

Always a Sinner

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Always a Sinner

Brooklyn Sinner 1.5

Gabe Ashby has given up much for love, but harbors no regrets. On the first night moving in to his new home with his lover, Rafe Soto, the men couldn't be more in love. Until a chance discovery puts a damper on their bliss.

In the middle of the night, Rafe Soto opens a drawer in hopes of waking his lover with pleasure. What he finds instead throws his faith in Gabe off track and threatens the new life they've begun to create.

Please note: The events in Always a Sinner take place **after** Angelo appears in the Poconos and **before** the epilogue of Love the Sinner.

Chapter One

“Last box.” Gabe plopped down onto the couch with a tired sigh and closed his eyes. If he ever saw another box so long as he lived...

Warm fingers closed around his nape, kneading him firmly. Gently.

“Hmm.” He tilted forward, giving his own personal masseuse more room to work. “Yeah. Feels good.” He moaned around the shivers racing up and down his spine. Good shit.

“Love that sound you make.” Warm air kissed his left ear before a wet tongue flicked over his lobe.

Gabe pressed the heel of his palm over the erection tenting his sweats and wiggled. “First of all, I’m too tired for that shit.” The chuckle against his neck called his bluff. “Second, I stashed all the lube in our drawers upstairs.”

“No one mentioned anything about sex, horny man.” Dry lips brushed over the sensitive area behind his ear but didn’t linger. The fingers massaging him moved away. Soft footsteps indicating his lover was coming closer.

Exactly where Gabe needed him.

Closer.

“Hey.”

Gabe opened his eyes and stared into the golden orbs of the man he loved. A man dead now resurrected. Come back to life for him. The sacrifice always left Gabe feeling humbled yet loved.

The best feeling.

Angel smiled at him. “I have something for us. Mama made us a basket of stuff.”

Gabe was supposed to think of his lover as Rafe. All Angel’s identification said so; Rafe Soto. But he would always be Angelo Pagan to Gabe. He’d always be Gabe’s Angel.

“What did Lilitiana make?” Angelo’s mother spoiled them rotten. Always with the food. The woman was something to behold. She loved her son and she loved Gabe, treating him like family from their first meeting to now.

Angelo moved away, talking as he disappeared into the other room of their new house. The house he’d had built for them even before knowing what Gabe would say to the question of moving away from New York. Of leaving their old lives behind.

Wasn't much to say; Gabe went where his heart went.

Every time.

"She made us dinner." Angel came back into the room with a covered basket and a bottle of wine. Flipping off the towel covering the basket, Angel peered inside. "We've got sandwiches and cookies and other stuff."

"Well, damn it man, bring it here." Gabe's stomach rumbled, punctuating his words. They'd been so busy all day, moving into the house, getting everything set up, he'd barely remembered eating. They'd started at dawn and now it was dark outside. The huge bay windows were open and the cool air from the beach behind their house swept inside.

"Stay right there." Angel held up a hand when Gabe moved to take the food. "I'll set it up."

Bemused, Gabe crossed his arms and watched as Angel spread the blanket from the couch onto the stained wood floors. Angel then went back into the kitchen. Gabe heard him rummaging around in the drawers, muttering to himself.

"Ta-da!" Angel came into the room waving candles and two wine glasses at Gabe. "I'm thinking we'll have a picnic right here. Christen our house proper." He raised an eyebrow. "What say you, *amado*?"

Amado.

Beloved.

Gabe's favorite word.

He let a smile curve his lips. "I'm thinking you need to hurry up and feed me if you intend on keeping me."

Angel bent over him with a smirk, those eyes twinkling. "Oh, it's too late. I'm keeping you." He kissed Gabe. Softly. All tender promises and carnal heat. All emotions at odds with the tattoos and shaved head, evidence of the dangerous gang leader he once was.

Gabe kissed his man back, opening his mouth so Angel could slide his tongue inside, fuck him nice and slow, get him hot and bothered and ready to combust.

Then Angel pulled away. "Come eat."

"Tease." Gabe grumbled the word but slid to the floor anyway. He sat cross legged on the blanket as Angel lit the candles then flicked off the lights. He poured the wine then handed Gabe

a glass. Gabe sniffed the red before taking a sip. He let out an appreciative moan when it hit his taste buds. “Nice.”

“Eat, *amado*.”

