes to look at Ryce. He was shocked to see the sudden anxiety on Ryce’s face. Was Ryce so enamored of his little boy toy that he was upset he had left?

“He left? But, why would he leave? He’s—”

Saul barked out a bitter laugh. “What? You actually expected him to stick around? Ryce, they never do. That’s why they call it a one-night stand. After you’ve fucked, they leave and, hopefully, they don’t come back.”

“Cary’s not like that, Saul. He’s not like—”

“Not like me? Is that what you were going to say, Ryce? Just because your boy toy doesn’t look like me doesn’t mean he doesn’t know the score. You fuck them, then leave them. That’s the way it’s done, Ryce.”

Saul couldn't believe Ryce was actually concerned about his little fling. Why? Was he planning on keeping him? Was that it? Was Ryce replacing him?

"Is that what you thought, Ryce? Did you think he was going to stick around? What, did you think you could bring some fling home with you and we'd all be one big happy family? I've got to give it to you, Ryce, you've got balls." Saul glared across the table at Ryce. The remembrance of finding Ryce curled around the beautiful man in their bed made him even angrier. "I was never thoughtless enough to bring them home and set them up in our bed, Ryce. Guess you can't say the same," he said harshly.

"What did you do, Saul?"

Saul stared at Ryce in confusion. He seemed honestly upset, but why? Because he had chased Cary away? Or because Saul was calling him on the fact that he had brought someone home to their bed?

"I didn't do anything. You, however, brought someone home to our bed. Not once, in all of the years we have been together, have I ever brought anyone home to our bed. I would never dishonor you that way."

"Dis—dishonor me? You dishonor me every time you leave me to go fuck someone else!"

"Ryce—" Saul jumped when Ryce slammed his hands down on the table.

"Every single damn time you're fucking someone else, you spit on the bond that we have. You may not be bringing them home physically, but every single one of them is in our bed, between us. And you dare yell at me because I finally brought someone home? Fuck you, Saul."

"Sorry, babe, already been there tonight. I'm a little tired right now. How about tomorrow?" Saul knew he was being sarcastic as hell and probably digging himself a hole he wasn't going to be able to get out of, but he couldn't help it. Ryce was pissing him off.

“You—where’s Cary?” Ryce asked quietly, a bit too quietly for Saul’s peace of mind.

“I told you, he left. But I’m sure if you hurry, you can catch up with him. Just don’t expect to bring him back here, Ryce. I won’t live in the same house as your sex toy,” Saul said simply as he stood up and carried his coffee cup to the sink.

“What the hell did you do, Saul? What did you say to him? Cary wouldn’t leave on his own!” Ryce shouted as he rounded the table and stalked over to Saul.

Saul couldn’t remember ever seeing Ryce this angry. Was the blond that important to him? Did he want him that much? The pain that thought gave Saul almost brought him to his knees. Only by holding onto the countertop did he stay standing.

“I told him to leave, Ryce, as simple as that. In the future, if you want to have one of your playthings around, please don’t bring them home. I don’t do that to you and I’d appreciate the same courtesy.”

Saul was never more surprised in his life as when Ryce stepped forward and took a swing at him. He was so shocked, he didn’t even defend himself. The power behind Ryce’s punch to his face sent him spinning into the wall behind him.

He stared at Ryce in astonishment, raising his arms at the last minute when Ryce attacked again. “Ryce! What the hell are you doing?” Saul yelled as Ryce swung again.

“You stupid son of a bitch!”

Saul tried to defend himself without hurting Ryce, but he knew it was a losing battle. If something didn’t happen soon, he would have to do something to put a stop to this. He couldn’t just let Ryce beat up on him. Ryce was nearly as big and strong as he was. He could do some serious damage.

“Ryce! Stop, damn it!” he yelled as Ryce pushed him to the floor.

Saul was just cocking his arm back to hit Ryce back when Ryce was suddenly hauled off of him. He looked up from his position on the floor to see a raging Ryce being held between Thomas and Caleb.

“What the hell is going on in here?” Caleb yelled.

Saul stood up, glaring over at Ryce as he fingered the cut on his lip. “Ryce is upset because I made his boy toy leave. I guess he wasn’t done fucking him yet.”

Ryce growled, struggling between Thomas and Caleb. “He wasn’t my boy toy, you shithead. He was our mate. He’s a tri-omega just like Micah. He’s mated to you and me. And you sent him away.”

He shook off the arms holding him when everyone stared at him in shock. He took a step towards Saul, getting right up in his face as he glared at him. The disgusted look in his eyes made Saul feel about three feet high. “I don’t know why I’m surprised. You’ve taken everything else from me. Why not Cary?”

Saul was stunned as he watched Ryce walk out of the kitchen. A moment later the front door slammed shut, then he heard Ryce’s truck start up, tires squealing as he tore out of the driveway.

Cary was their mate? He was a tri-omega like Micah? Why hadn’t he known that when he talked to Cary? He hadn’t even felt the connection. He hadn’t felt anything but anger and hurt—and the alcohol.

Saul raised his pale face to look at Thomas and Caleb. They looked just as shocked as he did. He didn’t know what to say, what to think. No wonder Ryce had been so angry with him. He had every right to be.

He winced when he remembered the things he had said to Cary, the way he had treated him. He had been a monster, relishing in Cary’s cries of pain, his sobs of despair when he had told him to leave.

“Saul?” Caleb said, laying his hand gently on his shoulder. “You need to go after him. I don’t know what happened between you two, but Ryce is your mate. And if what he says is true, this other man is also your mate.”

“I can’t. You don’t know what I’ve done, what I’ve said.”

He was surprised when Thomas stepped forward to let Micah through. He hadn't known Micah was even in the room. "Saul, you need to be think about your new mate. If he is a tri-omega and Ryce has already claimed him, he will die if you don't claim him. He needs you. You need to put aside your anger and think of him right now."

"You don't understand, Micah. I found them in bed together. I said things to him, to both of them, horrible things. Ryce is never going to forgive me."

"He will," Caleb said. "It might take some time, but he will forgive you. He loves you. Why do you think he's stuck around all of these years knowing that you go off every Friday night to be intimate with someone else?"

"But, I haven't—I don't—I've never—" Saul stammered before covering his mouth with his hand and turning away. He couldn't tell them the truth. If anyone had a right to the truth, Ryce did, and he couldn't even tell him.

"What are you saying, Saul?" Caleb asked. "You leave every Friday night to go into town and fool around. We all know that, Ryce especially. But he loves you enough to look the other way. He—"

Saul swung around to glare at his alpha. "I have never once, since the day I met him and knew he was my mate, been unfaithful to Ryce. I wouldn't do that to him. He's my mate!" He was tired of everyone thinking he was such a jerk.

It was only when Caleb stared at him in confusion that he realized what he had let slip. He was horrified. What was he going to do if they found out his secret? Caleb would feel honor-bound to tell Ryce—and then Ryce would leave him.

"I need to go," he said quickly as he tried to push past them.

"Saul, stop. I want to know what the hell is going on and I want to know now," Caleb demanded, grabbing Saul's arm as he strode past.

Saul stopped, looking at Caleb through his lowered eyelashes. "I can't, Caleb. Please, just let it go."

“Saul, I want to know what’s going on. I’m the alpha of this pack and it’s my job to protect you. How can I protect you when you don’t tell me what’s going on?” Caleb asked quietly.

Saul shook his head. “I can’t, Caleb,” he whispered as he raised his eyes to look at the man he had known and respected for several years. “I just can’t.”

\* \* \* \*

Caleb watched Saul’s slumped shoulders as he walked out of the room, a plan beginning to form in his mind. Without taking his eyes off Saul, he tilted his head towards his mate. “Thomas? Didn’t you tell me that Leyland is able to tell if someone is lying or not?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Can you call him and see if Leyland and his mates want to come visit for a few days? There’s more going on here than just Saul being unfaithful to Ryce, a lot more. I aim to find out exactly what it is and I think that Leyland might be able to help me.”

“Sure, Caleb. I’ll go give them a call right now,” Thomas replied as he walked past Caleb and headed for the study to make his call.

Caleb smiled and reached down to pat the arms that came around him from behind.

“What are you planning, my love?” a soft voice whispered against his back.

Caleb pulled Micah around to stand in front of him, wrapping his arms around him. “I don’t know at this point, just an inkling of an idea,” Caleb replied as he looked down into the beloved face of his mate. “What can you tell me?”

Micah shrugged. “Saul’s hurting. He’s been hurting so long he’s grown used to it. He’s definitely hiding something, though, and I don’t think it’s some fling. In fact, I think he was telling the truth when he said he has never been unfaithful to Ryce. There’s no feeling

of the guilt that I think would be associated with him being unfaithful.”

“It might be that he just doesn’t feel guilty about it, Micah.”

Micah shook his head. “I don’t think so. He loves Ryce too much for that. His love for Ryce is a major driving force in his life. It nearly consumes every other emotion he has. No, this is something else. I do believe it has something to do with Ryce, though.”

“What could he possibly have to do with Saul going into town once a week to play around, even if he’s just telling Ryce that’s what he’s doing? If Saul loves Ryce as much as you say he does, why hurt him like that?”

“He’s filled with so much anguish, but it’s like he gladly accepts it because of Ryce.” Micah shook his head again. “I can’t exactly explain it. There’s so much emotion coming from him, but I don’t think he believes he has a choice about what’s going on, Caleb.”

“You think someone’s making him do this?” Caleb asked in astonishment. If someone was forcing Saul to do something against his will, why wouldn’t he say something? Caleb would have gladly helped him.

“I don’t know. I can only read his emotions, not his mind. He feels regret for what he’s doing, for what it’s doing to Ryce, but he doesn’t think he has a choice. His love for Ryce overrides everything else. And, I think he’s ashamed of his actions.”

“Ashamed? If someone is making him do something he doesn’t want, he has nothing to be ashamed of, Micah. Surely he knows that.”

“Maybe, but it depends on what he’s doing. You have to remember, whatever it is that Saul is doing, for whatever reason he’s doing it, it’s bad enough that he lets Ryce believe he is being unfaithful to him once a week. I’d think it would have to be something pretty heavy for that to happen.”

He looked down in surprise when Micah tightened his arms around him, shocked to see tears in his eyes. “What is it, baby? What’s wrong?” he quickly asked in concern.



“I don’t know what Saul is going through, Caleb, but I can imagine. I can’t think of anything that I wouldn’t do to keep you and Thomas safe. Remember that when you start digging into Saul’s life.”

Caleb smiled, bending down to place a small kiss on Micah’s lips. “I will, baby, promise.”

“He may have his reasons for what he is doing.”

Caleb nodded, feeling a chill run down his back. He didn’t know what Saul’s reasons were, but he couldn’t think of anything he wouldn’t do for his mates.

## Chapter 3

Cary wiped the tears from his eyes as he drove down the road. He wasn't sure where he was going. He really had no place to go. His pack didn't want him, so he had no pack. Seems his mate didn't want him either, so he had no home. He had no place.

He had been so overjoyed when he had found Ryce last night. Being accepted by him had been a dream come true. Ryce was tall and strong, surely able to keep him safe. He had been so hopeful when Ryce had described Saul to him.

But it had all been a dream. He knew that now. It had all been a beautiful dream. Cary laughed bitterly to himself. He was waking up from his dream just in time to die. Wasn't that just peachy?

He knew he shouldn't have let Ryce claim him without Saul being there. Well, maybe that wouldn't have been a good idea, either. Saul obviously hated him, didn't want anything to do with him. He certainly didn't want him anywhere around Ryce.

Cary was also pretty sure Saul thought he was a whore. The disgust had been evident in his voice when he had spoken to him. Saul thought he had just been there to scratch an itch for Ryce, as if there couldn't be any other reason.

He had been stunned when Ryce explained about Saul going off every Friday night to play around. He never heard of such a thing. Once you were mated, you were mated. You didn't go off and have sex with anyone else. It just wasn't done.

Ryce had explained, though, that Saul was different. He, apparently, had to be intimate with other people. Ryce didn't like it,

but he had learned to accept it. Cary would have to learn to accept it also.

Oh, Ryce had been quick to assure Cary that he would never be unfaithful. He expected the same from Cary. But they would both have to look the other way while their mate flitted from one fling to another. It was just the way Saul was.

Cary wasn't so sure anymore, not after his confrontation with Saul. He didn't seem to want to share Ryce at all. How could he willingly leave his mate once a week to go have sex with a stranger, then be so upset when Ryce did the same thing? Was it because Cary wouldn't just be a one-time thing?

He didn't know what to think, not that it mattered. Saul had made it more than clear that he would never accept Cary as his mate. He wouldn't even let Ryce be his mate, which left Cary tied to just one mate instead of two, with no mate. A perfect spot for a tri-omega to be in.

Cary wondered how long he had before the weakness begun to set in. Weeks? Days? Maybe hours? How long would it be before he couldn't function anymore? How long before he couldn't take care of himself?

He knew from the pack elders that if a tri-omega wasn't claimed by both of his mates in a certain amount of time, he would die. That was why he had been so hesitant for Ryce to claim him. It was laughable now that he had believed Ryce about Saul. Saul was never going to claim him, which meant it was only a matter of time before he died.

Even if he had stayed with Ryce, it would still be just a matter of time. Both of his mates had to claim him, not just one. Cary slammed his fist against the steering wheel. Damn, he was so stupid!

He let Ryce claim him without his other mate being there because he just wanted someone to love him, to want him. He knew it was stupid when he did it, but he wanted to believe it so much. Look at the fix that had gotten him into.

Cary didn't see the headlights coming up fast behind him until they started to pass. *Idiot!* he thought as he slowed to let the other vehicle pass. Then he yelled and slammed on his brakes when the truck came to a sudden stop in front of him.

He stared in shock, his mouth hanging open and his hands gripping the steering wheel as he watched Ryce climb out of the truck. He stormed over to Cary's door, yanked it open and leaned over to glare at him.

"Ryce?" Cary asked in disbelief.

"Get out of the car, Cary," he growled.

Cary's eyes widened as he quickly reached for the lock on his seatbelt, clicking it open then climbing from the car. He pressed his body back against the side of the car as Ryce continued to glare at him, hands fisted on his hips.

Finally, Ryce spun away, running a shaking hand through his hair. His head dropped down on his chest and he took several deep, calming breaths. Ryce was obviously very upset, but Cary didn't know what to say to him.

"Ryce?" he whispered again.

"You left me, Cary. You came to me, you let me claim you, then you left me," Ryce ground out quietly. He swung back around to look at Cary, the anguish in his eyes making the green in them stand out. "Why would you do that to me? First Saul leaves me to be with other men, then you leave me? Is it me? Am I that unlovable?"

"Oh God, Ryce, no," Cary cried out as he rushed forward to wrap his arms around Ryce. "No, it wasn't you, I swear."

Ryce put his strong arms around him, his face burrowing into the crook of his neck. "You can't leave me, Cary. Saul doesn't want me. You're all I have left. I can't—I don't want to lose another mate, Cary."

"Ryce, I didn't—I don't want to lose you, either," Cary said as he raised his head to look at Ryce. "Saul told me I had to leave. I didn't want to. I tried to explain who I was, but he wouldn't hear it. He just

kept yelling at me to leave. He said he wasn't going to share you. What else was I supposed to do?"

"Come to me, talk to me," Ryce replied vehemently. He lifted his head and looked around a bit, as if gathering his thoughts, before glancing back down at Cary. "Saul doesn't own me. He certainly doesn't want me. If he did, he wouldn't leave me to go fuck someone else, so I don't care what he told you. I'm telling you that I want you to stay."

Cary let his forehead rest against Ryce's chest as he let his mate's words flow over him. Maybe Ryce really did want him. That still didn't end his tri-omega dilemma. "Ryce, you've already claimed me and Saul has made it more than clear that he won't. You know what that means as much as I do." Cary looked up at Ryce. "Do you really want to watch me die? Because that's exactly what's going to happen."

Ryce tightened his arms around him, pulling him closer to his stronger body. "I don't *want* to watch you die. I want to find a solution that will keep you living. Mates die, Cary, even those that are mated to tri-omegas. There has to be a solution."

