



***Tabled Discussions, Inches of Trust #8***  
***By AR Moler***

You couldn't count on time together during the holidays when you were involved with a homicide detective. Brian Townsend had been pleasantly surprised that he and his lover, Tristan Blake, had actually managed to carve some nice memories out of that busy time of year. Inevitably the shit had hit the fan however, and damn near the entire month of January had been a

*A Torquere Press Sip - 1*

disaster of interrupted dates and postponed evenings together. The really appalling amount of snowfall that had occurred so far this winter in combination with scheduling problems had conspired against the pair of lovers.

Blissfully, the two of them were guaranteed a few days of uninterrupted time over this long second weekend in February. Back at Christmas, Tristan had given Brian the gift of a reservation at a Victorian era B&B. Due to the popularity of the establishment, the first available weekend had been the eighth, ninth and tenth of February. Okay, so it wasn't actually Valentine's Day, but it was close enough for Brian to throw a few mushily romantic extras into the trunk of his car.

A couple bottles of Framboise Lambic, a box of truffles (because God knew they weren't going to melt in New York's winter temperatures), some candles and candlesticks, and a handful of other things all went into a bag along with some cocoa butter massage oil. Hey, they might as well smell like chocolate, too.

Brian glanced at his watch. It was just a little after eight a.m. and that meant Tristan should be just about getting off the night shift. He had already cruised by Tristan's house and picked up the suitcase left in the front hallway. Traffic was at the usual snail's pace, but luckily Brian didn't have too much further to go.

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Three weeks of night shift in and of itself wasn't horrible. The worst facet of that was the slender amount of time Tristan had been able to spend with Brian. They had only managed to see each other once a week lately, as Tristan often didn't get off shift until after Brian had

gone to work in the morning. Evenings were just about as bad.

As Tristan stood in the freezing cold dawn drizzle waiting for the forensic people to finish collecting evidence on the latest homicide, his mind revisited the idea of whether life would be easier if Brian lived with him. Tristan knew the bitter memories of living with and then breaking up with his previous boyfriend, Eric, were coloring his opinion on the concept. Granted, Brian was light years different in temperament than Eric, but still...Tristan was hesitant to take that step.

"Hey, Blake, the meat wagon's here for the body," called one of the tech women with a camera in her hand. "Tell them we'll be done in ten minutes."

"Yeah, okay," he responded, heading in the direction of the medical examiner's van. The female vic had been dead several days already, body found in an abandoned, burnt-out carcass of a car. Tristan wasn't sure why the processing was taking so long; between the rats and the weather there couldn't possibly be much discernable evidence left at this point.

"You standing around with your dick in your hand waitin' on us?" asked a short, barrel-chested man pulling a stretcher and a body bag out of the back of the medical examiner's office vehicle. "Oh no, I forgot, you'd rather have your dick in some other guy's hand."

Tristan clenched his teeth, suppressing the desire to haul off and hit the man. He couldn't remember a single encounter with the loud-mouthed bigot that hadn't started with some filthy derogatory comment.

"The forensic people are almost done," was all Tristan allowed himself to say.

It was another irritating, cold hour before everything was done. If Tristan hadn't taken the next three days as

vacation, he'd have been stuck with assisting in canvassing the neighborhood for potential witnesses.

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The car door opened and Brian watched Tristan slide in. The man looked miserable, annoyed and wet. Brian leaned across and offered Tristan a kiss, surprised by just how cold Tristan's mouth was against his own.

"Drive," said Tristan, slumping back into the seat as he jerked the door shut.

"Bad night?" asked Brian. He guessed from the half-drenched state of Tristan's coat and hair and his reddened face, that his lover had spent a fair number of the early morning hours outside in the foul weather.

"Yes."

Oh, one word responses this morning, it wasn't like that was uncommon for the man when he was stressed. At the next stop light, Brian took a good long look at Tristan, who was staring out the window. Tristan's expression was tight, circles of exhaustion under his eyes. Brian wasn't terribly surprised when Tristan's hand crept around the gear shift to lie on top of his thigh.