They ate in comfortable silence, sitting opposite each other on the blanket. Gabe watched Angel, watched the candle light dance in his lover’s eyes and remembered. He recalled stolen moments of pleasure and relaxation. He remembered the pain loving Angelo Pagan brought. The repercussions and the price they’d both had to pay.

It was worth it.

Angel smiled at him, eyes bright. Gabe missed the hair, all that thick, black luxurious hair he’d loved plunging his fingers into. Angel had chopped it off during his prison stint. A time Gabe couldn’t think off without getting choked up. Without regret.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Angel leaned over and cupped Gabe’s jaw. “You look...sad.”

Gabe put down his wine glass. “I miss your hair. I want it back.” He dragged his fingernails over Angel’s scalp. “I want to pull your hair while I fuck your mouth.”

Angel’s jaw went slack. His pupils dilated.

Gabe grinned. “I want to wrap your hair around my hand and tug on it while you ride me.”

A needy sound drifted from Angel. He swallowed. “It’ll grow back.”

Gabe took a sip of his wine to wet his dry throat and met Angel’s eyes over the top of the glass. “See that it does.”

Angel fidgeted suddenly. He broke eye contact and fished around in his pocket.

“I—we talked about this before,” Angel began then cleared his throat.

Gabe eyed him curiously. What was he up to?

Faint color brushed Angel’s cheekbones. “I didn’t think I’d be this nervous, *amado*.” He shook his head. “You make me forget everything but you—us.”

“What’s going on?” Gabe frowned at him. “You okay?”

Angel waved his concern away. “I’m fine. I just—bear with me, okay?” His eyes pleaded with Gabe. “I have some things I need to say.”

Gabe nodded.

Angel took a breath then spoke. “I wanted to say thank you. For trusting me. For loving me. For putting up with a lot and giving up even more to be with me.”

Gabe was shaking his head before Angel finished speaking. “No, babe. I didn’t give up anything except my address. There was nothing important back there. Nothing.”

Angel’s finger over his mouth stopped him. Those golden eyes caressed his face with fire, with love.

“Thank you for making a new life with me. A new life for us.” Angel’s eyes grew suspiciously shiny. “We talked about this in the Poconos and I don’t know if you were serious, but I was.” He opened his palm. “I am.”

Gabe gasped.

Two gold rings sat in Angel’s palm. Shiny and new.

“Angel, what—”

“Marry me.” Angel’s voice broke. His hand trembled. The rings clinked. “Be mine. Take my name. Or I’ll take yours. I want to be your husband. I want to be your partner.” He blinked rapidly, the speed matching his rush of words. “Be my forever, cop.”

Gabe bit down on his fist. Fucking man had his heart full to bursting. There was never a question, never a doubt he’d be here with this man.

“Gabe.” The uncertainty in Angel’s voice was unwarranted, but still warmed Gabe inside and out.

“Fucker.” He pushed the stuff on the blanket aside and straddled Angel. “You know I’m yours. I’ve been yours since that interrogation room.” He took Angel’s mouth fiercely. Hard and commanding. Imprinting himself on Angel again and again.

Angel held him tight, squeezed him right, as their tongues mated and Gabe humped the cock poking his ass through the barrier of their clothes.

He broke the kiss to gulp air into his lungs then held out his hand. “Gimme my fucking ring.”

Angel’s gaze bored into him as he took Gabe’s left hand and slid the ring on his finger. “I love you, *amado*. I’m yours. Always. Forever.”

Gabe blinked his stinging eyes and took the other ring. Angel held out his hand and Gabe slid the ring on. “I love you. This ring lets everyone know you’re mine as I’m yours. They’ll know you belong to me and I belong to you.”

Angel trembled in his hold. The pulse in his throat sped up. As Gabe stared at him, Angel’s gaze dipped to the ring on his finger and his jaw worked.

“I never thought I’d have this,” Angel whispered. “I never thought to want it.”

Gabe placed a finger under Angel’s chin and tilted his face upward. “You have it. You have me. Forever.”

Angel’s chin trembled. “A long time, that forever.”

“Yes.” Gabe nodded. “There is no out, because I won’t let you go. I meant everything I said in the Poconos. No one is leaving. No one.”

Angel gathered him back into his arms. “Works for me, cop. Works for me.”