"And if there isn't?" Cary asked carefully as he rested his body against Ryce's, wondering if it was possible to find a solution. He was right, mates did die. Accidents happened, people got sick, there were even deaths due to challenges. What happened to tri-omegas when one of their mates died?

"Then I want every moment with you that I can get, every last second," Ryce whispered against Cary's hair, his voice sounding hoarse and agonized. "You belong to me, Cary, and I won't let you go without a fight."

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Cary held tight to Ryce's hand as they walked back into the house. He was nervous about being back, afraid that Saul would tell him to

leave again. To say he was hesitant would be an understatement. The only reason he was even considering being here was because of Ryce.

Ryce seemed to need him almost as much as he needed Ryce. Saul was a different story altogether. Cary still didn't understand the situation with him, but he was determined to avoid the man at all costs. He didn't care if Saul was supposed to be his other mate. He didn't want anything to do with him.

He knew he could be wrong, but Saul seemed very selfish and uncaring. He didn't seem to care for anyone or anything but his own wants and needs. He certainly didn't care what his mates were going through.

Cary wondered how a man as special as Ryce could have been mated to someone like Saul, let alone put up with his crap for nearly five years. Ryce seemed to believe that Saul had some redeeming qualities. Cary just wondered what they were. So far, he hadn't seen anything that made him believe Saul was worth the feelings Ryce had for him.

He was even willing to admit to himself that he was jealous of Ryce's feelings for Saul. He wanted someone, preferably Ryce, to feel like that about him, to want him so much that he would do anything to have him.

It wasn't that he planned on being unfaithful to Ryce like Saul was, he just wanted to be loved that much. He couldn't imagine being with anyone but his mate now that he had found him.

Cary still wasn't sure how he felt about Saul being his mate. Saul was handsome, nearly as sexy as Ryce, but despite what Ryce had told him, Cary didn't think those looks went beyond the outer core. Inside, Saul seemed cruel and ugly.

"Caleb."

Cary looked up quickly when Ryce spoke, seeing a very tall, dark red-haired man walking into the living room. Behind him stood a man with curly black hair. He had his arm around a much shorter man with

the lightest blond hair Cary had ever seen. He assumed the smaller man was Micah, the other tri-omega.

“Thomas, Micah, I want you to meet Cary Jones, my mate,” Ryce said as he pulled Cary forward to stand next to him.

Cary tried to smile, wondering if they would demand that he leave like Saul had. He was bewildered when Caleb walked right up and gave him a hug, followed closely by Micah, then Thomas. He looked to Ryce for assurance, receiving a small squeeze of his hand.

“Cary,” Caleb said in a deep voice. “I’d like to welcome you to Hunter Pack. These are my mates, Micah and Thomas.”

Cary gave a hesitant wave, taken aback by their warm welcome. No matter how much Ryce had said he would be accepted by his pack, after his experience with Saul he hadn’t been expecting it. “Hello.”

“Cary Jones? That wouldn’t be Carrington Jones, would it?” Thomas asked.

Cary nodded, confused by the question, and a bit apprehensive. “Yeah, how’d you know?”

Thomas smiled. “Your brother, Lucas, is the beta of my former pack. He talked a lot about you when I was there.”

“Lucas? You’ve seen Lucas? How is he? Is he okay? Has he found a mate? What’s he been doing?” Cary asked quickly, stepping towards Thomas in his excitement. He hadn’t even realized he had until Ryce grabbed him by the arm.

Cary could feel his face heat as he leaned against Ryce’s side. “Sorry. I haven’t heard from Lucas since he left the pack.”

Thomas nodded. “He’s good. Yes, he is mated. One of his mates, Leyland, is a tri-omega, just like you. His other mate is my former alpha, Jake.”

“Is he happy?” Cary asked quietly, reeling from the fact that Thomas knew his big brother.

“Yeah,” Thomas said as he smiled. “He’s real happy.”

Cary nodded, turning his face into Ryce's chest as tears clogged his throat. He hadn't seen Lucas in years, not since the pack had kicked Lucas out for the same reason he had been kicked out, because they preferred men.

He missed him so much. Lucas had been his big brother, his mentor. He always had time for Cary, even when Cary was being a bother, which he usually was. But Lucas hadn't seemed to mind. He was always doing things with him or just talking to him. When Lucas left, Cary had been devastated.

To find out that he was okay and happy, Cary couldn't think of any better news he could have received.

"Would you like to talk to him?"

Cary looked quickly at Thomas. "Could I? I mean, if it's not too much trouble?"

"No trouble at all," Thomas said as he reached for his cell phone.

Cary held his breath as he watched Thomas dial then put the phone up to his ear. It was almost unbelievable that Lucas could be on the other end of that small plastic device. Cary was so excited, so scared, he was shaking.

"Calm down, baby. It's going to be okay," Ryce whispered into his ear, the amusement clear in his voice.

"Hey, Lucas, it's Thomas. I was wondering if you and your mates might like to come up and visit for a few days. You remember me telling you that Ryce had met his mate when I called earlier tonight, and that he's a tri-omega just like Leyland? I thought you might like to meet him."

Cary couldn't hear Lucas's response but he still held his breath. Would Lucas even want to talk to him after all this time? Would he even remember him?

"Here, why don't you talk to him," Thomas said, and held out the phone to Cary.

Cary's hand trembled as he reached for the phone, holding it to his ear. "Lucas?"



“Cary?”

“Yeah, it’s me, Luc,” Cary replied, looking over at Ryce as tears of joy filled his eyes. “I wasn’t sure you’d remember me.”

“Geez, how in the hell could I forget you? You followed me around like a lost puppy when you were smaller. What in the hell are you doing with the Hunter Pack? Why aren’t you at home with the family?”

“Why do you think? Seems blue eyes aren’t the only thing we have in common anymore, Lucas.”

“Ah, hell, Cary. I’m sorry, man. I never would have wished that on you,” Lucas replied quietly. “Did they hurt you?”

“No, no one hurt me, at least not physically. It wasn’t a real thrill when they made me leave, though. It was only a couple of weeks ago, so it hasn’t been bad. I was just kind of passing through town here when I found Ryce.”

“Oh, yeah, Thomas said something about you being a tri-omega and Ryce being your mate. How’s that going for you? Have you found your other mate yet?”

Cary’s eyes shot up to meet Ryce’s, not sure how to reply. “Um, sort of.”

“Sort of? Cary, either you have or you haven’t. Which is it?” Lucas asked in his exasperated big brother voice.

“I did, but he won’t claim me,” Cary replied quietly.

“What do you mean he won’t claim you?” Lucas yelled into the phone. “He has to. If he doesn’t, you could—”

“I know.”

“Shit!”

“Yeah, that about covers it.” Cary laughed bitterly, remembering the anger in Saul’s voice as he demanded that Cary leave and never come back. “I guess that’s the downside of not being able to pick your own mate, huh?”

“Cary, this isn’t a joke, damn it. If your other mate doesn’t claim you—”

"I know the position I'm in, Lucas, but I can't force Saul to accept me. He's made it more than clear that he will never claim me and—"

"I'll claim you."

Cary nearly dropped the phone when he heard a deep voice from the doorway. He turned to see Saul standing there with his hands in his pockets. His shoulders were slightly slumped and he stared at the floor as if he couldn't bring himself to look up, to look at Cary.

"Lucas, I have to go. I'll call you back later," Cary said. As he hung up, he could hear Lucas yelling at him, but it was a distant, almost muted sound. His total concentration was on the man standing in the doorway.

"Saul," Ryce said sharply as he held his hand out to Cary.

Cary immediately crossed the few steps needed to take Ryce's hand, pressing close to him when Saul raised his head to look over at them. As their eyes met, he felt a shock run through him at the grief shining in Saul's eyes. From everything he had learned about Saul, the anguish in his eyes didn't match.

"I didn't know—I didn't understand who you were when I told you to leave, Cary. If I had, I never would have said what I did. I know you can't—I don't expect you to forgive me, but I will do what is needed to ensure your safety."

Cary's eyes widened as Saul took a step towards him. Remembering the last time that Saul had touched him, he shrank back against Ryce in fear. While no permanent damage had been done, it had still hurt to be thrown up against the side of the house.

Saul stilled instantly, his hand coming out in a placating gesture. "Please, I won't hurt you," he whispered.

Cary stared at Saul for a moment before nodding his head. They continued to stare at each other as Saul approached. Saul stopped right in front of Cary, slowly raising his eyes to meet Ryce's

"Would you hold him, please? I don't want him to be afraid of me, Ryce."

Cary felt Ryce's hands settle over his shoulders, squeezing gently to let him know that Ryce was there, that he would keep him safe. Cary took a deep breath then closed his eyes as he tilted his head to one side.

It was strange to think that he was about to be claimed by his second mate. It was almost clinical. Cary had always associated the bite of claiming in sexual terms, not in this cold, detached way. It sent cold shivers down his back as he felt Saul's breath on his neck just a moment before his long canines sank in.

Cary cried out, tensing as Saul claimed him. No matter how cold and calculating it was, the feel of his mate's bite still aroused him. His face heated as he prayed no one else would smell his arousal. That would be so embarrassing.

He was so shocked when he felt his cock begin to harden, he couldn't help pressing his hand against Saul's chest, feeling his muscles tighten, then relax. Saul pulled his teeth free and swiped his tongue over the small bite, sending a small shiver through Cary.

As he raised his head, Saul's eyes momentarily met Cary's, their gazes holding in a dazed confusion. Then Saul stood to his full height, meeting Ryce's eyes before nodding and turning away.

Cary's eyebrows drew together in a frown as Saul started to leave the room, pausing briefly in the doorway. His head tilted to one side, not quite looking back, as he addressed Cary. "Whenever you feel the need for me to claim you again, Cary, just let me know."

Saul walked out of the room and up the stairs, going down the hallway to a room different from the one Ryce had taken Cary to the night before. He looked up at Ryce in confusion, frowning when he saw that Ryce wasn't much better off than he was.

"Where's he going? That isn't your bedroom."

Ryce shook his head. "I don't know. That's the guestroom."

"He moved all of his stuff in there right after you left, Ryce," Caleb said from behind them, surprising Cary. He had forgotten they weren't alone in the room.

Cary glanced at Caleb in surprise. "Why would he do that?"

Caleb shrugged, looking at Ryce. "He obviously thinks that neither of you will ever forgive him for what he's done. Maybe he believes this is the best thing for all of you."

Ryce looked back up to the second-floor balcony, a small frown on his handsome face. "I sure wish he would include me when making decisions about our life together."

"Does that mean you forgive him, brother?" Caleb asked, one eyebrow raised in query.

Ryce just shook his head. "I don't know. I want to, but I just don't know if I can."

"You might want to give it some thought, Ryce," Micah said.

"I don't know if it's that easy, Micah. Saul's done some things, things I'm not sure can be forgiven. First his little trips into town, now this? I've been forgiving him once a week for nearly five years. I'm not sure how much forgiveness I have left."

"Don't condemn him just yet, Ryce. I think there's more going on with Saul's weekly trips than meets the eye," Caleb said.

Ryce looked over the top of Cary's head as he glared at his brother. "What? He's fucking two people instead of one?"

Cary watched the scowl that crossed Caleb's face at Ryce's words. He would bet that Caleb wasn't used to people talking to him that way.

"Actually, Ryce, we don't think he's off fucking anyone at all. We believe something else is going on altogether," Caleb replied.

"Are you serious? Saul tells me he's going into town to find some young plaything and you think he's lying? Why? What possible reason would he have to lie to me like that? It's not as if he's stealing a cookie from the cookie jar. He's telling me that he's going to be unfaithful to me, to go fuck someone else. What could be worse than that?" Ryce said vehemently.

“I don’t know, Ryce, but maybe you could talk to him about it. Thomas has already called Leyland and asked him to come down. Hopefully, we can get to the bottom of this.”

Ryce nodded. Cary didn’t think he knew what else to say. Ryce had been convinced for years that his mate was being unfaithful and now he was being told it could all be a lie. Cary wasn’t sure he would have anything to say either.

He turned in Ryce’s arms, looking up into his face. “Why don’t you go up and talk to Saul? Maybe if you confront him, tell him how much he really means to you, he’ll tell you what’s really going on.”

“He does love you, Ryce,” Micah added. “I can feel it every time he looks at you.”

“Then why does he leave me?” Ryce asked quietly as he raised his eyes to look at Micah. “Why does he put me through this hell?”

Micah shrugged. “Only Saul can answer that question, Ryce.”

“Go on, Ryce,” Cary encouraged. “Go upstairs and talk to Saul. Don’t you want to know if he’s lying to you? Or why he might be lying to you? I would. If we can all be together, it’s going to be much better than what we have now.”

Ryce smiled, stroking his fingers down the side of Cary’s soft face. “You’re really something, aren’t you? After everything that’s happened, you still have hope.”

“Of course I do. A relationship isn’t something that you can just let happen. You have to work at it and it takes constant maintenance. If you want it to be really spectacular, and I do, then you have to nurture it and let it grow. You can’t just sit there and hope that it will be great.”

“Then I guess I’d better go work on it, huh?” Ryce chuckled, leaning down to place a small kiss on Cary’s mouth before turning to look at his brother and his mates. “Could you show him around? I’m not sure how long this will take, but I imagine I’ll be a while. Cary also has his stuff outside in his car. Maybe you could help him move it into the bedroom?”

Caleb nodded, a smile crossing his lips. “No problem, brother. You just go work things out with Saul. Micah, Thomas and I will keep your little mate entertained. We might even feed him.” Caleb chuckled.

Ryce nodded, patting Cary on his shoulder before heading upstairs. He didn’t have a clue what he was going to say to Saul. Despite what everyone was telling him, he wasn’t even sure there was anything to say.

If Saul wasn’t going into town every Friday evening to fool around, what was he doing? And what possible reason could he have for lying about something like this? He had to know how it was tearing Ryce up inside. It was getting to be almost more than Ryce could take.

Before Cary had come into his life, Saul had been Ryce’s life. Every moment they spent together was precious. When Saul wasn’t in town, he was attentive, caring and loving. He was everything Ryce could want in a mate.

As Saul continued to go into town every week, the bond Ryce felt for Saul was getting thinner. There were even times when he didn’t think he could be in the same room with him. He was filled with too much anger and resentment.

Other times, he couldn’t stand being away from Saul, afraid that if he let his mate out of his sight, he would be gone for good. As much as he was angry with Saul, he was still afraid of losing him.

.As Ryce stopped in front of the guestroom door, he tried to think of what he could provide for Saul that would keep him home, but nothing came to mind.

He had never denied Saul anything, especially when it came to their love life. He felt that nothing should be off limits between them. Hell, his brother put up with Thomas’s painted pink toenails. Ryce could put up with some kink in their sex life if that’s what Saul needed. He might even enjoy it.

Still, Ryce wondered if that was it. Did he not understand Saul's needs? Or was it something else? Maybe Saul just didn't love him. Just because they were mated didn't mean that their feelings had to be involved. He couldn't force Saul to love him no matter how much he wanted it, no matter how much he needed it.

Ryce clenched his hands into tight fists as he pondered that, wondering if he could take it when Saul told him that he could never love him. As he raised his hand to knock on the door, he wondered how long it would be before Cary told him the same thing.

## **Chapter 4**

Saul looked away from the window when he heard a knock at the door. Maybe if he just ignored it, the person would go away.

He really didn't want to talk to anyone. He just wanted to bury his head under a pillow and pretend that the last few hours had never happened. But however much he wanted them to go away, he didn't think he would ever forget the look on Ryce's face when he confronted him.

Ryce had been so angry, and rightfully so. Saul had sent their mate away. He hadn't even given Cary time to explain himself, just yelled at him to leave. Saul imagined that both Ryce and Cary were pretty angry with him.

Then, to have Ryce accuse him of taking everything away from him... Saul knew Ryce was referring to more than just his demand that Cary leave. He was talking about his weekly trips into town.

In the beginning, it had just seemed easier to let Ryce think he was being free and loose with his affections. He knew it hurt Ryce every time he left, but at least it kept him safe and alive.

If Ryce found out the truth, Saul had no doubt whatsoever that Ryce would try to fight for him, and he would lose. No, it was better to let Ryce go on believing that he was going into town every week to fool around than for him to know the truth.