Verbal communication was never Tristan's strong suit when it came to emotions, but Brian was learning that little touches were his lover's substitute for the missing words.

"Why don't you shrug out of your wet jacket and try to catch some sleep?" Brian suggested. "I'll wake you up for lunch."

"Maybe."

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At least it was dry and warm in the car. Tristan would have preferred a hot shower and a change of clothes, but the game plan was to get on the road as soon as he'd gotten off work. He stared out the window, barely registering the vehicles and buildings as they passed.

After a number of minutes, the motion of the car and the soft music from the radio lulled Tristan into drowsiness. Maybe Brian's suggestion of sleep would be a good idea. Tristan stopped fighting the heaviness of his eyelids and let himself slouch against the window. In a bed with Brian would have been a preferable location for a nap, but that would have to wait for later in the day.

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The drive took roughly five hours and Brian noted that Tristan spent the majority of that time sleeping, except for a brief lunch stop. It wasn't like he minded. He knew that Tristan needed to catch what sleep he could if the weekend was going to go according to plan. Not that there was actually much of a plan beyond being together.

Pulling up in front of the inn, Brian sat for a moment looking at the roofline and the way the porches were laid out. It was an occupational hazard for an architect. He guessed the place had been built right around the turn of the century, early 1900s.

Tristan showed no signs of stirring, so Brian reached across and shook him gently. "Rise and shine. We're there."

Tristan blinked in the afternoon sunshine and stretched a little before climbing out.

"At least it looks like the picture on the website," Tristan commented, obviously not fully awake yet. His breath steamed the air. "I guess we should go check in." As he came around the front of the car, he held out his hand to Brian.

Hand in hand, the two of them walked up the steps to the main entrance. Inside, Brian took immediate notice of the dark wood beadboard lining the interior staircase and the exquisite joinery of the steps themselves. He must have been standing there staring because Tristan whispered in his ear.

"You can drool over the architecture later."

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Check-in was smooth and they were given keys to one of the carriage house rooms. Walking across to the other building, they unlocked the door and found a huge four-poster bed, a whirlpool tub in one corner and wide brick fireplace.

"This is amazing." Brian set his bags down. "I've hardly seen you all week." He pulled Tristan down onto the bed beside him.

"Yeah well... working nights is sometimes part of the job."

"I know, but we've got to come up with a plan. Maybe you could come crawl in bed with me at my apartment when you get off work in the morning, and we could get in a little snuggle time if nothing else."

"Mmm, maybe." Tristan's hand skimmed down Brian's arm.

Brian nipped at Tristan's chin, then he rolled on top of Tristan and delivered a deep, passionate kiss. It was

returned with interest as Tristan's arms wrapped around Brian's torso.

"Missed you," he mumbled against Tristan's lips. "I wanna screw you stupid. You interested?" Brian was disconcerted by the sudden stillness of his lover beneath him. "Tris?" Brian said carefully.

"Can't we just..." Tristan began, then his voice trailed off.

"Can't we just what?"

"I don't ... the only person I ever..." Tristan couldn't seem to get the words out.

"You've never bottomed," Brian speculated.

"No, I have... once." Tristan squirmed out from under Brian and stumbled across the room.

For just a moment, Brian thought he was headed for the door, but Tristan veered and headed for the window. He stopped in front of it and stared outside, his back to Brian, hands in his pockets. Brian allowed himself a small sigh of relief.

Open mouth, insert foot. Brian cursed himself for blindly assuming that Tristan would be willing to switch hit, even occasionally. How could he have known it was such a sensitive topic? Brian had a sudden revelation. "Eric," he said softly, referring to Tristan's careless, egotistical prick of an ex.

"Yeah."

"And you didn't like it."

"It fucking hurt," whispered Tristan.

Brian was silent for a while, wanting to hunt Eric down and choke the ever-loving shit out of that man. Eric had hurt Tristan in just about every conceivable way emotionally, and now, it turned out, physically too. He slid off the bed and went to Tristan, placing a hand on his lover's shoulder.