Gabe dipped his head. Pressing his nose to Angel’s neck, he inhaled the scent of his lover, so familiar and still a hit to his system after all this time. His eyes drifted close as Angel pressed a kiss to his temple.

“Take me upstairs,” he whispered. “I’m too tired to make love to you, but I want to fall sleep in our new bed, in our new home, with you in my arms.”

“I’d like that.” Angel helped him stand. “Let me clear away the stuff first.”

“I’ll help.”

Side by side, they dealt with the leftovers and dirty dishes. Every once in a while the ring on his finger would catch the light and sparkle and Gabe would stop and stare at it, his throat working.

When they’d cleaned up everything, Gabe held out his hand to Angel and together they climbed the stairs to their bedroom. To spend their first night in their new home.

* * * * *

The heat woke Rafe. He opened his eyes and blinked in the darkness. Beside him, Gabe snored, his right arm around Rafe’s torso.

Rafe smiled and rolled away, careful not to wake his lover.

Husband.

The moonlight pouring through the sheer drapes at the wall of windows glinted off the ring on his finger. His stomach fluttered. Their first night in the house he’d built for them. A smile spread. Rafe got up from the bed and pulled on his pajama bottoms. After glancing back to make sure Gabe was still asleep, he made his way downstairs for a glass of water.

In the kitchen he relived the activities earlier. He hadn’t anticipated being so nervous when he’d produced the rings, but the magnitude of what the gold circles represented had him all choked up.

He belonged to the man asleep in their bed upstairs. And that man belonged to him. He'd paid his price, done his time, and he wanted his happiness. He wanted to be open with the man he loved. Wanted everyone to know who he loved.

He finished his water and made his way back upstairs.

He walked into the bedroom to find Gabe had wrapped the blanket all around himself. So maybe Gabe wasn't as hot as Rafe. He chuckled and went to the drawer where he knew Gabe had stashed their toys. He'd wake Gabe up with a blow job and maybe entice him into using that new dildo on him.

Fuck. Rafe's cock throbbed at the thought.

He dug around the drawer and pulled out their toy chest, but as he opened the box he caught a glimpse of yellow paper buried beneath the hand towels.

Rafe pulled the papers out with a frown. They were in a short stack, neatly folded. He opened the paper on top when he recognized Gabe's handwriting and began to read.

I got your letter. It stole my breath, yanked it right out from me, but I guess that was your intent. Selfish. That's what you are, Angelo. Selfish. Making decisions about my life for me. What about what I want? What about what I need?

Did you think about that, you son of a bitch? I don't understand how I could hate you and love you at the same time. How I could want you and loathe you in the same damn breath.

This thing I feel for you, I wish I didn't. I wish I could flip a switch, turn it off. Turn you off. If I could erase you from my life, I would. I'd go back to that interrogation room. Make it so I wasn't the one who came into that room. Make it so I didn't look into your eyes, your fucking eyes, and lose myself.

Rafe's knees buckled. He gathered up the letters and rushed into the bathroom. After locking the door behind him, he sat on the closed toilet seat and opened back up the letter. Gabe's letter to him, apparently written after Angelo had sent him the Dear John letter from prison.

The fury and anguish Gabe felt came across in his words. He'd hated Rafe. Hated what he'd done to them. He didn't understand why Rafe had to do it. Gabe was hurting, he was only venting, but the words, they hit Rafe square in the chest.

He took a breath and continued.

I'm scared. Of the way I feel for you. I'm scared to acknowledge just how fucked I am, how gone I am over you. You're locked up in fucking prison and I'm writing you letters. Letters you forbade me to write so I can't mail them. You forbid like I'm your child. You'll never read just how much you hurt me. How much your letter destroyed me. You won't see me as I write this, crying like a bitch over you. My tears soaking the paper. You're not around anymore and I can't accept it.

I still feel you. On me. In me.

I still smell you in my bed.

I can't look myself in the mirror. I'm ashamed of who I see looking back. Someone weak, pining for someone who threw me away like nothing.

Like nothing.

You turn your back like it's nothing and I'm left to do...what? Pick up the pieces and wait? For you to come back—if you ever do—and act like nothing ever happened? Is that what you want? What about me, what I want?

I want to look in the mirror and see me. I want to wake in the middle of the night and have you here. I want you. And I'm back to hating myself because I want you here, in my arms when I wake. In my bed. I want you here, but you're gone and I don't know when you're coming back.