Saul just didn't know if he could continue to see the pain and sorrow in Ryce's face every time he left. As much as he knew it was hurting Ryce, it was nearly destroying him. Cary being here just brought that fact home with a vengeance.



When he had found them curled in bed together, Ryce looked so peaceful, so happy. More so than he had looked in ages. Saul knew it was his doing, but he still couldn't help feeling resentful.

He wanted Ryce to feel that way with him. In the beginning he had, but over time that happy look had slowly gone away. He hardly ever saw Ryce smile anymore, let alone laugh. He would be surprised if Ryce even spoke to him again after all of this.

"Saul, damn it, I know you're in there. Open this door." Guess that answered that question.

Saul quickly wiped away the tears forming in his eyes and stood up to cross the room and unlock the door. If Ryce needed to come in and yell at him, did he really have a choice to tell him no?

He went back to stand over by the window, his gaze going to the fields and trees beyond. He didn't know if he had it in him to look at Ryce while he yelled at him and told him what a horrible mate he was. He already knew that.

He watched out of the corner of his eye as Ryce opened the door and walked in. He frowned, looking back out the window. Ryce looked tired, and just a bit apprehensive. Saul wondered what he had to be apprehensive about. He wasn't the one about to be handed his head.

"We need to talk, Saul," Ryce said as he settled himself down on the side of the bed.

"There's nothing to talk about. I've claimed Cary, so nothing will happen to him. I'll do it again when he needs me to and I won't ask for anything in return," Saul replied quietly.

"This isn't about Cary. It's about you and me. We need to talk about us, Saul," Ryce said just as quietly, and he folded his hands together in his lap.

Saul winced. Yeah, he had been expecting this conversation. He knew Ryce wouldn't put up with his behavior forever. But for some reason, he had thought he would have more time before he had to give Ryce up.

Of course, now that Ryce had Cary, he didn't need to put up with Saul anymore. He had someone else to love him, someone else to give his love to. Saul wasn't needed anymore, except for every few days when Cary needed to be claimed again.

Saul briefly considered holding that over Ryce's head. That thought lasted all of about two seconds before he dismissed it. No matter how much it was going to hurt to hear Ryce say goodbye to him, he could never do that to him.

If Cary made Ryce happy, so be it. Saul would do everything in his power to make sure that he kept him. "There's really nothing to say, is there?" Saul asked quietly, never lifting his gaze from the view out the window.

"Damn it, Saul, that's not true and you know it," Ryce said as he jumped to his feet to pace around the room. "Don't you care about what this is doing to us? To our relationship? You leave me every Friday night to go off and fuck somebody else and you don't think we have anything to discuss?"

Saul never wanted anything more than he wanted to tell Ryce the truth right at that moment. He could hear the anguish in his voice, a voice that had become beloved to him the moment he heard it five years ago. But telling Ryce the truth was not an option.

"It's not my problem if you can't deal with it. I made it more than clear to you in the very beginning that I would be going out once a week. You agreed to it. Just because you want to change things doesn't mean that I do." The words were so hard for Saul to get out of his mouth that he almost threw up.

"You can't mean that," Ryce whispered as he stopped in front of Saul.

Saul schooled his features, replacing his anguish with the stone-cold mask of indifference he had become so used to. "Can't I?" he asked as he looked at Ryce.

"Saul—"

“Why are you suddenly trying to change things, Ryce? Is it because of your new boy toy? Oh, sure, I understand that he’s supposed to be our mate, but that should make you happy. Suddenly, you want to change things between us? I don’t think so.”

Saul could see from the look of confusion on Ryce’s face that he didn’t understand why Saul was acting this way. He wasn’t totally sure himself. It was like he had this need to hurt Ryce before Ryce hurt him.

He knew he needed to get Ryce out of the room before he said something he could never take back, not that he wasn’t already in that position, but he still held out hope. If things kept going as they were, though, that hope was going to commit suicide.

“Why don’t you just go play with your little toy, Ryce? I’m tired. I had a long night,” Saul said as he turned towards the bed and began unbuttoning his jeans, pushing them down his legs. He wasn’t even sure where his shirt was. He had lost that a long time ago.

“You wouldn’t be so tired if you would just—”

“Are we really going to play what-if games, Ryce?”

“Fuck you, Saul!”

Now, that was an offer he couldn’t refuse. Saul swung around, grabbed Ryce by the arms and pushed him down onto the bed, following him down and settling his body over his. Before Ryce could even catch his breath, Saul was attacking his mouth with his lips, his hands going to the buttons on his jeans.

He had Ryce’s jeans off his legs and his shirt over his head before Ryce could protest. His hand encircled the hard cock he knew would be waiting for him. One thing he could always depend on when Ryce was around, he was hard the minute Saul walked into the room.

He began stroking Ryce just the way he knew he liked, starting at the tip and squeezing his hand as he moved down to the root as his thumb moved over the small slit in the top. One thing about being someone’s lover for so many years, he knew how to get Ryce going in a matter of moments. Lifting his head to look into Ryce’s dazed eyes,

he brought his hand to his mouth and slowly licked off the droplets of pre-cum he had gathered from the head of Ryce's cock. As he did, he could see Ryce's eyes glaze over even more, as the cock pressed against him thumped in enthusiasm.

"You like that, baby? You wish it was your cock I was licking off instead of my thumb? Hmmm? You want to see that gorgeous cock of yours in my mouth?" Saul drawled deeply.

He could see Ryce swallow hard, then hesitantly nod his head. "All you had to do was say so, baby. You know I'd never deny you," Saul said as he scooted down Ryce's body until his jutting cock was right before him.

He glanced up at Ryce briefly. "You sure this is what you want, Ryce?" He had to be sure. No matter what, he would never force himself on Ryce.

The moment Ryce nodded his head, Saul engulfed his cock with his mouth, his lips wrapping around him as his tongue pressed against the small slit on top, then around the sides and just under the mushroomed head.

Saul used every weapon at his disposal, his hands, his lips, his tongue. If this was going to be the last time he got to have Ryce, he was going to make it one to remember. He was determined to have Ryce so aroused, he would beg to be fucked.

His lips covered the head of Ryce's cock, and he used his fingers to trail down and push against his hole. As he did, he tried to remember whether or not he had brought any lube into the room when he had moved his stuff in earlier. There had to be something somewhere that he could use as lube.

Saul lifted his head and looked around the room. His eyes strayed to a box next to the bed, a small bottle of massage oil. He hooked his foot around it and pulled it closer. Grabbing the bottle, he popped it open and poured some out on his fingers.

Dropping the bottle on the bed, he placed his fingers at Ryce's puckered hole, his mouth going back to his throbbing cock. As he

started sucking him again, he used his fingers to stretch Ryce, lubing him as best he could.

“Saul,” Ryce cried out as his hands clenched in Saul’s hair, “I’m so close, Saul.”

That was his cue. He slid up, kneeling between Ryce’s legs as he reached for the bottle of massage oil. He poured some on his cock and tossed the bottle aside as he lathered himself up.

He raised his eyes to see Ryce intently watching the movements of his hand as he stroked himself. “You like that, baby? You like knowing my cock’s going to be in your tight ass in a moment?”

Ryce nodded again, his eyes glued to Saul’s movements as he started stroking his own cock. The quickening of Ryce’s movements and the whimpers coming from his mouth told Saul he had only moments to claim Ryce before he exploded.

Reaching down with his hands he pushed Ryce’s legs up to his chest. “Grab your legs, Ryce,” he demanded, letting go of them and sitting back on his haunches the moment he did. Grabbing his cock, he lined it up with Ryce’s slick hole, raising his eyes to his once more.

“Are you ready for me, baby?”

At Ryce’s quick moan and the slight nod of his head, Saul pushed into him, eyes closing at the ecstasy he felt to have Ryce’s body wrapped around him once more. He wasn’t sure there was anything more pleasurable on the entire planet.

The moment he hit bottom, his balls brushing against Ryce’s body, he opened his eyes and looked down at him. He pushed his legs to the side and gently settled his body over Ryce’s until his chest was pressed tightly against his.

He placed his arms on either side of Ryce’s head and framed his face with his hands as he began to slowly move in and out of him. “Open your eyes, Ryce, and look at me,” he whispered.

Ryce quickly shook his head from side to side, causing Saul to chuckle lightly. “Come on, baby, open your eyes or I’ll stop.”

After a brief hesitation, Ryce opened his eyes and looked up at him. Saul carefully brushed his dark auburn curls back from his face as he drank in his beautiful features. Ryce was so handsome. With the exception of Cary, Saul wasn't sure he had ever seen a more beautiful man in his entire life.

"This is our last time, isn't it?" Ryce whispered, his pale, moss-green eyes filling with tears.

Saul smiled down at him, trying to keep his own tears at bay as he gently wiped Ryce's tears away with his thumb. "I think it's for the best, Ryce, don't you?"

"I don't want to lose you, Saul."

"You'll never lose me, baby. I'll always be here for you, but I think it's time for you to move on, especially now that you have Cary. If you stay with me, you're just going to grow bitter and begin to hate me."

Ryce shook his head. "I could never hate you."

Saul's eyes devoured Ryce as he smiled again. "Yes, you will. I can't stop going into town and you need something I can't give you." He stroked his hand gently down the side of Ryce's face.

"Saul—"

"It's better this way, Ryce. You have Cary to love. He won't leave you, not like I do. He can give you what I can't," Saul said quietly. Every word he spoke was like a knife in his heart, but he had to say them. Ryce needed to move on.

"What about you?"

This time, Saul couldn't keep his tears from falling. He gave Ryce a soft kiss on the lips before lifting his head to gaze down at him again. "I just want you to be happy, Ryce."

"But, Saul—"

Saul quickly covered Ryce's lips with his finger. "Ssshhh, don't say anything. Just let me love you this last time, Ryce, please."

Saul held his breath as Ryce stared up at him as if he was pondering his words, then slowly let it out as Ryce nodded. Saul

leaned down again to kiss Ryce, feeling his arms wrap around his neck, his legs around his hips.

He groaned as Ryce met his kiss with the force of his own. He put everything into the kiss, all of his regret and sorrow at what he had done to Ryce and all of his love that he still felt for him.

Just this once, this one last time, he wanted to feel, to know that Ryce loved him. As he quickened his pace, increasing the force of his thrusts, he could feel Ryce's hard cock pressed between their two bodies, his pre-cum leaking onto him.

He knew he was just as close as Ryce was, maybe moments away. Lifting his head, he looked down into Ryce's eyes again. "You are so beautiful, baby," he whispered softly. "I want you to come for me, Ryce. Show me how much you want me."

As if his cock was wired directly to the demand in Saul's husky voice, Ryce arched his head back and cried out, filling the space between them with his wet release. Saul groaned as Ryce's inner muscled tightened around his cock, gripping him.

As the pleasure he felt detonated and the head of his cock exploded, Saul roared, leaning forward to sink his teeth into the soft skin between Ryce's neck and shoulder, drinking his life essence.

He thrust into Ryce again, then one more time before lifting his head and licking the bite mark he had left. He leaned his head against Ryce's shoulder for a moment, wishing he never had to give this up, but knowing that what he said to Ryce was true. This was the best thing for all of them.

## Chapter 5

“Saul, it doesn’t have to be like this,” Ryce whispered against Saul’s hair, his arms tightening around him.

Saul let out a deep breath. *Guess dream-time is over*, Saul thought as he lifted his head to look down at Ryce, shaking his head. “Yes, Ryce, it does,” he said as he carefully pushed himself away and rolled onto his back. He flung his arm over his eyes to hide the tears.

“Maybe—maybe we can just go on as we have been.”

Saul laughed, the sound bitter to even his ears. “No, we can’t. You’re already starting to be angry with me, Ryce. What do you think it will be like once you get used to having Cary around?”

“What does Cary have to do with this?”

Saul felt him roll onto his side, his body pressing against his. He lifted his arm away from his face to look over at Ryce, a small frown forming. “What do you think it’s going to be like once you get used to having Cary around, Ryce? He’s not going to leave you once a week like I do. How soon do you think it’s going to be until you resent me even more than you already do?”

“Saul—”

“I can’t stop going into town, Ryce, not ever. Once you see what you can have with Cary, you’re going to hate me and frankly, I don’t want to be around for that. It’s better if we just end things before they get worse.”

“Does that mean you’re going to leave me?” Ryce asked quietly as he drew circles on Saul’s chest.

Saul shook his head, his hand moving down to settle over Ryce’s. “No, I won’t leave. I made a commitment to you, and to Cary. You



need me here to keep Cary safe. If keeping Cary safe is the price I have to pay to make you happy, that's what I'll do."

"I'd be happy if you would stop—" Ryce began angrily, stopping suddenly as he sat up. "I just don't understand, Saul. Why do you have to go into town? Is there something that I'm not doing for you, something that I'm not providing? Is it me? Am I doing something wrong?"

Saul sat up quickly, reaching out to hug Ryce to him. "No, baby, it's not you, I swear, it's not you. This is—this is just something I have to do. I wish that I could explain it to you, but I can't."

"Can't you just stop?"

Saul shook his head sadly. "It's just not that easy, Ryce."

"Why not? It's obvious you don't want to do it, so why are you? Is it the anonymity of being with a stranger? Is there some kink that you're looking for that you don't want to do with me? What is it?"

Saul stared at Ryce, his mouth dropping open in astonishment. Was he serious? Ryce really thought he was going off every weekend to get kinky with a complete stranger? That's what he got out of this whole situation?

"Ryce, I can honestly say that there is nothing that I can think of that I wouldn't want to do with you. This isn't about being kinky," he replied, trying hard not to laugh. This was a very serious situation, not a humorous one. He didn't think Ryce would understand if he started laughing.

"Then what is it about?"

Saul dropped his arms from around Ryce's shoulders, scooting back against the headboard and crossing his arms over his chest as he stared back at him. He knew he could end all of this right here but the consequences if he did would destroy him. It was better to just end things with Ryce instead, even if by doing so he destroyed any chance he would ever have of being with Ryce again.

"Look, Ryce, I'm not going to discuss this with you. Frankly, it's none of your business. It has nothing to do with you. And, as I've

already told you, I will continue to go into town every week and nothing you can say or do will change my mind.”

“None of my business? How in the hell can you say that?” Ryce shouted as he climbed off the bed to stand and glare at Saul. “This is totally my business. You’re my mate, damn it. This has everything to do with me.”

“I’m not going to discuss this with you, Ryce.”

“Well, that’s just not good enough, Saul!”

“I think it’s time for you to leave,” Saul replied, praying that Ryce would just leave so he wouldn’t have to be cruel than he already was. There was no way he was going to get into a discussion with Ryce about his trips into town.

“No, I’m not ready to leave, damn it. I want to talk about this.”

“Ryce, I spent the night in town then came home to fuck you. I’m tired and I want to go to sleep. Please go,” Saul said, wincing as he watched the blood drain out of Ryce’s face with each word he spoke. *Yep, that should do it*, he thought.

Ryce just stared at him for a moment before grabbing his clothes off the floor. . He didn’t say a word as he yanked on his jeans, not even bothering to button them up before he stormed to the door.

“I hope you enjoy sleeping by yourself every night, Saul. You’ve certainly earned it,” Ryce spit out as he yanked the door open.

“Who says I’m going to be alone?”

*Just one more nail in my coffin*, Saul thought as he watched Ryce walk out, slamming the door behind him. He rolled over onto his side and reached for the covers, pulling them up over his head.

Ryce would never forgive him, but wasn’t that what he was hoping for? If Ryce hated him, he wouldn’t ask questions that Saul couldn’t answer. He wouldn’t ask Saul to stop going into town.

He wanted more than almost anything to say yes, he’d stay home, he’d never go back into town, but he knew he couldn’t. The price for refusing to go into town was more than he was willing to pay.

\* \* \* \*

Ryce leaned back against the wall outside of Saul's new room, trying desperately to stop the impending tears from flowing down his face. He had to take several deep breaths, most of them catching in his throat and turning into sobs before he could stop them.

He couldn't believe how callous Saul had been, almost to the point of being cruel. It didn't seem to matter to him what they could have together as long as he still got to go into town every week.