"It was a suggestion, not a demand," Brian said.

Tristan glanced at him. "I'm sorry I'm messing this up."

"You're not messing anything up. Come lie back down on the bed with me. We don't even have to get naked, I just want to hold you, okay?"

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If being in Brian's arms felt like a place of safety, Tristan couldn't figure out why the idea of letting his lover do *that thing* made him want to haul off and punch something.

He cared about Brian a lot and it continued to astound him the amount of shit the man was willing to put up with. Crazy work schedules and interrupted dates, job stress and sometimes danger were the hell every cop relationship had to endure. Every time Tristan ran headlong into another obstacle or bitter memory, Brian responded with care. Did that patience have a limit?

Brian's hands traced slow patterns along Tristan's back, and he was faintly surprised at how much the gentle touch was easing the tension from his body as they lay on the bed. Tristan began to kiss the side of his lover's throat, working his way up to Brian's mouth.

Their lips met, brushing, nibbling, opening to allow the hot slide of tongues. There was no hurry to the action. After weeks of rushed and infrequent moments together, Tristan realized just how much he was longing for even a few hours of guaranteed time with Brian.

"I need you in my life," Tristan whispered. "Please don't let me fuck this up." He wasn't certain if the plea was to Brian or some higher power.

"You're doing fine," replied Brian. "We're here. We're together, and that's all that really matters... How do you feel about snowmobiling?"

Tristan had to chuckle at the lack of segue. "I have no idea. It's not something I've ever done."

"It's pretty cool, a little like riding a motorcycle but in the snow."

"I take it that means it's something you've done before?"

"Yeah, a couple of times. I went with a buddy in college. Down in the foyer I saw there was info and scheduling paperwork. So, are you interested? I figured it might be a cool way to spend a couple of hours," Brian said.

Tristan knew it was as much a diversion tactic as the long slow make-out session on the bed. "It sounds like a good idea."

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Two freezing cold hours romping through the snowy woodlands on a snowmobile left Brian exhilarated but chilled to the bone. Tristan looked like he was half frozen, too.

The moment Brian entered the room, he made straight for the huge whirlpool tub and turned on the hot water full blast.

"Good idea," commented Tristan, as he began to peel out of cold, snow damp clothing.

"Then maybe I'll be able to feel my fingers again." Brian fumbled open the zipper of his jacket with partially numb fingers.

"You're probably even more frozen than me because you were driving." Tristan shed his clothes more slowly.

"After we get thawed out, we need food. I brought some stuff with us, but it's not really meal oriented."

"Chips and soda?"

"No, raspberry Lambic, chocolate truffles, and some way too expensive out of season strawberries," Brian replied.

Tristan looked vaguely startled. "Aw hell, I didn't even think... I know it's February but..." His face colored in embarrassment.

Brian had gotten as far as getting his jacket and sweater off. His jeans were unzipped but he hadn't wrenched them off the under-layer of long johns yet.

Brian crooked a finger at Tristan and when he stepped up close Brian threaded a couple of fingers through Tristan's belt loop. "I didn't really expect you to remember and Valentine's Day is actually still several days away. I figured this weekend was as close as we'd get to spending it together. Now hurry up and get naked so we can get in." He jerked a thumb in the direction of the tub.

"Hold that thought. I don't think this place does room service, but since they serve breakfast, they have to have a kitchen. Maybe I can convince them to throw together something that would pass for dinner and then we wouldn't have to go out."

Brian gazed at Tristan. The man was obviously trying hard to make up for what he thought was a faux pas. "I guess it's worth a try."

Tristan put his shoes back on and placed a kiss on Brian's lips. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

After Tristan left, Brian continued stripping, thinking about the snowmobiling as much as anything else. He had been slightly surprised when Tristan wanted him to drive. His lover had passed it off as a matter of

experience: Brian had been snowmobiling a few times before and he hadn't. But maybe it was a subtle way of trying to offer Brian control of something that bothered Tristan less. Then again, Brian wondered about the wrist damage Tristan had sustained falling down a flight of subway steps chasing a suspect back before Christmas. Tristan was back on full duty at work now and had seldom mentioned the injury over the past couple of weeks. That didn't mean that Brian hadn't noticed Tristan still favoring it at times. The whole clutching mechanism on the snowmobile along with the rough terrain would quite probably have given Tristan's wrist a good beating.