If you're coming back.

Do you miss me, Angel? Do you look up at the sky and wonder where I am? Who I'm with and if I'm doing okay? Maybe you're wondering if I'm fucking somebody else? If I'm letting another man take what I've only ever given you.

That pain, the uncertainty, it cripples, doesn't it? That's what you do to me. What you've done to us.

I won't forgive you. I can't.

Rafe tore his eyes from the letter in his hand and stared up at the ceiling. He'd known how much the letter he'd sent would hurt Gabe. Hell, writing it damn near took everything he had in him.

But seeing it. Reading the proof of Gabe's pain in black and white, that was different. That was harder. Gabe's emotions bled from each word, the recriminations and regret rang out loud and clear.

Rafe shuffled the bunch of letters in his hand, looking at the dates on them. Some were days apart, some months, but they went on up until weeks before Rafe got out of prison.

He moved the one dated his birthday to the top of the pile and unfolded it.

Happy Birthday.

I can't imagine what it must be like today of all days. Locked up. I bet you're picturing Catarina and the times you both spent in Miami to celebrate. I bet you're missing your mother and all that food. I emailed her when I got out of bed, but she hasn't responded yet. I remember last year and what a train wreck it started out as. Then I took you. You took me. And we confessed our feelings. Remember that? When everything was simpler. Or at least when I thought it was simpler. Even then you were keeping secrets, keeping your plans under wraps. And it all imploded the next morning. I miss the time in between then, when we were just us, just Angelo and Gabe, wrapped up in each other's arms. I miss your eyes, the way they see me. All of me. I miss the way you wake me up, the soft kisses. The tender touches. Funny, isn't it, how you could touch me so sweetly, so reverently, then do all the things you do.

I wish I'd told you how much those little things meant, because right now the loneliness is killing me. There's snow outside on the ground, but I haven't stepped out of this place in days. Days, Angelo. I don't want to smell the air, it's so cold and it reminds me it's winter. Reminds me it's our time. The winter. I hate the snow; it reminds me of you. Even the cold wind on my face.

Do you realize how that makes me sound? So lost. So lonely. Unable to sleep through the night because you're not here. I haven't slept through the night since you went away.

I miss everything, Angel.

Everything.

Everything about you. About us. I can't believe I still want you, after all you've done. After all I know. After what you've put me through. I stopped looking into mirrors; I see your eyes looking back at me. I dread dreaming when I do fall asleep. You're there. In my dreams. Telling me you love me. Telling me lo siento. You're sorry.

I miss you.

I should have said it from the get go. Miss you like a part of me. How did you do that? Burrow so deep under my skin, into my soul that I can't exorcise you?

I hope I can. I'll do my damndest to try, because Angelo, you're not getting me back.

Jesus. Rafe couldn't breathe under the onslaught of pain. His heart broke for Gabe. They were fine now, but then...God, what he'd put the other man through and Gabe had accepted it. Accepted him back.

So fucking lucky. It all could have gone the other way, he could be alone right now and Gabe would be with someone else.

Loving someone else.

The thought brought bile to Rafe's throat. If he had to, he could exist without Gabe by his side, but he wanted to *live* and he wanted to do it with Gabe. Alongside his cop.

Why didn't Gabe destroy the letters? He'd trekked them all the way to the new house and then hid them, why not just tear them up? Burn them?

He scanned the rest of the letters, a small smile spreading as Gabe reminisced about their time together. Not nearly enough, but they'd lived a lifetime in that short span.

...Kissed me and I let him.

Whoa! Air escaped Rafe's lungs in a rush as he slowed his reading and backed up. Gabe was talking about someone who'd kissed him. A man he'd written about in previous letters, he hinted. A man he'd...

"Fuck!" Rafe jumped to his feet, the letters falling to the floor as he unlocked the bathroom door and went into the bedroom. He struggled to breathe, to calm himself, to not reach any stupid conclusions without first talking to Gabe, but he could read and he'd read what the man he loved had written.

He'd seen it with his own eyes.

He flicked on the light and Gabe sat up, blinking at him.

"Babe, what's wrong?"

Rafe looked at him, really looked at the man he loved, at the man he'd pledged his life to and swallowed as he fisted his hands. *Calm. Calm.*

"Angel?"

"I wanted to wake you up with a surprise so I got the box with our toys out the drawer."