Even then, after Ryce had agreed to keep things just the way they were, Saul had still ended things between them. Ryce just didn't understand it. What was in town that held Saul's attention so firmly?

Was it someone else? Was Saul in love with someone else? It was the only explanation Ryce could think of, the only one that made sense. Saul must be in love with someone else, someone who wasn't his mate.

Why else would he go to town once a week to fool around? Why else would he end their relationship even after Ryce had told him he would continue to look the other way? Ryce slid down the wall to sit on the floor as his legs gave out, drawing them up to his body.

He didn't know why he had never considered the possibility that Saul was in love with someone else. It just made sense. There was someone somewhere who could give Saul everything that Ryce couldn't.

How was he supposed to fight that? He could complain and throw a fit, making Saul's life hell, or he could give him what he wanted and look the other way. Only this time, Saul wouldn't be coming home to him anymore. He would just be coming home.

"Ryce? Is everything okay?"

Ryce tilted his head back to look up at Cary, trying his best to give him a reassuring smile. "Hey, baby, did you get something to eat?" he asked as he reached for Cary, pulling him down to sit between his

legs. He wrapped his arms around him and buried his face in his hair, breathing deeply to draw in his sweet scent.

“Did you talk to Saul?” Cary asked quietly.

“Yeah, I talked to him.”

“And?”

Ryce shook his head. “He won’t stop going into town and...and he doesn’t even want to be in a relationship with me.”

“He’s leaving?”

“No, he won’t leave,” Ryce chuckled bitterly. “He says he made a commitment to both of us and he’ll stay here to keep it, to make sure that you stay safe so that I can have you in my life. But he doesn’t want to be with either of us. We’re supposed to be with each other, leaving him out of it.”

“Why? I know he told me to leave, but I thought that was because he didn’t know I was his mate. Does he hate me that much?”

“No, I don’t think he hates you at all, Cary. I don’t think you even come into it. I think that Saul’s in love with someone else and he’s going into town to be with him. I don’t think it has anything to do with either of us.”

“He’s in love with someone he’s not mated to?” Cary asked in horror. Sure, he had heard stories of things like that happening, but he had never thought it would happen to him. He wasn’t sure how he felt about it.

He barely knew Saul. He wasn’t sure he had spoken more than a couple of sentences to him. But he knew the man was his mate. Until this moment, Cary had held out hope that they might all be together as mates were supposed to be. With the information that Ryce had just given him, he wasn’t sure that was possible anymore.

“What are we supposed to do?” Cary asked after a moment.

“Look the other way when he leaves. Don’t ask him about it or nag him about it. Let him have the space he seems to want. He has as much right to be with the person he loves as you and I do.”

“But, Ryce, I thought you loved Saul. Doesn’t that mean you have a right to be with him?”

“I do love him, Cary, but he doesn’t love me and I can’t make him. I’ve tried for five years to give him what he needs, but it just isn’t enough. If this other guy can make him happy, then that’s all I want for him. Besides, I still have you, don’t I?”

Cary nodded, feeling sad as he laid his head on Ryce’s shoulder. “Yeah, you still have me, but I wonder if I’ll be enough to make you happy.”

Ryce grabbed Cary’s face and lifted it until he could look into his beautiful blue eyes. “You will always make me happy, Cary. Yes, I wish that Saul was with us, but if you are all that I ever have, I’ll still be a happy man.”

“Are you sure, Ryce?”

“I’m sure, baby,” Ryce said as he tucked Cary’s head under his chin and hugged him close. “Just don’t ever leave me. I don’t think I could handle losing you, too.”

“I think I’m here for the long haul, Ryce. I just have one question.”

“What would that be, baby?”

“Can we go back to bed and start this day over?”

## **Chapter 6**

Cary took a deep breath and knocked on Saul's bedroom door. It had been three days since Saul had claimed him last and it needed to be done again. Cary had specifically waited until Ryce had gone out before going to Saul's room. He didn't want to remind Ryce about their weird situation any more than he had to.

Despite Ryce's assurances, Cary knew he was miserable without Saul. From the few glimpses Cary had gotten of Saul, he wasn't much better off. Cary just couldn't figure out what was going on between these two men.

Ryce obviously loved Saul, and from what he had seen, Saul was heartbroken without Ryce. Surely that meant that he loved him? Cary had believed Ryce's theory that Saul was in love with someone else in the beginning, but the more he was around him, the more he thought that Ryce was wrong.

The only man Saul was in love with was Ryce. Cary had seen it in Saul's sorrowful eyes every time he looked at Ryce. He never left his room except to grab something to eat, which he immediately took back up to his room. He never even went outside. Cary had caught Saul watching Ryce and himself through the window a few times. He always looked like he would give anything to join them, but he never did. He just turned away when he saw Cary watching.

No, there was something more going on here, something very wrong, and Cary was determined to get to the bottom of it. Saul might never love him the way he loved Ryce, but at least with the two of them together, they might all have a chance at happiness.

Cary knocked on the door again when Saul didn't answer, more determined than ever to solve this great mystery and bring Ryce and Saul back together. He just wasn't sure how he was going to go about it.

The door swung open suddenly, startling Cary. He quickly glanced up from the pajama bottoms and bare chest into Saul's face, frowning at the disinterested look he found there. *Well, this is going to be a lot of fun*, Cary thought as he squared his shoulders and tried to look like he wasn't shaking in his shoes.

"What do you want?" Saul growled.

"Uh, it's been three days, Saul. I—uh—I need you to—" Cary stammered.

He watched Saul lift his head and look past him as if searching for something, or someone. Cary smirked, hiding it quickly when Saul looked back down at him. He bet he knew who Saul was looking for.

"Where's Ryce?"

"He went into town," Cary replied, crossing his arms over his chest. "What's it to you?"

"Why did he go into town?"

Cary shrugged. "I don't know. He's been going into town for the last couple of days. When I asked him what he was doing he told me it was none of my business."

That wasn't exactly true. Ryce was actually in town *on* business, but Cary wasn't about to tell Saul that. Maybe it was time for him to sit and stew for a while, find out how the other half lived.

"What do you mean it's none of your business? You're his mate, aren't you?" Saul nearly yelled.

"Yeah, but that never stopped you. Why should it stop him?"

"Cary—"

"Look, Saul, I'm only here for one thing. Let's just get it over with and then I'll get out of your hair," Cary said as he tugged the edge of his cotton shirt off his shoulder and tilted his head, baring his neck to Saul.

“Fuck, Cary!” Saul exclaimed, grabbing Cary by the arm and dragging him into the bedroom before slamming the door closed. He ran his fingers through coal-black hair before looking at Cary. “Do you have to be so damn cold about it?”

“Is there some other way to be? You’re the one who set up these rules, Saul, not me. You wanted cold and clinical, you got cold and clinical,” Cary replied stiffly. Inside, he was jumping for joy. Saul seemed to hate the coldness of this situation as much as he did.

Saul rubbed his hands over his face before settling them on his hips. “I didn’t mean for it to be like this, Cary.”

“Then how the hell did you mean for it to be, Saul?”

“I don’t know, but not this. This is just so—so—”

“Cold, clinical, sterile, unfriendly, unfeeling, depressing? I’ve got a whole lot of other words in my vocabulary, Saul. Pick one.”

“You do have a mouth on you, don’t you?” Saul replied with a small chuckle.

“Yeah, and I know what to do with it, too.” Cary smirked when he saw Saul’s eyes widen. “Do you know what to do with yours?”

“You keep playing with fire, boy, and you’re going to get burned,” Saul growled.

“Oh, I’m all aquiver.” Cary pulled his shirt over his head. He drew his hair back from his neck and tilted his head to one side. He knew from the sudden inhale of breath behind him that he had surprised Saul. Good, he needed to be shook up.

“Do you think maybe you could use that mouth of yours or should I go find someone else to claim me?” Cary asked as he gazed up at Saul. He knew he was just throwing fuel on the fire, but he wanted some sort of reaction out of Saul, something to break him.

He wasn’t prepared, though, when Saul jumped across the space between them and hauled him into his arms, growling at him through bared teeth. “You belong to me. No one else will claim you but me!”

“Like you have any say in what happens in my life. You don’t want me, remember? You as good as told Ryce that we were on our



own, that you wanted nothing to do with us. So screw you, Saul. What I do with my life is none of your business.”

“You’re my mate. Everything you do is my business.”

“Wrong! I’m the poor sap that was unlucky enough to be mated to you. The only reason I have anything to do with you is because I would die without you. Believe me, if I could find a way out of this, I would. Then we’d never have to see each other again.”

Saul’s eyebrows drew together in a frown as he stared down at Cary, confusion written all over his face. “You hate me that much?”

“No, Saul, I don’t hate you. I don’t feel anything for you, not love, not hate, not anything. You’re a means to an end. You’ll keep me alive until I can find a way to break the bond between us without dying. It’s as simple as that. Now, if you don’t mind?” Cary said as he tilted his head, once more baring his neck to his mate.

“My God, you’re one cold son of a bitch!” Saul dropped his hands and stepped back from Cary. “I wonder how in the hell Ryce puts up with you.”

Cary bent his head down to hide his grin. If Saul thought he was callous, maybe he would do something to protect Ryce from him. Of course, it wouldn’t be bad if Saul learned a few things along the way, like putting others before his own selfish desires.

“Yeah, yeah, I give great blowjobs, too, now bite,” Cary demanded, tilting his head to one side again as he stepped closer to Saul.

“Fuck you, Cary.”

Cary smirked, looking up at Saul. “Well, that’s more like it. I always preferred it this way in the first place,” he said as he quickly unbuttoned his jeans and pushed them down his legs.

“You’re—you’ve lost your mind,” Saul whispered, but Cary could see his response to his naked body in the quick rise in the front of his pajama bottoms. Yep, Saul liked what he saw.

“Have I? Why? You’re my mate just as much as Ryce is. I thought I was supposed to want to be with you. Isn’t that how it works?” Cary asked innocently.

“Cary, you—this is ridiculous. We can’t do this,” Saul groaned.

Cary moved forward to press his body against Saul’s. As much as he wanted Saul to wake up and see what was right in front of him, he sure didn’t mind doing it this way. Saul was gorgeous. He would have no problem being with him, none at all.

“I don’t see what the problem is, Saul. You’re my mate,” Cary replied as he pushed his hands between Saul’s hot skin and the elastic waistband of his pajama bottoms.

He slowly moved his hands down further, giving Saul plenty of time to stop him. Saul just stared at him, not moving or saying a thing. Cary took that as acceptance and dropped to his knees as he dragged Saul’s pajama pants down his legs.

He grinned when he saw the small droplets of liquid on the head of Saul’s hard cock. Oh, yeah, he was into this as much as Cary was. He might want to deny that he was aroused, but the evidence was right in front of Cary’s face.

So close, in fact, that Cary just had to stick out his tongue to taste him, which he did. As his tongue crossed over the small slit, licking up the small drops of liquid gathering there, Cary heard Saul cry out, his hands fisting in Cary’s hair.

Cary tilted his head back to look up at Saul, admiring the rippled torso above him. “Do you want me to suck your cock, Saul? Is that what you want? You’re going to have to tell me you want this.”

“Fuck, yes!” Saul growled, yanking on Cary’s hair to pull him back towards his jutting cock. Cary quickly opened his mouth and swallowed Saul’s cock, his tongue doing a quick dance across the top.

Cary lavished Saul’s cock, his lips closing tightly around him as he bobbed his head up and down, his tongue following the motion of his lips. He could feel Saul’s hips begin to hump against him, his hands tightening in his hair.

“Fuck, baby.” Saul groaned deeply as Cary scraped his fingernails down his ass cheeks.

Cary could tell by the tightening of the rigid muscles in Saul’s thighs that he was close to coming, but he wasn’t going to come alone. Cary had plans for the nice big cock that he had in his mouth.

Pulling his mouth off of Saul, Cary crawled back on his arms and legs until he reached the bed. He scooted up until he sat on the side, crooking his finger at Saul before lying back on the bed and pulling his legs up to his chest.

He wondered if Saul was going to do anything when he didn’t move right away, but was soon satisfied when Saul leapt across the room and grabbed him. His face looked so fierce, Cary was momentarily apprehensive.

He was intensely grateful that he had prepared himself before coming to Saul’s room when Saul didn’t even pause to see if he was ready, just held his legs in a tight grip before plunging his cock deep into Cary’s tight hole.

“Ooohhh,” Cary groaned as Saul began a rapid pace, thrusting into him so hard that Cary had to grab the blankets beneath him to keep from being pushed across the bed. “Harder, Saul.”

Saul seemed eager to comply. His hands clenched against Cary’s back as he picked him up in his arms. Cary squeaked, his arms instantly wrapping around Saul’s shoulders. His eyes nearly crossed as Saul walked across the room with him still impaled on his cock. He felt every step, every movement of Saul’s body.

As Saul pressed him back against the wall and began thrusting into him again, Cary wondered if he was going to be able to walk after this. He knew he had unleashed a ferocious beast and was about to be consumed.

Cary clutched his fingers tightly into the hair at the nape of Saul’s neck and pulled his head down for a quick, hungry kiss before turning his head to the side and pressing his mouth there. He wanted Saul to claim him while fucking him. This was the way it was supposed to be.

Just as Saul sank his teeth into the soft skin of Cary's neck, the bedroom door swung open. Cary looked up in surprise when he heard Ryce's voice.

"Saul? Have you seen—Fuck!"

Cary could see the stunned surprise in Ryce's face and the instant arousal in his eyes. He held out his hand to him, inviting Ryce to join them. "*Come, love,*" he said through their mental bond.

He saw Ryce hesitate, then quickly peel his clothes off before coming over to wrap his arms around Saul, pinning him between their two bodies. By the quick jerk of Saul's body when Ryce sank his teeth into his neck and pressed his hard cock against his backside, Cary didn't think Saul had realized Ryce was there until their mate touched him.

As Ryce stroked his hands up Saul's sides to wrap around him and gently pull at his nipples, Cary could feel Saul's response in the thickening of the cock buried deep within him. He wasn't even sure Saul actually knew how aroused he was, but Cary did. He could feel it in the quickening of Saul's breath, the acceleration of his thrusts.

Cary looked past Saul's head to meet Ryce's eyes, smiling at him as he pointed back towards the bed. His eyes twinkled with delight at Ryce's grin. "*Think you can get us back to the bed? Saul needs to learn about being loved by his two mates.*"

Cary held tight to Saul's shoulders as Ryce guided them back towards the bed. Saul offered no resistance other than to lift his eyes from where they were buried in Cary's neck. Even though they looked dazed, Saul's beautiful hazel eyes sparkled with ecstasy.

Grunting from the wrench of Saul's teeth in his neck as Ryce pushed them down on the bed, Cary pulled his legs up closer to his chest. As Saul pushed into him again, Cary looked at Ryce. "*Hurry up, baby. I'm not sure how much longer I can hold on here.*"

Ryce grinned back at him, his hands going to Saul's ass. "*Hold on a damn minute. You can't rush these things.*" Ryce laughed back through their bond.

The loud growl that came out of Saul's clenched teeth told Cary that Ryce had joined the conga line. He could feel Saul's fingers digging into his hips, his thrusts becoming frantic in his haste. Saul seemed to be thrusting his cock into Cary, then slamming himself back onto Ryce's cock.

Cary was enjoying every minute of it. He could feel the sweat dripping off of Saul's body onto his, the tight grip of Saul's hands on his hips, and the thickening of Saul's hard cock in his ass. He knew he was just a moment away.

"Harder, Ryce, fuck him harder," Cary moaned out loud. "He's gonna come."

Saul's heavy grunt was the only thing that told Cary that Ryce had heard him. He withdrew his teeth from Cary's neck, baring them and growling down at him. Cary blew him a quick kiss, then held his legs up even higher, feeling Saul slide deeper into his ass.

"*Claim him, Ryce,*" Cary demanded silently. "*He's so close.*"

Cary watched Saul's eyes widen as Ryce grabbed his hair and yanked his head back, tilting his head to one side so he could bite him. Saul cried out, his eyes drifting closed as he came, his cock pulsing inside of Cary as he filled him.