Once he was naked, Brian found two long terry cloth robes in the bathroom and he deposited them near the tub, along with a bottle of soap. He was just stepping into the water when Tristan returned bearing a large picnic basket.

"Apparently dinner on the fly is not an uncommon request. They keep a couple of these stashed in the walk-in," Tristan said, setting the basket in front of the fireplace. "It supposedly has bread and cheese, cold fried chicken and a few other things."

"Way cool."

Tristan pushed the switch to ignite the gas fireplace and turned off all the lights but one. He shed his clothes and slid into the water beside Brian.

"Oh God, this feels good," Tristan said with a slight groan.

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The heat of the water immediately began to work magic on the cold ache of Tristan's hands and feet.

"Damn, snowmobiling gives a whole new meaning to wind chill."

Brian slid across the tub and sat on Tristan's lap, straddling his legs across Tristan's. He whispered, "I'm sure I can think of all sorts of way to warm you up."

The drag of blunt fingernails along the underside of his cock sent tendrils of a different kind of heat through Tristan's body. Brian began to kiss him, soft nips and sucks at his mouth, moving down the side of his neck toward his collarbone.

Tristan shivered.

"Still cold?" Brian asked.

"No."

"Hungry?"

"Yes," Tristan said.

"For food?"

"Maybe."

"Then we should wash up and go sit by the fire."

Tristan let Brian soap him up, enjoying the slide of warm hands on his skin. When they finished, Brian offered Tristan a thick white terry cloth robe.

They ate on the floor before the fireplace, flames casting warm flickering light, and then Brian broke out the things he'd brought.

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As Brian turned out the last light and lit the candles he'd brought, he saw Tristan pick up the bottle of Framboise Lambic.

Tristan was gazing at the label with a touch of a puzzled frown on his face. "With a name like Lambic, somehow I wasn't expecting drawings of fruit on the label."

Brian snickered, and his brain hit overdrive. "Don't be sheepish at trying new things," he quipped.

Tristan grimaced.

"Ewe wool probably like it, but I won't ram it down your throat. That would be a baaaaaad idea."

Tristan rolled his eyes. "Looks like it was expensive."

"A little. I'm not a sheeps skate, but I can't afford a lamb-orghini." Brian let out a yelp as Tristan goosed him up under the robe.

"You are just plain evil."

Brian laughed. "Thank you." He made a little bow and Tristan dragged him to the floor, pinning him to the carpet and kissing him soundly.

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The cocoa butter laced massage oil did smell a hell of a lot like chocolate, Brian noted as he began to work it into the muscles of Tristan's back. Tristan was splayed naked on his belly on top of the robe he'd been wearing. Brian's hands slid smoothly across skin as he made his way slowly toward his lover's waist. He spent several minutes grinding knuckles and then fingertips into the tightness of Tristan's lower back, before gliding his thumb lightly across the very top of the cleft in Tristan's ass.

"Just do it," Tristan said suddenly. "Just do it. I'll... cope."

Brian stilled his hands. "No."

"I know you want to top me. Just go ahead and do it!"

This was swiftly heading toward Tristan trying to start an argument and Brian tried to think of a way to defuse it. He moved from his position kneeling across

the back of Tristan's thighs, rolled his partner over, and sat on the floor beside Tristan.

"Do you think you hurt me when we have sex?" Brian asked gently.

There was a flutter of confusion and distress across Tristan's features. "What? No, God no, if I did, why didn't you tell me?"

Brian laid a hand on Tristan's chest. "That's the point. You don't hurt me. You're gentle. You take your time, and I get a *lot* of pleasure from having sex with you. Do you think I would hurt you? Or that I wouldn't stop if I even thought I was causing you pain?"