Gabe frowned and pressed the heel of one hand to his eyes. "Okay. Then why do you look so angry?"

Rafe held Gabe's eyes, watching closely as he said, "I found the letters."

To say Gabe went pale would be the grossest of understatements; Rafe's lover's face leached of all color. His eyes went wide.

"I-I—"

"Should have burned them. Why didn't you?" He stepped closer to the bed.

Gabe threw back the covers and swung his feet over the side. "I can explain." The first time he'd seen Gabe so flustered. Unsure of himself.

"Why didn't you burn them?" Rafe repeated. "I wouldn't have known, *amado*." He shook his head and squeezed his eyes shut as pain sliced through him. "I wouldn't have known what you did."

The guilt in Gabe's eyes. He couldn't face it. Rafe turned away.

"No!" Gabe grabbed his arm, turned him around. "I don't—I didn't—"

"You lied," Rafe whispered. "In the Poconos you said you didn't sleep with him." Making his mouth form those words was the hardest thing. "You said you couldn't."

"What?" Hurt flashed in Gabe's eyes. "I didn't lie. I never slept with Trevor."

Rafe wrenched away from Gabe's hold and stalked back to the bathroom where he gathered up the loose sheets of paper and brought them back to Gabe. "I read it," he spat as he fumbled with the pages. "Here." He pulled out the letter in question and thrust it at Gabe. "There. In black and white." His voice cracked and he swallowed. "Read it back to me."

"Angel—"

"Read it, Gabe!"

Chapter Two

With a sad sigh, Gabe smoothed out the crumpled paper and began. *“I wrote you about Trevor. Told you he asked me out and I said yes. He kissed me and I let him. That was last week. Another man kissed me, put his mouth where only yours have ever been.”* Gabe’s voice quivered and he paused. “Angel.”

Rafe turned away, giving his lover his back as he stared out the windows into the ocean, their backyard, cloaked in darkness. “Read.”

Gabe did. *“I’d never given much thought to what I’d do if the situation ever arose. I never thought about being with someone again. I’d locked myself away from that, but he touched me. Touched my body. Up until last night you’d been the only one to touch me like he did.”* Gabe’s words tapered off and he cleared his throat. *“I allowed it for purely selfish reasons; I wanted you gone and in order for that to happen someone else had to take your place.”*

Rafe’s throat hurt. His eyes and sinuses burned. Gabe had been with another man and lied about it. He would’ve forgiven it, had his lover been upfront when he initially asked. After all, he’d asked Gabe to move on.

But now?

“He kissed me. I kissed him back and then he got naked. We both did. When he dropped to his knees I didn’t stop him. I heard you in my head, calling me yours. But if I was, you’d be here, not Trevor. If I were yours you wouldn’t have left me like you did. You asked me to move on and I’m trying.” Gabe stopped and sniffed.

Soft footsteps echoed in their bedroom then Gabe was beside him, still reading.

“I’m trying to move on, Angelo. Trying to do as you asked. I thought I had until Trevor touched me, until he put his mouth on me and then I called him your name. He questioned me and I was so angry at him for trying to take your place. I lashed out at him, even pulled my gun when he refused to leave without working things out. Didn’t he know I was yours? Didn’t he see I was already owned?”

Tension broke in Rafe’s body and he sagged against the glass wall, his forehead pressed to the cool surface. Next to him, Gabe’s voice shook.

“Didn’t he feel I was nowhere near being interested in him? It was a plan to wipe you away and it failed. Miserably. I hated every second. I kept comparing his kisses to yours, his touches to yours.”

Shaking fingers grabbed Rafe’s chin and forced him to face Gabe. His lover’s eyes were red while holding Rafe’s captive.

“I can read the rest without looking at the paper,” Gabe said softly. “He can’t compare. He’s a nice guy, but he’s not you. He’s not my Angel. He can’t compare because no one else can. I know you want me to move on. I’ve tried. I know you wanted me to give up. I can’t. I’m here. Waiting. I’ll be here, waiting, until you come back to me. Like I ordered you to. I’m here, still loving you, still needing you, and you can tell me it’s over to my face.”

Rafe didn’t budge until Gabe touched him, a tentative clasp on his shoulder. He broke eye contact and opened the glass door, ducking outside before Gabe could speak again. Fear was a very real thing, tangible on his skin, an acrid taste on his tongue. The fear that Gabe would see beyond to the scared inner core he hid, the one that whispered everyday to him that the happiness couldn’t last. Gabe’s devotion couldn’t possibly last.