"*Our turn, love,*" Cary whispered to Ryce as he dropped his head back and cried out, filling the space between him and Saul with his release. He dimly heard Ryce cry out as Saul's body settled over the top of his, but he was too exhausted to lift his head.

After a moment, Cary felt Saul pull away and he rolled onto his back. Cary lifted his head to see Ryce kneeling on the floor next to the bed, his head resting on the mattress. He knew how they felt. His arms felt like lead weights.

However, he needed to clean up before things dried. With that thought in mind, Cary rolled to the side of the bed and went into the bathroom to quickly clean up. Grabbing a couple of wet washcloths, he went back into the bedroom, giving one to Ryce and using the other to clean up Saul.

Cary chuckled when he saw that Saul was out cold. Guess he was worn out, but at least he had a smile on his face. He tossed the washcloth back into the bathroom then reached for his clothes. Time to leave.

Buttoning up the last button on his jeans, Cary reached over and patted Ryce on the shoulder, speaking to him through their link so he wouldn't wake Saul up. *"Come on, baby, time for us to get our asses into our own bed."*

*"You expect me to move? Now? Why can't we just stay here?"* Ryce replied.

*"Because Saul didn't invite us to stay. We don't have the right to invade his space without his permission."*

*"I'm pretty sure we just did a lot more than invade his space, Cary,"* Ryce replied as he reached for his jeans.

*"True, but he was awake for that. Maybe after what we all just did together he'll have second thoughts about ending things when he wakes up and he's all alone. I, however, plan on being cuddled in bed with you."* Cary chuckled silently.

*"Fine!"* Ryce huffed, following Cary out of the room and quietly shutting the door. He didn't like the idea of leaving Saul after just having sex with him. It seemed kind of cold.

Of course, he had never thought he would be with Saul again and now he had been, thanks to Cary, so if he said they needed to leave, he'd leave. Maybe in the future they could play together again.

He just had to remember that he had no claim on Saul. When playtime was over, it was time to leave and give Saul his space. If that's what he needed to do to have Saul in his life, that was exactly what he would do, no matter how much he hated it.

*"Come on, Ryce, it's not going to be that bad. At least you have someone to go to bed with. Saul's going to wake up alone. Just give my plan some time to work, okay?"* Cary said as Ryce followed him into their bedroom.

“Yeah, I guess, but I hate it. He should be in here with us, not sleeping alone.”

Cary turned to wrap his arms around Ryce’s chest. “And hopefully, that’s what will happen. But Saul needs to see what he’s missing and until we can convince him to share whatever it is he’s going through, this is the way it has to be.”

Ryce hugged Cary tightly to him for a moment, kissing him on his head before releasing him to pull his clothes off again. “If you say so, but I sure hope this works. It all seems so cold and calculating to me. It gives me the shivers.”

“It’ll get better, baby.” Cary laughed as he climbed into bed and held the covers back for Ryce. Once Ryce was in bed, he pulled the covers over both of them and snuggled down against him. “Just give Saul some time. He needs us as much as we need him.”

\* \* \* \*

Saul knew he was alone even before he opened his eyes and looked around the room. He reached over and grabbed the sheets where Ryce and Cary should have been, heartache filling him when he fisted the sheets in his hand.

He didn’t know what made him think that Ryce and Cary would still be there, even after the great sex they just had. He had never given them any reason to want to stay. He was surprised that they had even consented to have sex with him.

Saul knew he had done everything in his power to drive them away, but they kept coming back, no matter what he did, no matter how cruel he was to them. He just couldn’t figure out why.

Rolling over to the side of the bed, Saul sat up, pushing his feet down to the floor. He shook his head as he looked around the empty room. He didn’t want to do this anymore. He was tired of being alone, tired of his mates being angry with him.

He'd much rather be like they were a couple of hours ago, the three of them together, enjoying each other. It was more than just the sex, although that had been phenomenal. It was the connection they had while they were together.

Saul knew that Cary and Ryce had been talking to each other through their mating bond, but neither of them had attempted to speak to him in that intimate way. It made him feel like a sex toy instead of a living, breathing person.

He missed the intimate communication between mates. He and Ryce used to talk that way all of the time. It hadn't happened in weeks. Saul didn't realize how much he missed it or how jealous it made him feel to know Cary and Ryce talked that way to each other and not to him.

He had set down the rules, as Cary said. He had drawn the line and told them not to cross it. He couldn't complain when they didn't cross it. Could he?

Saul got to his feet and reached for his pajama bottoms, pulling them on. He needed to see if maybe they could blur that line. He couldn't give it up, not all the way, not yet. There was too much at stake for that.

But maybe Ryce and Cary would be willing to meet him in the middle. He just had to hope that they would listen to him after everything he had said to them, after all of the hell he had put them through.

Saul opened his door and crept down the hallway to his old room. Taking a deep breath, he opened the door and tiptoed in, closing the door quietly behind him. Halfway to the bed, he stopped, his breath catching in his throat at the sight on the bed.

The moonlight coming through the window shone right down on the sleeping couple, lighting them up. It bathed them in its incandescent rays.

They looked so beautiful together, Saul could only stand there and stare for a moment. It brought home the fact that Ryce and Cary were



truly mated. They were lying spooned together, Ryce cradling Cary as if he was trying to protect him even in his sleep.

Cary had one hand around Ryce's arm. The other was curled under his cheek as he slept. What really threw Saul was the soft, peaceful smile on Cary's face. He looked so content, so happy where he was.

Saul couldn't remember having that kind of peace, not in a very long time. He had been happy with Ryce, very happy, in fact. But his secret life in town had always kept him apart from Ryce. It had stopped him from truly committing himself all of the way to his mate, maybe out of self-preservation.

He wondered if he even had it in him to fully commit to a single mate, let alone two. Besides being afraid that he wouldn't measure up, what did he really have to offer either of them, a mate that went away once a week and couldn't share the reason why?

That sounded like a fair trade all right. Ryce and Cary would be giving him everything and he would give them only part of his life. Oh, yeah, that would work. He could just imagine their faces when he offered that to them. They'd probably laugh him out of the room.

Saul shook his head. No, it was just better to leave things the way they were. Ryce and Cary were happy together and maybe, if he were really lucky, they might include him in their lives every once in awhile.

Just as he started to turn away, Cary opened his eyes and looked right at him. Saul held his breath, waiting for Cary's reaction. Was he going to tell him to leave? Or yell at him? Was he just going to lie there and stare at him?

Saul felt his knees go weak when Cary smiled and flipped back the bed covers, inviting him into the small ray of light he and Ryce were bathed in. Saul couldn't stop himself from dropping his pajama pants on the floor and rushing the last few steps to the bed to climb in beside Cary.

As Cary pulled the covers up over him and put his arms around Saul's shoulders, Saul buried his face in Cary's neck, inhaling his heady scent. He smelled so sweet, so clean, so damn inviting. Saul didn't think he would ever get tired of Cary's scent.

"Why?" Saul whispered against Cary's soft skin. He couldn't understand why Cary was being so accepting after everything he had done, every horrible thing he had said to him.

"Because you're my mate," Cary replied simply, as if that said it all.

"Cary—"

"Ssshhh," Cary murmured quietly against the top of Saul's head. "I'm not asking anything from you, Saul. Just close your eyes and sleep with us tonight. Tomorrow will take care of itself."

"But, what if Ryce doesn't—" Before Saul could finish, Ryce climbed over Cary and him to lie on his other side, cuddling up behind him, their bodies pressed together.

"Go to sleep, baby," Ryce said as he wrapped his arms around Saul's body. "We'll be here all night to keep your demons away."

As Saul closed his eyes and snuggled down into the loving arms of his mates, he couldn't help but wonder what the next day would bring. Yes, tonight Cary and Ryce seemed accepting of him, but what about tomorrow? Would they still want him in the morning?

## Chapter 7

Again, Saul knew he was alone when he woke up. For one, he was cold. Two, he couldn't feel the impression of their bodies pressing into the mattress. And three, no one was holding him.

He didn't want to open his eyes and have the reality of the day come crashing in. He wished he could just go back to sleep and pretend that his mates were still sleeping with him, still holding him.

But reality was a bitch. It came crashing in whether he wanted it to or not. Opening his eyes, Saul looked around the room. Finding it empty, he rolled to the side of the bed and sat up, rubbing his hand down his face.

Well, tomorrow was here and he was alone. *Big surprise!* Saul guessed a lot of things could be forgiven in the dark of night, but they seemed different in the light of day. He wondered how quickly Ryce and Cary had fled after finding him in bed with them. Had they even taken the time to wonder why he was there?

Saul reached for his pajama bottoms, standing up and pulling them up his legs. He started towards the door, reaching for the handle, but jumped back when the door swung open. He was surprised, even shocked, to see the welcoming smile on Cary's face as he walked in.

"Oh, hey, you're awake. I was just coming to get you. Ryce and I are going on a picnic down by the lake. We wanted to know if you wanted come with us." Cary leaned up on his tiptoes and kissed Saul gently on the mouth.

"You—you want me to go on a picnic with you?" Was Cary serious?

“Well, you don’t have to if you don’t want to, Saul, but the invitation is there,” Cary replied, looking disappointed before he turned his head away and walked over to the dresser.

Saul watched as Cary opened a drawer and grabbed a sweatshirt, then turned back to face him. He walked to the door, pausing to look back at him. Saul thought he seemed hesitant, maybe even apprehensive, but he obviously had something he felt he needed to say.

“Look, Saul, neither Ryce nor I are going to try to take anything from you that you don’t want to give us. We understand that you don’t want a relationship with us, just the occasional bout of sex. We don’t like it, but if that’s all you want with us, we’ll take it and not pressure you for more. We respect the boundaries you’ve put up. Just know that the invitation is there if you want to join us. We won’t ask anything from you, even if you do decide to join us.”

Saul opened his mouth to say something, anything, but Cary just turned on his heel and left the room, the door closing quietly behind him. Saul just stood there, his mouth hanging open in astonishment.

He didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry. Cary was telling him that he and Ryce would accept anything he gave them and not pressure him for more. But what if he wanted more? Would they tell him no?

Oh, who was he fooling? Cary and Ryce were giving him exactly what he had said he wanted—the ability to be with them when he chose to with no commitment. He couldn’t believe how thrilled that made him. *Not!*

He was so miserable his stomach felt like it was on a constant roller-coaster ride. Cary and Ryce were giving him exactly what he had said he wanted—and he didn’t want it. He wanted them to fight and argue with him, to demand that he be a part of their lives in all ways, not just occasionally.

Saul opened the door and went to his room, letting himself in and shutting the door. He looked around the guestroom, seeing how small

and bare it was. There was none of the homey feeling here that he found in the room he'd shared with Ryce.

He hated it, but he saw no other avenue open to him. If he joined Cary and Ryce, he knew that eventually he would want more from them. He would want a full, committed relationship, the one thing he couldn't have. But if he didn't join them, he would be miserable. That didn't leave him a lot of options.

Hearing a noise outside, Saul walked over to the window and looked down to see Ryce and Cary climbing into the Ryce's truck. Cary was laughing at something Ryce said as he opened his door and climbed into the cab.

Ryce opened his own door and started to get in, then paused, his head lifting to look up at the window where Saul stood. His lips lifted in a small smile.

*"Coming?"* Ryce asked through their mental bond.

Saul nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard Ryce's voice in his head. It had been so long since Ryce had communicated with him in that way. Saul didn't realize how much he missed it until that moment.

It suddenly dawned on Saul that he was denying himself for no reason. Ryce and Cary were willing to take him any way he allowed, no strings attached. By staying away from them, Saul was only punishing himself.

*"Just let me grab my shorts and I'll be right there,"* Saul replied. Joy filled him and made him light-headed. He saw the smile on Ryce's face grow into a huge grin before he climbed in the truck.

Saul scrambled around the room, quickly changing into a pair of denim shorts and a tank top. He grabbed some tennis shoes and all but ran out of his room and down the stairs. As he dashed out the front door past Thomas, he couldn't keep the grin off his face at Thomas's stunned expression.

*"Where's the fire?"* Thomas laughed.

"If I'm lucky, down by the lake," Saul yelled as he ran down the steps towards the truck. Opening the passenger side door, he lifted an eyebrow at the self-satisfied grin on Cary's face.

"Glad you decided to join us," Cary said as he scooted closer to Ryce, making room for Saul. Saul climbed in, shutting the door and reaching for his seat belt. Before he could even turn to face the front of the truck, a hand had landed on his thigh.

Saul glanced over at Cary. He couldn't help smiling down at him. The delight on Cary's face was infectious. He stretched his arm out behind Cary's head on the back of the long bench seat, his fingers resting on Ryce's shoulder as he looked back towards the front of the truck.

The breath momentarily caught in Saul's throat when Ryce leaned over and kissed the top of his head then drove them towards the lake.

\* \* \* \*

The lake could be reached from the house easily enough, but if privacy was something they wanted, they needed to drive to the other side of the lake. Everything else could be seen from the house.

"Sandwiches okay with you?" Cary asked, breaking the comfortable silence that had been established in the cab of the truck.

Saul nodded. "Sandwiches sound great, Cary."

"I didn't know what you'd like so I packed several different kinds of lunch meat and cheeses. If there's—"

Saul dropped his hand from Ryce's shoulder to wrap it around Cary's neck, pulling Cary's head towards him and dropping a small kiss on the top of his head. "I'm sure I'll like whatever you packed, baby."

He expected Cary to sit up and move away from him after he nodded his head. Instead, Cary curled closer to him, nearly sitting in Saul's lap. One hand wiggled down between Saul's thighs, the other moved between Saul and the seat back.

Saul looked at Ryce, feeling a bit disconcerted. Even so, he leaned forward so Cary's arm could wrap more firmly around his waist. As Cary settled his head against Saul's chest, Saul gave the top of his head another small kiss, then turned his gaze out the window.

He felt overwhelmed. He knew that Ryce and Cary said they would accept anything he gave them, but to actually see it in action was a bit off-putting. Saul briefly wondered what kind of person he was to put the men who professed to care for him through this.

He could feel Ryce watching him as he tightened his fingers in Cary's hair. He knew his behavior didn't make a whole lot of sense to Ryce. How could it? It didn't make sense to him. He was beginning to wonder what the hell he was doing.

"It's okay, baby, just enjoy the day and forget everything else."

Saul looked over at Ryce at his softly spoken words. His head whirled with doubts. Could it be that simple? The slight grin on Ryce's face said it was. Saul desperately wanted to believe him.

He wanted it so bad, he had to bury his face in Cary's soft sunlight-blond hair and close his eyes to keep from pleading with Ryce to make everything so simple. Saul opened his eyes and looked up as Ryce brought the truck to a stop and shut it off.

He had picked the perfect spot. They were far enough away from the house that no one watching could really tell what they were doing, but close enough to still see the house off in the distance.

The lake was clear and calm, surrounded by trees and grassy banks. Trying to push his misgivings aside, Saul opened the door and climbed out. He held the door for Cary, then closed it behind him.

"I'll get the snacks," Cary said as he squeezed past Saul and headed for the bed of the truck.

When Cary reached over the side of the truck to grab the picnic basket, Saul hauled the little man up in his arms and tossed him over his shoulder. He slapped Cary on his jean-clad ass as he glanced over at Ryce.

"I got my snack," Saul said, laughing. "What are you having?"

Ryce chuckled as he reached for the picnic basket. "Leftovers?"

"If there's anything left when I'm done with him..." Saul grabbed the blanket out of the back of the truck, carrying it and the laughing man over his shoulder down to the water's edge.

"Hold on, baby," Saul said as he patted Cary's ass again, then grabbed the blanket with one hand to spread it out on the ground. The moment the blanket was laid out, Saul grabbed Cary around the waist and pulled him off his shoulder.

He let Cary's body slowly slide down. He grinned at the gasp that came from Cary when his hard cock pressed against Cary's abdomen. Saul couldn't help it. The sexy man turned him on something fierce.

"You're a hot little piece, aren't you?"

Cary laughed. "I can be even hotter with the right persuasion."

Saul stared down at Cary in wonder. He still had trouble with the fact that Ryce and Cary both seemed to accept the boundaries he had placed on their relationship. He just didn't understand why he had trouble with it.