"No." Tristan's voice was barely audible.

"Eric was a self-absorbed piece of shit, who I'm guessing just couldn't be bothered to care what you got out of having sex with him... Unless he did it on purpose?" The odd expression on Tristan's face made Brian press a little further. "Was it intentional? Or maybe I should ask, was it consensual?"

"I was sober. It was consensual... We'd had a fight the day before..." Tristan's voice hitched a little.

"So I'm guessing it was supposed to be make-up sex in a twisted sort of way?"

"He asked. I said okay...and it st-started out all right."

"What was the fight about?" Brian asked.

"Ron's death."

The mention of Tristan's work partner and best friend, who had died in a car accident, brought a pang of sympathy to Brian's heart. It also made him believe that what had gone on between Eric and Tristan in bed had possibly been very intentional. Where did one draw the line between rough sex and dubious consent? Jesus Christ, there were days when Brian thought he ought to

take up karate for the sole purpose of beating the shit out of Eric.

"I'm sorry." Brian traced a thumb along Tristan's cheekbone.

"Please... just do it."

"No. You're wound so tight it might hurt no matter how careful I am."

"I'll deal. At least I'll know you're trying to go easy."

Tears burned in Brian's eyes at the amount of discomfort that statement must have caused Tristan. "The object is not for you to *deal*. The idea is for it to feel good, preferably amazing." A tentative idea crossed Brian's mind. "How 'bout you let me get on with the massage and I'll let my fingers do a little rubbing between your butt cheeks, and maybe my tongue, too."

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Here Tristan was trying to work himself up to allowing Brian to do something he was obviously interested in and getting shot down. More than once, too. A mixture of strange relief and guilty confusion swirled through his thoughts.

"That'd be all right," he replied to Brian's offer of something more low key.

"Flip back over then.."

Brian's weight settled across the back of Tristan's legs again and his hands returned to kneading and rubbing from the nape of Tristan's neck down the top of his ass. Occasionally he could feel the drag of Brian's prick along his own skin.

A finger rubbed the same spot Brian had drifted to before, the very base of his spine where the crack of his behind began, then it moved higher again. Brian

repeated the exploratory touch a number of times before going lower. Fingers slick with massage oil grazed lightly down the length of his crack and reflexively, Tristan's glutes tightened for a moment, expecting... He wasn't entirely sure what he was expecting: pain, pressure, burn... just something unpleasant. Instead it was merely a caress, not all that different from times when Brian fondled Tristan's balls during a blowjob or when they were just messing around.

"You okay?" Brian asked, lips pressing a kiss to the back of Tristan's neck.

"Uh-huh," murmured Tristan.

The massage continued, although truthfully it was more of a seduction now and less oriented toward loosening the tight muscles of his back. The softness of lips and the minute pressure of teeth nibbled at the lower curve of Tristan's butt. Fingers ran lightly from behind Tristan's balls up between his cheeks to the base of his spine and back down. Beneath his body, Tristan could feel his cock filling.

When Brian's touch paused to circle the entrance to Tristan's body, he involuntarily clenched against the potential invasion.

"Breathe, Tris," Brian said.

Tristan could feel the ghost of Brian's breath against his hip. More kisses left a trail across one cheek and he could feel the warmth of exhalations mix with the finger brushing that sensitive area.

The unmistakable wet heat of a tongue replaced the finger, and Tristan found himself moaning against the fabric of the bathrobe that lay under him. There was no pain, just the hot swipe of Brian's tongue, lapping and circling. Tristan could feel his balls tightening, orgasm getting close. A tiny length of that divine wet heat

pushed inside him, spreading him open just a fraction and then he was coming blindingly hard.

When he finally caught his breath, Tristan realized that Brian was stretched out beside him, nuzzling against his throat.

"No pain?" Brian asked softly.

"That was... amazing."

Brian grinned at him, then kissed Tristan. "Good.."

"Maybe I should help you with this?" offered Tristan, wrapping his fingers along the hot and leaking length of Brian's prick. He placed a line of kisses down the center of Brian's chest, savoring the smooth dip in the skin between Brian's pecs. He worked his way down to Brian's cock, circling the tip with his tongue before going down.