Ignoring Gabe’s calls, Rafe jogged down the huge, jagged stones that led from their bedroom balcony to the small beach below. The motion sensors tripped the lights and they flooded the darkness, chasing away the shadows and lighting his path.

If Gabe had slept with whoever that guy was, it would have been Rafe’s fault. He’d pushed his lover after all, urged him to move on. Only he’d thought he wouldn’t have to know anything about it and even if he did, he was a big guy. He could handle it.

Not so much.

The thought of anybody touching Gabe in any way brought so much anger, it terrified Rafe. The urge to dig, find names and addresses, and do damage terrified him.

He sank to the sand, knees pulled to his chest and stared out at the water. Tiny waves broke mere feet from him, their cool spray dropping onto his naked skin, cooling him some.

Rafe inhaled to calm himself down. Maybe all his plans were mistakes. Maybe taking what he’d assumed was his was a mistake. Maybe he needed to pay for his sins and losing Gabe would be his punishment.

He barked a laugh into the night. Some punishment that would be, losing his heart. He'd never survive. And maybe after all he'd done, all the shit he'd pulled, he didn't deserve to survive.

"So you're running from me now?" Gabe plopped down beside him and when Rafe didn't answer, Gabe spoke again. "This really isn't as big a deal as you're making it, you know that right?"

Rafe turned to him with a scoff. "Really?" Gabe sleeping with someone else wasn't a big deal? "What if it were me, *amado*? If you found something to make you think I'd betrayed you?"

Gabe hesitated. "I'd want to kill someone."

"Yes." Rafe faced the water and they sat in silence, Gabe sliding his palms on his thighs covered in cotton pajama bottoms. He'd also pulled one of Rafe's t-shirts.

"You're being hypocritical, pouting for no reason."

Rafe licked his dry lips, still refusing to look directly at Gabe. "Do you ever lie in bed at night and think maybe this is a mistake? Me. Us. Starting this life." He swallowed the knot lodged in his throat. "Do you think maybe after everything I've done, I shouldn't be happy?" He looked down at his knees, fists clenched as he waited, heart beats louder than the waves crashing nearby.

"When I lay in bed at night, you're next to me," Gabe answered softly. Rafe had to lean in to catch the words. "In the middle of the night when I turn and you're there, your breath on my face as you snore—yes, fool, you snore—I have no worries. I have no complaints in that moment."

Rafe cleared the emotion from his throat. "And the moments after?"

"The moments after are very much like the moments before." Gabe's smile sounded in his words. "I am happy because I have you. I don't give a fuck who says what, or who doesn't like it. They don't matter. If you love me and I love you, shouldn't that be all?"

"It is." Rafe swung to face him. He cupped Gabe's face, stroked his chin. "It is. I swear."

"Not right now it isn't." Gabe's eyes flashed. "You read words written in anger and you fly off the handle. You doubt and you accuse and that," he emphasized, "is not good."

Rafe slid his eyes shut with a nod. "I just—I knew you'd kissed him, but you said nothing else happened and then I read you'd gotten naked and he gave you a professional—"

"It wasn't all that professional."

Rafe barked a laugh. A warm palm slid over his scalp and he blinked his eyes open. Peering at Gabe he said, "You know, I've been referring to you as my husband in my mind."

Gabe's nostrils flared. His nails scraped a sharp trail of fire down the back of Rafe's head to his nape.

Rafe shivered. "Because that's what you are, who you are. Despite the legalities."

"That means everything, since you're not much for legalities." Gabe winked.

Leaning over, Rafe kissed him softly. "Angelo Pagan wasn't a fan of legal, but I think Raphael Soto doesn't have the same hang-ups. He can't, not if he wants the world to know who he loves."

"We gonna make this thing legal then?" Gabe asked against his lips.

"Yeah," Rafe whispered back. He reached for Gabe's left hand with his and threaded their fingers. It was an awkward move, but he managed to bring their joint hands to his mouth where he kissed their rings. "We're gonna make this thing legal."

"Good." Gabe pulled away from him and stood, dusting off the seat of his pants. "Inside. Now." He held out a hand and Rafe took it while warmth flooded his lower belly and groin. He recognized the command in Gabe's voice.