"I don't know, Cary," Saul said as he picked Cary up again and started towards the lake. "I was kind of looking forward to those sandwiches you brought with you. Maybe you need to cool off a bit."

Before Cary could protest, Saul hoisted Cary up further in his arms and tossed him into the cold lake. Cary screamed in surprise and shock as the cold water splashed around him. Saul stood on the edge of the lake, hands on his hips as he laughed.

"What in the hell did you do that for?" Ryce asked as he came over. Saul heard a small chuckle escape Ryce's lips when Cary stood up and glared at Saul. He was dripping wet, locks of sunlight-blond hair hanging over his face.

Saul shrugged. "He needed to cool off."

Ryce looked at Saul like he was crazy. "He's all wet now. He's going to have to take off his clothes and let them...Oh!"

Saul smirked, wiggling his eyebrows. "I know."



“Oh, that wasn’t nice, Saul.” Ryce chuckled as he reached for Cary. “But effective.”

Saul let out a small laugh. He quickly grabbed a blanket and held it out for Cary as he climbed out of the lake and walked over to their makeshift picnic spot. Cary glared at him even as he began to pull off his clothes, dropping them to the ground with a wet plop.

“If you wanted me naked you didn’t have to throw me in the lake. You just had to ask. I’m freezing,” he complained.

Saul wrapped the blanket around Cary’s shoulders and pulled the smaller man into his arms. “Yeah, but now I have a good reason for holding you close. You need to be warmed up,” Saul said as he swung Cary up into his arms.

Saul took a few steps closer to the picnic basket and sat down. He carefully sat Cary down between his thighs, wrapping his arms around him. He could feel Cary shiver. Saul felt guilty, but not enough to regret doing it. A naked Cary was a very good thing.

“I’ll get you warmed up again, promise,” Saul whispered as his hands slid under the blanket to stroke Cary’s smooth skin. He rubbed his hands up and down Cary’s arms several times.

Saul’s hands became softer, his touches lighter, as he moved them along Cary’s ribcage and around to his abdomen. He could hear a small hitch in Cary’s breathing as he moved his hands up over Cary’s chest.

“Getting warmer, baby?” Saul asked quietly into Cary’s ear.

“Oh, yeah,” Cary groaned. His head was pushed back against Saul’s shoulder, his eyes closed. The smile playing across Cary’s lips told Saul that he was enjoying what Saul was doing to him.

Saul glanced up at Ryce when he heard a small chuckle. He raised an eyebrow at Ryce, then parted the blanket, baring Cary to their hungry gazes. He really was gorgeous, every damn inch of him.

Long, limber legs, flat abdomen, and a luscious cock surrounded by golden skin. Definitely drool worthy. Saul watched with a great amount of interest as Ryce crawled over to settle between Cary’s legs.

Small whimpers fell from Cary's mouth as Ryce enveloped his cock. Saul was fascinated. He had been on the receiving end of Ryce's mouth many times. The things Ryce could do with it were probably illegal in most states.

Not wanting to be left out of the fun, Saul reached up and tugged on Cary's brown-hued nipples. He rolled them between his fingers, tugged on them. His lips moved to the crook of Cary's neck, nibbling, sucking, leaving red marks.

Cary continued to whimper. His hips started moving, thrusting towards Ryce's wet mouth. His hands clenched around Saul's arms, fingers digging in. Saul was gratified to know that he and Ryce brought their mate so much pleasure.

"Aaahhh," Cary suddenly cried out, his body going stiff as if frozen. His eyes opened briefly before rolling back into his head. Saul glanced down to see Ryce swallowing heavily, small dribbles of seed escaping from the corner of his mouth.

Finally, Cary's body collapsed back against Saul's. His chest rose and fell rapidly with his breathing. His hands fell from Saul's arms to land on the ground beside him. His head burrowed against Saul's chest.

Ryce smiled up at Saul, a wide grin covering his lips. "Think he's warmed up yet?"

Saul chuckled. "I don't know." Saul grabbed Cary's head and tilted it up to his. "You warm, baby?"

"If I say no, can we do that again?"

Saul laughed. This was good. Life was good. Maybe he was worrying too much. Maybe he should just enjoy the time he did have with Ryce and Cary and let the rest take care of itself.

"Anyone hungry?" Saul asked as he wrapped the blanket around Cary again and pulled his body tighter against his chest. "I'm starving."

Ryce chuckled as he sat up and reached for the picnic basket. "I'm sure we can take care of that for you."

"I'm hoping you can take care of a few other things for me," Saul said. "But I'll wait until we can refuel Cary first. I think he might be in danger of wasting away."

Cary laughed. "No, I'm good."

"Does that mean you're not hungry?" Ryce asked as he reached into the basket and grabbed several sandwiches.

"Define hungry."

"Well, hungry is when you want something really bad," Ryce replied. "You might feel an ache deep inside that won't be satisfied until you get what you're hungry for or until you get your fill."

"Then I'm definitely hungry."

"Then have a sandwich," Ryce said, holding one out to him.

"That's not what I'm hungry for."

"Then what—" Ryce began, only to be cut off by Saul's ringing cell phone.

Saul quickly reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. He took one look at the number and a chill ran up his spine. He wished more than anything in the world to not answer it, but he knew that wasn't an option.

Lifting Cary off his lap, Saul stood up and walked several paces away. He took a deep breath, turning away from Ryce and Cary's curious faces, then flipped the phone open and held it to his ear.

"Yes?"

"Tonight, six o'clock. You know where," said the cold voice from the other end of the phone.

"No. It's Thursday, not Friday. I don't have to be there until tomorrow."

"Ah, but see, that was when you just had one man in your life. Now there are two. That means you belong to me two nights a week."

"No, I won't do this," Saul growled. His hand gripped the phone so tightly, his fingers turned white. "I don't want to do any of this anymore. It's over."

“Think carefully about that decision, Saul. Remember what happened the last time you tried to end our association.”

Saul felt another chill climb up his spine. He remembered all too well what had happened the last time he had tried to end his Friday night escapades. It had been two weeks after he mated Ryce.

He had been eagerly waiting for his new mate to come home from work, excited about the life they were going to build together. Then the phone rang, bringing threats against Ryce’s life. Hours later he found Ryce’s unconscious body in the remains of his car.

The message had been clear. Saul had never complained about his Friday night trips away again. Ryce’s life, and now Cary’s, depended on it.

“Fine. I’ll be there at six. But this is the last time,” Saul said. Sorrow and regret filled him as he snapped the phone closed. He dropped it back into his pocket before letting his chin fall to his chest.

Saul could feel Ryce and Cary watching him. He knew they had heard his part of the conversation. He just hoped they didn’t question him. He couldn’t explain to them what he had to do.

He rubbed his hand over his face. His picnic was over. It had all been a fantasy anyway. Saul knew that. Reality had crashed in on him with a vengeance. Saul turned to face his mates.

Remorse filled him. Cary had a curious, eager look on his face. He didn’t seem to have any idea that their picnic was over. Ryce, on the other hand, wore a resigned expression. He knew. He’d been through this too many times in the past.

“I have to go,” Saul said.

“It’s not Friday, Saul,” Ryce said. Saul could see the knowledge in Ryce’s eyes that there would be no arguing about this, but he still seemed to want to try. It just made Saul’s sorrow cut even deeper.

“No, it’s not. But I have to go anyway.”

“Do you love him that much?”

Saul’s mouth dropped open in shock at Ryce’s words, at the guarded look on his face. Ryce seemed to brace himself against Saul’s

answer, as if he knew something that was going to rip his world apart if voiced.

“Love who?”

“Whoever you’re leaving us for.”

Saul shook his head as he tried to comprehend Ryce’s words. Ryce actually thought he was going to see someone he loved? Where had that crazy idea come from? It was insane.

It also might give him the leverage he needed to end things.

Saul knew if he had to go to town two days a week that having any type of relationship with Ryce and Cary would be impossible. There was just no way they would allow things to continue the way they were.

“Yes,” Saul replied as he gazed purposefully at his two mates, “I love him more than life.”

\* \* \* \*

Cary sniffled as Saul walked away. He could feel Ryce’s tension in the tight grip he had on Cary’s arm. Watching Saul walk away was nearly as hard as hearing Saul say he loved someone else.

Saul’s head was bowed, his shoulders hunched, hands shoved in his pockets. It suddenly dawned on Cary that someone who was leaving to go see the man he loved shouldn’t look so dejected. Something was wrong.

Pushing away from Ryce, Cary crawled over to the picnic basket and started putting everything back inside. Closing the lid, he climbed to his feet and held out his hand to Ryce.

“Come on.”

“Where are we going?”

“We’re going to follow Saul and see where he’s going,” Cary said as he grabbed the blanket and rolled it into a ball. He reached for the picnic basket, but a hand on his arm stopped him. Cary looked up at Ryce.

“Cary, Saul already told us where he’s going. We have to let him go.”

Cary rolled his eyes. He pushed away from Ryce’s grasp and pointed down the road at Saul. “Does that look like a man going to meet someone he’s in love with?”

A frown came to Ryce’s face as he registered Saul’s distressed posture. He shook his head. His expression was worried when he turned back to Cary. “No. But, he said—”

“Yeah, I know what he said, but I think he lied.” Cary shrugged. “Haven’t you ever wondered where he goes? Who he’s seeing? Haven’t you ever wanted to follow him?”

“Yes, but it’s none of my business.”

“The hell it’s not. Saul is our mate and I, for one, am not going to just let him go,” Cary said as he picked up the picnic basket. He carried it over to truck and tossed it in the back along with the blanket. He didn’t really care where they landed.

Turning to glare at Ryce, Cary placed his hands on his hips. “You can either go with me or you can stay behind, but I am going to follow Saul and find out what in the hell is going on.”

Cary held his breath as he waited for Ryce to come to a decision. He knew it wouldn’t be easy to change five years of conditioning. For five years Ryce had looked the other way. It was time for that to stop.

“All right, let’s go,” Ryce finally said.

Cary let out the breath in his chest and grinned. He climbed into the truck, shutting the door and pulling his seatbelt on. He looked at Ryce as he climbed into the driver’s seat and started the truck.

Ryce paused. “Are we really going to do this?” he asked. “Saul is going to be pissed.”

Cary nodded. “Oh, I have no doubt that Saul’s going to be mad. But frankly, I don’t give a shit. He’s our mate and he has as much of a duty to us as we have to him. Something is going on and Saul’s caught up in the middle of it. We have a right to know what it is.”

“Cary, what if he really is going to meet someone he loves? Are you prepared for that? Because I don’t know if I am.”

“If Saul is going into town to meet his lover, we’ll deal with it. But I don’t think that’s what’s going on, Ryce. Did Saul sound like he was in love with the person he talked to on the phone? Or did he sound like someone was forcing him to do something he didn’t want to do?”

“Cary—”

Cary laid his hand on Ryce’s. “Ryce, you heard him on the phone, just like I did. He wanted to end this. He doesn’t want to do this anymore, whatever *this* is. Doesn’t that tell you something?”

Ryce remained silent for a moment then lifted Cary’s hand, placing a kiss on the palm. “Okay, baby, we’ll do it your way. I just want you to promise that you won’t get upset if we do find Saul with a lover. It’s always a possibility.”

Cary shook his head. “No, I can’t promise I won’t get upset. This means too much to me. But if Saul really is going to see his lover, then we’ll deal with it. However, I seriously doubt that’s what’s going on.”

Ryce drove the truck down the road back to the house. He glanced over at Cary. “What do you think is going on?”

“I think our mate is in trouble and he needs us to get him out of it.”

## Chapter 8

Ryce spotted Saul going into his guestroom just as he and Cary came in the front door.

Before he could wonder at that, Cary let out a squeal and ran towards three men standing with Caleb and Thomas. Possessive instinct kicking in, Ryce reached out to grab Cary, missing him by inches.

He growled low in his throat as Cary threw himself into the arms of one of the men. He stalked across the room and yanked Cary away, pushing his mate behind him. He could hear a low rumble coming from the man and immediately took it as a threat.

“Mine,” Ryce growled again. His hands fisted at his sides. He started to lower himself into a defensive posture, ready to fight for his mate when he felt someone smack him hard on the back of his head.

Ryce turned around in surprise, shock falling over his features when he found Cary standing behind him, glaring.

“What did you do that for?” Ryce asked as he rubbed the back of his head.

Cary just rolled his eyes. “Get over yourself already. That’s my brother you’re growling at. Now get out of my way so that I can say hello to him. I haven’t seen him in years.”

Ryce felt his face flush as Cary pushed past him and hugged the man glowering at him. He could hear Caleb and Thomas chuckling, obviously enjoying his embarrassment. He couldn’t blame them. He had made an utter ass of himself.

He couldn’t help it. He had seen Cary in the arms of another man and had seen red. Suddenly, every feeling he had towards Saul’s



weekly retreats had played over in his mind until he could only think about tearing the stranger apart, slowly.

“Ryce, come meet my brother, Lucas,” Cary said, holding a hand out to him.

Ryce tried to look like he wasn’t embarrassed but knew his red face gave him away as he stepped forward. He offered his hand, hoping Cary’s brother would see it for the gesture it was and not make more of a fool of him than he had already done.

“Ryce Hunter.”

“Lucas Jones,” Cary’s brother replied. “It’s good to know you can protect my baby brother, even when you don’t need to.”

Okay, that hadn’t been so bad. Lucas seemed to understand where Ryce came from. It wasn’t easy to control his possessive instincts when his mate was in the arms of another man.

Ryce nodded his thanks. “I would do anything for Cary.”

“Understandable.” Lucas chuckled. He reached back and pulled a small man out from behind him. “I would feel the same way if my mate was in the arms of anyone except Jake. This is my mate, Leyland.” The tender look in Lucas’s eyes as he gazed down at the man with light-brown hair almost made Ryce look away. It was almost too intimate to look at.

“Leyland,” Ryce said, greeting him with a handshake.

“This is our alpha and mate, Jake McAlester,” Lucas said, gesturing to the taller man standing next to him. He watched Lucas and Leyland with a very indulgent glint in his eyes.

“Jake,” Ryce said, shaking his hand. He gestured towards Cary, still held in Lucas’s arms. “Would you mind?”

“Oh, sorry.” Lucas quickly released Cary, who instantly stepped over to lean against Ryce. “I haven’t seen Cary in a lot of years. Last time I saw him he was just a gangly kid. It’s hard to think of him as mated.”

“I grew up a long time ago, Luc,” Cary grumbled.

"I'm sure you did." Lucas chuckled. "Guess you'll just have to bear with me until that sinks in." Lucas ruffled Cary's hair. He glanced around the room. "So, where's your other mate? He has claimed you, I assume? You're looking pretty healthy."

Ryce glanced down at Cary, lifting an eyebrow in query. Should they tell his brother everything or just pass off their relationship with Saul as being unusual? Ryce waited until Cary nodded before he spoke.

"Why don't we go for a walk?" Ryce suggested. "What we have to say needs to be said in private, although, I would like Caleb to come also. I could use his advice."

"Ryce, I don't know what you have to say to me, but I don't hide things from my mates. You need to know that. I'll be sharing with them whatever you tell me. If you don't want them to know, don't tell me."

Ryce looked back at Cary just in time to see him roll his eyes. "God, you always were a pushy bastard," Cary said as he pulled away from Ryce and started towards the kitchen. "Come on. Let's go talk in the kitchen. I missed lunch and I'm hungry."

"We just need to keep our voices down. Saul is right upstairs and I don't want him to hear us discussing this," Ryce said.

Everyone nodded their head in agreement as they made their way to the kitchen.

Ryce waited until everyone sat down at the large table in the breakfast nook. Caleb sat next to Thomas, their mate Micah standing behind them, a hand on each shoulder. Jake sat across from Ryce, Lucas sitting so close to him that their shoulders touched.

He had been surprised when Leyland gave a small laugh and sat between them on both their laps. The moment he was seated, Leyland had leaned back against his larger mates as if he sat that way all the time. Ryce suspected he did.

Cary sat next to Ryce after pushing his chair closer. Ryce reached into the ceramic bowl on the table and picked up an apple and handed

it to Cary. Didn't matter what they were doing, he was not going to neglect his mate.

"So, what's going on with your mate?" Lucas finally asked.