Brian must have been close to climax because it only took a couple of minutes before he was flooding Tristan's mouth.

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Considering the difficulty of matching schedules, waking up with Tristan was still an immensely pleasurable novelty. Brian slid an arm around Tristan's warm body and snuggled closer. Tristan drew a deep breath and his eyes blinked open sleepily..

"Good morning," murmured Brian, nipping gently at Tristan's chin.

"Mornings with you are always good."

"Do we have plans today? Or are we going to have breakfast and come straight back to bed?"

Tristan chuckled a little. "I don't know. Your choice."

"I was wondering if I could interest you in hitting a couple of the antique shops we passed on the way into the area. You could really use a kitchen table."

"I guess so."

"Gee, you sound enthused, oh king of the pressboard put-together."

"Guilty as charged... What's with you and the furniture thing? Are you going to color coordinate my bedroom next?" Tristan teased.

Brian laughed. "Hell no. I like furniture, especially well made wooden furniture. I like the dovetail joints, and the interlock of mortise and tenons, the smooth elegant lines. Maybe it just goes with the architecture thing. I love the lintels and the bay windows and mansard roofs."

"You sound like you're about to get a hard-on from saying all those words."

Brian tickled him.

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Three antique stores later, Brian hadn't found anything that Tristan would agree to buy for his kitchen. Among others, they had looked at several gorgeous mahogany tables, one round oak one and a cherry drop-leaf. Although he was enjoying looking at the furniture, Brian was feeling mildly frustrated at Tristan's ambivalence. He suggested they go to lunch at a local brew-pub.

"We looked at a batch of different woods and several different shapes, nothing seems to wow you. What kind of table do you want? Something brass and glass?" Brian asked. The waitress had just taken their drink order.

"Not really."

"Then clue me in, I'm just pointing out things that I think would look nice, given the period of the house."

Tristan heaved a sigh and gazed at Brian. "The kitchen in the house Grandfather left me used to have a big oval table made of dark wood. Maybe it was oak, I don't really know. My grandfather and I..."

"Keep going," Brian coaxed.

"There were a lot of memories attached to that table."

"Good ones?"

"Yeah, a hell of lot more good ones than occurred in my parent's house."

"Meals with family?" Brian asked.

"No, mostly... mostly hot chocolate with him when I was young and later coffee when I was an adult."

"Him, meaning your grandfather."

"Yeah." Tristan stared at the ceiling. "He was only one who told me wanting to be a cop was a good thing."

"Because your parents obviously had other plans."

"I was supposed to go to some swank Ivy League school and get an MBA."

"It sounds like he cared about you being happy," said Brian, laying a hand on top of Tristan's.

"When I was twenty, I told him I was gay. He just shrugged and said that the right choices were sometimes the hard and unpopular ones. When I told my parents, we had a screaming match in their living room."

"I'm sorry." Brian could see tears brimming in Tristan's eyes, tears he knew Tristan would probably never allow to fall. "What happened to the table?"

"I think it ended up in my aunt's house, along with about a quarter of the rest of the furniture."

"Do you want a table like the one that used to be there? Or do you want one that's completely different?" Brian asked.

"I... want something that doesn't remind me of the fact he's gone."

Brain squeezed Tristan's fingers. "We passed a place that does Shaker style reproductions. We could look at trestle tables."

"Okay. What's a trestle table?"

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The table Tristan chose was rectangular and the wood was stained a warm honey gold color. He let Brian convince him into buying four ladder-back chairs to go with it. It was dramatically different from the one that used to be in that kitchen and Tristan tried to envision what this one was going to look like in the room when it was delivered. What his thoughts offered up instead was an image of how it would be to eat at that table with Brian. Would talking about the difficult tangle of crap that represented his life be as reassuring with Brian and a table they had purchased together as the memories of conversations with Grandfather? Tristan thought maybe so and he was looking forward to finding out.

End

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Tabled Discussions

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