"That seems to be the question of the day," Ryce said. "Cary and I don't know, but we believe he's in trouble."

"I told you that," Micah said. "No matter what he says, Saul is not going into town to fool around. He has some serious feelings of guilt, but not the kind he should have if he's being unfaithful."

"When you first said that, I dismissed it, Micah. I really did. I know you can feel other people's emotions, but I was sure you were wrong." He folded his hands together on the table and shook his head. "Now, I'm not so sure."

"What's changed your mind?" Caleb asked.

"We went down to the lake for a picnic this afternoon. Everything was going great. We were really enjoying ourselves. Then Saul got this phone call. It was weird. He argued with the person on the other end, told them he didn't want to do whatever he's doing anymore. Then he suddenly hung up and said he had to go."

"But, it's not Friday," Micah insisted.

"That's what I said. Saul said it didn't matter," Ryce replied. His eyes dropped down to his hands. "I asked him if he loved the person he was leaving us for. He said he loved him more than his own life."

Ryce's words were met by silence. He looked up to see stunned expressions on every face there. He didn't blame them. He had been stunned at Saul's words himself. It had felt like his heart had been ripped out of his chest.

Ryce looked down when he felt another hand entwine with his. Seeing Cary leaning towards him, holding his hand, Ryce leaned back and wrapped his free arm around his shoulders.

"No, no," Micah said shaking his head, "this is wrong. I don't care what Saul said to you. This is wrong. I know Saul loves you. I can feel it every time he's around you two. I don't know what's going on, but I've never doubted Saul's love for you."

“That’s what Cary said. Saul looked so sad when he left. If he was going into town to be with his lover, he wouldn’t have been so sad. It was like he had to force himself to leave us. It just doesn’t make sense.”

“So, what are you going to do?” Caleb asked.

Ryce laughed. It wasn’t a sweet laugh, but rather bitter. “Cary wants to follow him and see where he’s going. That’s why we came back to the house. Saul’s supposed to be wherever it is he’s going by six o’clock tonight.”

“That’s not a half bad idea, Ryce,” Thomas said. “Especially if you think he’s in trouble.”

“Does that mean you’re willing to help us?” Cary quickly asked.

“What do you need us to do?” Lucas asked.

Ryce looked at Lucas, surprised. He knew that Caleb, Thomas and Micah would help him, but he didn’t expect the same out of Cary’s brother and his mates. “I’m not sure you want to get involved in this.”

“Nonsense,” Jake said, speaking for the first time since they had entered the kitchen. “Cary is Lucas’s brother. You and Saul are Cary’s mates. That makes us family. If you need our help, you’ll get it.”

Ryce felt tears prick the edges of his eyes. Family. Maybe that was what it was all about. A family was there for you when you needed it, to help you and care for you. A family was made up of those that you loved and who loved you, no questions asked. And it looked like Ryce had quite the family.

“Thank you,” Ryce whispered.

Jake nodded.

“So what’s the plan then?” Thomas asked. “I don’t feel real comfortable having Micah out on this and someone has to man the home ground. Any volunteers?”

“If we all take different vehicles, use our cell phones to stay in contact, we can follow him without him spotting any of us,” Cary said.

Ryce nodded. "If Lucas stayed here with Micah, Leyland and Cary, he could keep an eye on them. It would also give him some time to spend with Cary."

"I want to go."

"I know you do, Cary, but I would really feel better if you stayed here. I can't worry about you and Saul at the same time."

"I'm not a weakling!" Cary cried out. "Saul's my mate, too."

Ryce put his arms around Cary, hugging his mate to his chest. "Cary, please. Just do this for me. Jake, Caleb, Thomas and I will follow Saul. It will be much easier for me to concentrate on finding out what's going on if you stay here where you're safe. Please?"

"Oh, all right. But you'd better call me the minute you know anything," Cary said, resignation ringing in his voice.

"I will, I promise."

"So, how do we do this?" Caleb asked.

"I suggest that Jake and Caleb leave in Jake's car. Thomas can ride with me. You two leave early and wait on the edge of town. We'll follow Saul from here. If he gets suspicious, I'll drive on past him or go a different way. We'll call you and you can take up the trail."

Caleb nodded. "Sounds good." He glanced at the clock. It was almost five o'clock. "We better hit the road, then. We'll be waiting down on Old Minter Road. If Saul turns off before then or spots you, call us."

Ryce nodded. Caleb and Jake went out the kitchen door. A moment later, a vehicle started up outside and the sound of its engine faded as it drove away. Ryce could feel Lucas staring at him. He looked at him.

"What?"

"I know the whole mate thing makes this hard on you, but is this guy really worth all of this?" Lucas asked, waving his hand in a gesture that encompassed their plan.

Ryce knew that answer without having to think about it. “Yes, he is.”

\* \* \* \*

Ryce waited until he heard Saul start up his truck before he opened the kitchen door. He and Thomas crept around the side of the house and watched Saul drive away. They sprinted over to Ryce’s truck and climbed in.

Making sure that Saul’s tail lights were out of sight, Ryce started up the truck and drove down the driveway, following a good distance behind Saul. This whole plan wouldn’t work if Saul got suspicious.

Each mile that they covered made Ryce feel uneasy. The muscles in his shoulders tensed to the point that they hurt. Ryce rolled his head, feeling a few cracks in his spine, easing some of the tension, but not all.

Ryce doubted he would feel better until he knew exactly what was going on with his mate. He wanted to beat his head against the steering wheel in frustration. Ryce knew he should have done this long ago instead of waiting five years.

Saul had needed him and he let him down. Mates didn’t do that. If they did find that Saul had gone to a lover, Ryce wouldn’t blame him. He certainly hadn’t been a very good mate to Saul. He should have cared enough to find out what was going on with Saul instead of looking the other way.

Ryce realized that he had been afraid to question Saul. If he asked a lot questions, demanded answers, Saul might have left him and he couldn’t live without Saul in his life. No, he should have done this a long time ago.

“You going to be okay?” Thomas asked as they drove through the streets behind Saul’s truck.

Ryce shrugged. “I guess. It’s hard to realize that I should have done this a long time ago. I’ve spent too many years looking the other way because I was afraid of losing Saul.”

“And now?”

“Now I know if I continue to look the other way I’ll lose Saul for good. I don’t know what he’s into, but I know he hates it and wants out. Something, or someone, is compelling him to do this, forcing him. We have to stop it.”

“Any clue as to what he might be mixed up in?”

Ryce shook his head. “No. He leaves every Friday and comes home Saturday morning. He’s always tired when he comes home. He crawls into bed and sleep for hours.”

“Is his routine the same every time he comes home?”

Ryce thought about it, then nodded. “He comes home, takes a shower, then crawls into bed and goes to sleep. It’s like he’s exhausted. I always assumed it was because he’d been having sex all night.”

“Okay, so whatever he’s doing is physical. Any ideas?”

“Not a one,” Ryce replied regretfully.

Thomas patted him on the shoulder. “We’ll figure it out, Ryce.”

“God, I hope so. The thought that Saul has been going through this all of these years alone... Fuck, what does that say about the kind of mate I’ve been? I should have done something earlier, said something at least.”

“You didn’t know, Ryce. You took Saul at his word that he was going out every Friday to fool around. You can’t be blamed for believing your mate.”

“I feel like such an idiot.”

Thomas chuckled. “Part of being mated, my friend.”

“It sucks,” Ryce grumbled.

“Yeah, it does. It’s—Hey, he’s turning off.”

Ryce looked back out the front window to see Saul leave the main road for a small dirt one. Ryce didn’t recognize the road. “Call Caleb and Jake. Tell them we’re on a dirt road about a mile from town.”

Thomas nodded and reached for his cell phone. He gave Caleb directions, staying on the line with him as they followed Saul up the

narrow road. Ryce was worried that Saul would see their car, but with the headlights off they had a good chance of staying hidden.

As the tree line opened into a large clearing, Ryce realized he shouldn't have worried. There were about twenty cars parked all around the clearing. People were coming and going, some on foot, others in vehicles.

If Ryce didn't know better he would have thought they had just arrived at a rave. Lights lit up the clearing. Loud music blared from large speakers set up in several different places, all aimed towards the clearing.

Ryce pulled the truck to a stop next to several other vehicles and shut it off. He stared out over the steering wheel in fascination and a bit of dread. Torches were lit in a circle in the middle of the clearing. People milled around the torch circle, but never crossed into it.

A large stand could be seen on the other side of the clearing. Ryce suspected it was an alcohol shack from all of the people coming and going with bottles in their hands. Next to that was a shack selling food.

"I'm not going to like this, Thomas."

"I don't think I am either."

"Should we wait for Caleb and Jake?"

"I don't know. Let's just sit here for a minute and see what happens."

Ryce nodded. He spotted Saul's familiar frame amid the growing crowd. Saul was walking towards the torch-lit circle. He seemed to be walking with a purpose. The cold, stony look on his face was one Ryce had never seen before. It sent cold shivers down his back.

When Saul stopped before another man, Ryce's interest picked up. Saul seemed to be arguing with the man, gesturing wildly, as if angry. Ryce didn't know what had been said, but he recognized the defeated look on Saul's face when he finally nodded, dropping his head to his chest.



When the strange man pointed towards the circle, Saul seemed to draw into himself. He nodded then walked slowly towards the circle. Ryce was stunned when Saul began unbuttoning his shirt, dropping it on the ground.

Saul did several stretching moves then bounced on his feet several times like a boxer, punching his fists into the air in front of him. Ryce suddenly knew what was happening and he felt dread steal the breath from his body.

“Oh my God, he’s fighting,” Ryce whispered.

“No. Saul doesn’t like to fight, you know that,” Thomas said. “Why would he do something like this?”

Ryce shook his head. “I don’t know, but that’s what’s going on. Look at him. He’s standing in the middle of a torch-lit circle getting ready for a fight.” Ryce looked at Thomas. “If he isn’t going to fight I’ll eat my hat.”

“Uh, Ryce, you’re not wearing a hat.”

“I know. I’m that positive he’s going to fight.”

## Chapter 9

Saul took several deep breaths. He needed to regulate his breathing, get himself under control if he had any chance of winning this fight. Hell, at this point he just hoped to come out of it in one piece. He could care less about winning.

Unfortunately, he knew what would happen if he lost. Drake had made that more than clear. If Saul lost, one or both of his mates would be made to pay. That pretty much meant that losing wasn't an option.

Saul still couldn't figure out how he had gotten mixed up with Drake the Snake, as Saul liked to refer to him. Drake Ramono, entrepreneur to the masses or snake in the grass. Either description fit, as far as Saul was concerned.

One little fight for money five years ago and Drake had controlled his life ever since. If Saul refused to appear or to fight, Drake threatened Ryce's life. And now, he was threatening Cary's life, too.

Saul didn't have a choice. No matter how much he tried, he couldn't watch out for Ryce and Cary twenty-four hours a day. Drake or one of his minions would get to them eventually and Saul couldn't allow that.

So, here he stood in the middle of some field in the middle of nowhere, waiting to fight some poor sap Drake had dug up. Saul's opponent would believe he had a chance at beating him, but Saul knew differently. If Saul didn't win, gaining Drake oodles of money, Ryce and Cary would pay.

Any way that he went about it, Ryce and Cary would pay. If Saul didn't fight, Ryce and Cary would be hurt. If he didn't win, Ryce and

Cary would be hurt. If he continued fighting, Ryce and Cary would be hurt. Saul just couldn't get a break.

"Are you ready?"

Saul glared at Drake. He so wanted to beat the slimy man into a pulp. He knew that desire showed in his eyes when Drake took a quick step back. "You do remember what I said, Drake? This is the last time. I won't be fighting anymore."

"Oh, I remember. This will be the last time that you fight. I heard you loud and clear."

Saul tilted his head slightly as he gazed at Drake. Something was wrong, but damned if Saul could figure it out. Drake was up to something. He'd given up way too easy, especially for someone who had kept Saul on a short leash for the last five years.

"You win this last match, beat this one last opponent, and you're free to go. Lose, and you'll continue to fight for me until I say otherwise," Drake said, a sneer on his face. "I want this opponent obliterated."

"I didn't agree to that. I said one last fight. I never said anything about continuing to fight if I lost tonight," Saul growled.

"But you will," Drake replied. He held up a hand filled with cash. "Fight this one last fight for me, Saul, and you can leave free and clear. I'll never bother you again. But remember, you have to win. I have a lot of money riding on this fight. If you lose..."

Saul took a deep breath, holding himself back from reaching out for Drake's neck. His fingers itched with the need to wrap around his scrawny little neck. "Fine. I'll fight this one last fight, and win. Then I'm done. Clear?"

"Crystal."

Saul still didn't like the sly look on Drake's face. He was up to something. Saul just couldn't figure out what. Frankly, he didn't care. He just wanted to get this fight over with so he could go home to Ryce and Cary.

He had some groveling to do at the least. A lot of apologizing to do, too. Saul just hoped that once he explained things to Ryce and Cary that they would forgive him and let him be a part of their lives.

“Let’s just get this over with, Drake.”

“By all means. Step into the circle and meet your opponent,” Drake said. “And remember, I expect you to win. Hell, I don’t even care if you kill the guy this time. It would certainly make both our lives easier.”

Saul’s eyebrows drew together in a frown. What in the hell did that mean? Before he could question Drake, the crowd started cheering. Saul took a deep breath, his fists clenching, and turned to face his opponent.

A small gasp escaped Saul’s lips and terror filled him as he watched Cary being pushed into the center of the torches. What in the hell was he doing here? He should have been at home with Ryce.

Saul scowled at Drake, taking a threatening step in his direction.

“You don’t want to do that, Saul,” Drake quickly said. He pointed behind Saul to a man standing off to one side. Saul’s heart sank with despair when he spotted the gun aimed in Cary’s direction.

“Touch me and he dies,” Drake said.

“I can’t fight my mate,” Saul spit out between clenched teeth.

“If you don’t, I lose a lot of money. I would be very unhappy if I lost money, Saul. So unhappy, who knows who might get hurt in the melee.”

“If I fight my mate, he’s going to get hurt. You know that.”

“True. But if you fight and win, I won’t kill him. On the other hand, if you fight him he might have a chance of living. Depends on how badly you beat him. That part is really up to you, Saul. Just make sure you win.”

Saul knew he was beaten. He had to fight Cary to keep him alive. Didn’t that twist of fate beat all? If Saul didn’t beat the shit out of his mate, Cary would be killed. If Saul did beat the shit out of his mate,

Cary might die anyway. There really was only one way out of this mess.

“Fine. I’ll fight him. But if you touch a hair on his head, I will come after you and there is no one, and I mean no one, that will be able to stop me,” Saul said.

He had the satisfaction of seeing Drake’s face pale right before he turned away. It was a cold comfort, but a comfort nonetheless. It would probably be the last one he had ever had.

Saul stepped into the circle. He knew the exact moment that Cary spotted him by the small cry he made. Cary dashed across the clearing and threw himself into Saul’s arms. Saul couldn’t help but cradle Cary’s body to his one last time.

He leaned down to whisper into Cary’s ear. “I love you, Cary. Don’t ever forget that. Tell Ryce I love him and I’m sorry for everything.”

“Saul?” Cary murmured. He lifted his tear-streaked face and Saul brushed the sunlight-blond hair back from his face. He tried to drink in as much of Cary’s delicate features as he could, but the growing noise from the crowd told him he only had moments before all hell would break loose.

“When I tell you to run, I want you to run into the woods as fast as you can. Don’t stop and don’t look back. Just run,” Saul whispered.

“Saul? What’s going on? What is this place?”

Saul shook his head. “It doesn’t matter, Cary. You just need to run when I tell you to. These people, they will try to kill you if you stay.”

“What about you?” Cary cried. “I can’t leave you here.”

Saul was silent for a moment. He could see the desperation and fear in Cary’s eyes. “I just need to make a little distraction first. I’m going to push you into the crowd. When I do, I want you to run. Understand?”

“You’ll be right behind me?”

Saul hated that his last words to Cary would be a lie. “Yes, baby, I’ll be right behind you. I just want you to run and don’t stop until you find Ryce.”

Cary nodded his head slightly. His eyes darted back and forth, looking at all the people surrounding them. Saul could see the frantic fear in his eyes. He gave Cary’s arms a small squeeze.

“Ready?” he whispered.

Before Cary could nod again and give them away, Saul pushed him. With deep regret, he punched Cary in the stomach. He controlled his punch enough that Cary wouldn’t really be hurt, just shocked.

It worked. Cary grabbed his stomach and looked up at Saul in total confusion. Before Cary could voice the questions flashing through his eyes, Saul pushed him again, forcing Cary back step by step until they stood on the edge of the crowd closest to the trees.

With one last look around, Saul shoved Cary back into the cheering crowd. Before Cary had even stopped falling backwards, Saul punched the person closest to him, then another and another. He pushed and shoved, kicked and hit, until the entire crowd began fighting each other.

It was just the distraction he needed. Saul looked over the heads of those fighting to the trees Cary had run towards. He could just make out Cary’s body running away. Satisfied that Cary was safely on his way to Ryce, Saul turned back towards the crowd. He had a snake to find.

\* \* \* \*

Ryce’s mouth dropped open in shock when he saw Cary shoved into the circle of torches. Cary was supposed to be home safe and sound with Lucas. What in the hell was he doing here? “Thomas?”

“Already on it,” Thomas replied as he dialed the house with his cell phone.

Ryce's eyes were so intent on the happenings in the clearing that he jumped when someone knocked on his window. He glanced over to see his brother, Caleb, standing there. Ryce quickly opened the door.

"Caleb, they have Cary."

"I know. Lucas called a few minutes ago. Someone called the house and told Cary that Saul had been hurt. Cary ran out the door before Lucas could stop him. By the time he got outside, Cary was being driven off in a car." Caleb took a deep breath. Ryce could see that Caleb was very angry. "They were waiting for Cary, Ryce, outside our house. Whoever is doing this knows where we live and they were waiting for Cary."

Ryce climbed out of the truck and closed the door. A moment later, Thomas had joined them. "Where's Jake?"

"He went back to the house to help protect Micah and Leyland. Neither of us felt safe knowing that they know where we live."

Ryce nodded. He would have done the same thing. Protecting one's mate was the most important thing for them. Ryce looked back over at the gathering crowd. Looks like he needed to do the same thing.

"Come on. It's time to end this once and for all," Ryce said as he headed towards the clearing. They had just reached the edge of the crowd when all hell broke loose. Ryce looked up just in time to see Saul shove Cary into the crowd and Cary crawl away.

Ryce stopped and watched for a moment. When he saw Cary climb out of the fighting crowd and run towards the woods, he gestured for Thomas to go after him. He yanked on Caleb's arm.

"Thomas is going after Cary. You and I need to get Saul."

Caleb nodded and the two of them began fighting their way to the middle of the clearing. By the time they broke through the throng of brawling spectators, they had bruises and abrasions on several different areas of their bodies.

Ryce reached the clearing just in time to see Saul take off after a small man running in the opposite direction. Ryce chased after them. He could hear Caleb bringing up the rear. His heart frantically beat in his chest with each step he took.

By the time Ryce reached the wooded area where Saul had run to, Saul had the small man pinned against a large tree. His canines had dropped down and his claws were extended. Saul was growling low in his throat.

“Saul!”

Saul’s head whipped around. Ryce could see that he was about to shift. Even his eyes had changed, the whites bled away to leave only golden brown in their wake.

“Don’t do this, Saul,” Ryce pleaded. He could have cared less who the man was or if he died. Ryce just didn’t want Saul to kill him. He’d regret it for the rest of his life. Saul hated killing and violence. He always had.

Saul’s head swung back around to the man he had pinned. “He needs to die!”

“No, Saul, this isn’t the way to do it. You’ll regret this,” Ryce reasoned.

“I’ll celebrate and dance on his grave,” Saul snarled. “He stole five years of my life. He stole five years of our life. And then he had the balls to try to force me to fight Cary. He needs to die.”

“Saul, please. Let it end here. You don’t have to...do whatever it is you do for him anymore. Let’s just go home.”

Saul glared at Ryce. “Do you really think it’s that simple, Ryce? Do you think this pile of shit is just going to let me go without trying something? I make him too much money.”

“Saul, why would you get involved with scum like this in the first place? What’s he holding over you?”

Saul was quiet, so quiet, Ryce didn’t think he had heard his question. “Saul?”

“You, okay?”



“Me?”

“You remember that car accident you had a couple of weeks after we mated? And the time you got mugged three years ago? Or the time someone tried to force your car off the road last year?”

“It was him?” Ryce asked, pointing to the trembling man Saul held by the throat.

“Yes!” Saul shouted. “Why do you think I left every Friday? Because he said he’d kill you if I didn’t fight for him. And he proved to me that he could get to you time and time again.”

Saul jerked Drake around in front of him and held him with his head tilted back. “Every damn time I tried to quit, something bad happened to you. Now that we have Cary, he wants me to fight for him two nights a week. Two mates, two nights. And you think he deserves to live?”

Okay, Ryce realized that Saul might have a point. Drake probably needed to be taken out just to save humanity. God forbid the man reproduces. Still, Saul shouldn’t be the one to kill him.

“Saul, I can’t let you do this no matter how much it needs to be done. You’d hate yourself in the end,” Ryce said as he stepped closer. He slowly reached out and grabbed Saul’s wrist.

“Come on, baby,” Ryce whispered as he pried Saul’s hands away from around Drake’s neck. “He doesn’t have any power over you anymore. I’m safe and Cary is safe. Please, Saul, let him go.”

The moment Saul released Drake, Ryce pushed the man away from him. He shoved Drake into Caleb’s waiting grasp, then followed Saul down to the ground as he fell to his knees, wrapping his arms around his mate.

“It’s going to be okay, Saul,” Ryce whispered into his hair, placing small kisses there.

“I was never unfaithful, Ryce. I swear. I haven’t even looked at another man except Cary since we mated. I would never do that to you,” Saul said rapidly.

Ryce tilted Saul's face up to his. He wiped away the tears streaming down Saul's face. "I believe you, Saul."

"You believe me? Why would you believe me after everything I've done to you, everything I've said?" Saul asked, looking a bit astounded. "I've told you for years that I was going into town to get laid."

Ryce smiled. He could feel his own tears prickling at the corners of his eyes. "I believe you because you said it was so. I love you, Saul. And as long as you love me, that's all I need to know."

"I do love you, Ryce, and I'm sorry that I did this to you."

"You didn't do this, Saul. You were just trying to protect me," Ryce said. "Just promise me, if something like this ever happens again, you'll come to me and we can take care of it together. We're mates, a family. You don't have to go through these things alone."

Ryce held Saul, rocking him back and forth. They had all been through a lot, but it was finally over. Saul could come home for good and he'd never have to leave again if he didn't want to. It was almost unbelievable.

"God, Ryce. I was so scared," Saul uttered softly. "Drake said just one more fight and I could go free. I just had to win one more fight for him. And then he brought Cary out. I knew that I had to—" Saul suddenly looked up, his eyes frantic. "Cary! He's out in the woods. I told him to run and keep on running. We have to find him."

"Ssshhh, it's okay," Ryce said as he pulled Saul back down to settle against him. "Thomas went after Cary. They should be waiting out by the truck."

Saul was silent for a moment, then nodded. He got to his feet, wiping his arm across his face to get rid of the tears falling down his cheeks. "Okay, let's go get our mate, then."

Ryce smiled as he stood up. "I think that's a very good idea." He grabbed Saul's hand and walked him towards the truck.

"What do you want me to do with this?" Caleb asked.

Ryce glanced back to see Drake held securely in Caleb's tight grip. "Bring him along. We'll decide what to do with him later."

Caleb shrugged and began pushing the whimpering Drake towards the clearing. Ryce and Saul led the way. By the time they got closer to the clearing, Saul was nearly sprinting in his haste to get to Cary.

Ryce glanced around at the nearly empty clearing. There were signs of a party but almost everyone had left, and in a hurry, too. The only people still milling about were a few party goers and a couple of deputies. Caleb must have called them to clear the area. Sometimes it helped to have a brother who doubled as the local sheriff.

The moment Cary spotted them, he broke away from Thomas and ran towards them, throwing himself into Saul's arms. Ryce gave them just a moment as Saul wrapped his arms around Cary and buried his face in Cary's hair.

Ryce could hear Saul murmuring softly to Cary. He knew Saul was asking Cary for the same forgiveness he'd asked of Ryce. He also knew that Cary's answer would be the same as his. There was nothing to forgive.

When Ryce felt that Saul and Cary had enough time to bond again, he stepped forward, clearing his throat. Two faces turned towards him, one with surprise, one with a grin.

"Do you mind?" Cary asked. "I'm getting some loving here."

"Yeah, I know." Ryce chuckled. "I'm hoping to get some myself."

Ryce laughed when Cary rolled his eyes and held out his hand. Before Ryce could step into his arms, Caleb walked up, pushing Drake ahead of him. Cary quickly dropped his arms and started towards Drake, a glare working its way into his blue eyes.

"Is that him?"

Royce looked over his shoulder then nodded. "Yeah."

"I'm going to kill him."

"Cary!" Royce exclaimed. He hadn't realized he had such a blood-thirsty mate.

Saul caught Cary around the chest and held him back when Cary lunged at Drake. "Oh no, baby, if I can't kill him, you can't either."

"Fine. I won't kill him. I'll just maim him a little," Cary growled as he struggled in Saul's arms. Saul looked at Ryce in desperation as he tried to hold onto Cary. It wasn't easy. Cary was pissed and fighting to get to Drake.

Ryce shrugged. "I say let him go."

Saul gave Ryce his first smile since the horrible evening had started. He simply opened his arms and released Cary, then stepped over to stand next to Ryce. They both crossed their arms over their chests and stood back to watch the fireworks.

Cary stalked towards Drake. As he advanced, Drake took several steps back until he bumped into Caleb. Cary continued to stalk him. Ryce saw Cary's canines drop down and his claws extend. Cary brought one hand up and stroked his long claw along Drake's cheek.

"Do you know who I am?"

Drake quickly shook his head.

"I am the mate to Saul, as is Ryce. But you knew that, didn't you?"

Drake nodded, gulping audibly.

"Do you have any idea of the hell you have put us through for your own personal gain, for your own pleasure? Do you know what you've stolen from us?"

Drake gulped again then shook his head. Ryce could see him trembling. He was pretty sure that Drake had wet his pants. The scent of urine was strong in the air. Ryce smirked. His little mate scared the hell out of Drake.

"What should I do with you, hmmm? You tortured my mate for five years. You forced him to fight against his will. You wanted him to fight me to the death. Now that the tables have turned, what do you think I should do?"

Drake mumbled, he stammered, he spouted unintelligible gibberish. Ryce hid his smile behind his hand. He could see Thomas

out of the corner of his eye, standing next to the truck. He had a cell phone in his hand and he seemed to be giving the person on the other end a play by play of what was going on.

Ryce was pretty sure that this incident would go down in the annals of their family legends. His little mate threatening a grown man until he peed his pants. If Ryce hadn't loved Cary before, he would have fallen just then.

"I'm going to tell you what I will do if you ever set foot in my territory again," Cary said as he circled Drake. His voice was low and menacing. "If you ever come into my territory again, if you ever threaten my mates or one of my family members, I will tear you limb from limb and clean my teeth with your bones."

Cary stopped directly in front of Drake. Ryce found it pretty comical. Drake was several inches taller than Cary, but he still cowered away from him. If the situation hadn't been so serious, Ryce was sure he would have been on the floor rolling with laughter.

"You can't do this," Drake said, his voice quivering. "I know people, important people."

Cary let out a bitter laugh. "Do you think I give a shit? Do you honestly think that anyone you know can stop me from killing you if I want to?"

When Drake looked at Ryce and Saul, Cary grabbed him by the chin and forced his face back around to his. "They may be bigger than me, but I'm the one you need to worry about. They're just here to look pretty."

Even Ryce's eyebrows rose at Cary's statement. He and Saul were just there to look pretty? What in the hell did that mean? A moment later, Ryce's jaw dropped as he stared at Cary in shock.

Cary had shifted, but it wasn't a normal shift. He hadn't shifted into a wolf. Instead, Cary had suddenly grown to nearly seven feet tall. He grew a snout and fur like any other shift, only he stood on two legs like a man, instead of four like a wolf.

Cary snarled deep in his throat, a low, deep growl. "I told you, I'm the one you need to worry about."

Drake let out a terrified scream and pushed away from Cary. He backed up several feet, then ran towards the clearing as fast as he could. The last Ryce saw of Drake, he was running frantically, screaming that monsters really did exist.

Ryce watched Cary drop his head back and let out a loud howl. Several answering howls could be heard off in the distance. Ryce knew from the pitch of those howls that they were from the four-legged variety of wolf and not shifters.

Still, Ryce did arch his head back and let out his own howl in response. He heard Caleb, Thomas and Saul join in until they were all howling at their victory. They had won the fight. It might not have been the same type of fight that Saul had been forced to do, but it had been a fight.

As Cary shifted back to his human form, Saul chuckled. Ryce glanced at him in query. Saul shook his head. "Now, why in the hell didn't I think of that?"

## Chapter 10

Cary bounded down the stairs, heading for the kitchen. His mind wandered as he hummed some nonsense tune. He felt happy. In the weeks since they had rescued Saul from Drake, life had just gotten better.

Saul never left on Fridays anymore. In fact, all three of them had decided that Fridays belonged to just them. They usually curled up in their room together and watched movies in between loving each other or went on a picnic. As long as Ryce, Saul and Cary were together, that's all that mattered.

Cary had started towards the kitchen when Micah's laughter and Caleb's low voice coming from the front porch caught his attention. Curious, he walked in that direction. He pushed the front door open and stepped out onto the porch.

"What're you two laughing about?"

"Them," Micah laughed as he pointed out into the yard. Cary turned to see Ryce and Saul dressed in nothing but cut-off denim shorts. Saul had a hose in his hands and he chased Ryce around the yard as he tried to spray him with the cold water.

Cary laughed as Ryce tried to turn the tables. He ran towards Saul, grabbing the hose and pushing it back in his direction, soaking Saul to the skin. Saul yelled and laughed. Ryce yelled and laughed.

Cary just laughed. More and more, as Saul began to feel comfortable and safe, he opened up to Cary and Ryce. There was a humorous side to Saul that had come out recently. It tickled Cary pink and drove Ryce crazy, usually because Ryce ended up being the butt of Saul's jokes and pranks.

It had been hard for Saul to come to terms with everything that had been stolen from him and then suddenly returned. Cary knew that there were some things that would only come with time, but that time was getting closer every day.

Ryce and Cary did everything they could to assure Saul that they didn't hold him at fault and that they loved him unconditionally. In return, Saul never took their love and understanding for granted.

Cary distantly noted Micah and Caleb going back inside. His attention was centered on the water fight in the front yard that had suddenly turned into a kissing frenzy. Ryce had his hands clenched in Saul's hair. Saul had his arms around Ryce's waist. There wasn't an inch of space between them or their lips.

Not wanting to be left out of the festivities, Cary quietly crept down the steps and over to the kissing pair. As silently as he could, Cary picked up the discarded hose and held his thumb over the end, forcing the water out even faster.

With a wicked grin on his face, Cary pointed the hose at his two mates and sprayed them from head to toe. "You two look like you need to cool off," he laughed loudly.

A moment later, his eyes widened. Cary dropped the hose and ran as fast as his feet would carry him across the yard. Ryce and Saul chased after him. Cary screamed as strong arms wrapped around his waist and picked him up, only to drop him down to the ground.

Cary laughed as he looked up into Saul's deep hazel eyes and his mate's body settled over his. Ryce's moss-green eyes looked down on him from above his head. Cary struggled as Ryce pushed his arms over his head and held them down. He was totally pinned to the ground by his mates.

"Oh, hey, guys." Cary chuckled. "I...uh...you looked hot."

Saul grinned. Ryce grinned. Cary got worried. As eager hands began pulling at his clothes, tickling him, Cary laughed even harder. Yep, life was good. And this time, no one was going to steal anything from them.



**THE END**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three, men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70-pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories.

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