Anticipation brought goose flesh to his skin as he followed Gabe back up to the house.

"Undress," Gabe barked once they stepped inside their bedroom. He left the doors and drapes open and dimmed the lights while Rafe kicked off his underwear.

He stood in the middle of the room, naked and anxious, waiting for whatever his lover saw fit to dish out. Whatever it was, Rafe would love it and he would love Gabe even more for not making light of his insecurities and doubts.

Gabe rummaged in the drawers then threw some stuff on the bed; lube and a butt plug, a blue flexible glow-in-the-dark kind about the width of Rafe's thumb.

Rafe's ass clenched at the sight. Damn. He licked his lips as his erection grew, precum already slicking his tip. He must've made a sound because Gabe jerked his head up and stared him down, heat and appreciation in his eyes while his hard-on tented his PJ bottoms.

"You are going to be punished." Gabe circled him slowly, talking low yet commanding, his body heat inviting Rafe to lean in to him. He made a complete circle and stopped behind Rafe. Calloused fingers grazed his nape then slid down Rafe's shoulder and over his chest, sliding down his abs to tease his cock.

Rafe trembled, biting his lip to keep from begging.

Gabe nipped his earlobe, flicking his tongue in and out of his ear while fisting Rafe's cock. Rafe rocked into his hold before pushing back onto his chest, rubbing over the prick pocking his ass.

"Do you remember the first time you sucked me? In my kitchen?"

Rafe choked on his spit when Gabe bit his shoulder. "Ye-yes."

"We talked right there, sat on the floor and talked, and I told you then you had me." He loosened his grip and twisted Rafe until they stood face to face. The love in his lover's gaze burned Rafe, so bright and shiny.

"Knees."

Rafe dropped. Prostrate before the man he loved, he never once broke eye contact. Gabe wanted to prove something and Rafe had every intention of letting him.

"You had me then." Gabe's eyes slitted, his features going sharp as he stared down at Rafe. "You have me now."

He knew that. In his heart where it mattered most, Rafe knew that. He opened his mouth to say those words, but Gabe pressed a finger to his lips.

With his free hand, Gabe pulled his cock free and guided the swollen shaft to Rafe's mouth. Rafe could barely breathe, his mouth dry as he waited to taste his lover. At his lips, Gabe paused. He brushed a thumb over the slit in his cock head, catching a drop of translucent fluid that he offered to Rafe.

Rafe took the gift offered, sucking Gabe's thumb deep into his mouth and moaning at the slick taste of warm sweetness.

"I warned you not to lose me," Gabe said hoarsely above him. "Now it's too late. You couldn't even if you tried." He removed his thumb from Rafe's mouth with a loud plop and guided his cock in. "You can't get rid of me, Angel."

As if that was even remotely his wish. Rafe knelt silent as Gabe thrust into his mouth, shallow movements that frustrated him. He wanted more, he wanted Gabe to use him up, go for rough, but it appeared his lover had settled on a slow and steady pattern.

"You should see your eyes." Gabe's lips quirked. "They're flashing, yelling at me to hurry up and what? Fuck your mouth? Fuck you hard, like you deserve?" He punctuated his words with a sharp thrust that nudged the back of Rafe's throat.

“Unh.” Fuck, that sent shivers unfurling all along his spine.

“Yeah, but this isn’t your show, is it?” Gabe slowed up. “I’ll decide how to mete out your punishment.”

Damn it, how was it that Gabe knew him so well? Knew just how to handle Rafe?

Strong fingers cupped his head, drew him back then forced him forward onto Gabe. Rafe trembled. He laced his fingers behind his back, squeezing tight. His balls ached, heavy and needy and his shaft pulsed and dripped all over his thigh and lower belly.

“Suck me.”

Goddamn, he didn’t need telling twice. With a low cry, Rafe sealed his lips around the thick cock in his mouth and went to town, bobbing up and down on Gabe’s length, slobbering all over him. Hungry sounds filled the room and it took a minute or two before he realized that was him making all that greedy noise.

He flicked his tongue over the veined cock, loving the feel of Gabe’s smoothness, so hard and hot on his tongue, pulsing just for him. His lover tasted like salty skin with a hint of something creamy underneath. His scent, heated male arousal, blanketed Rafe’s nose and made him moan louder.

He ached. Ached so good.

“Did I mention you weren’t supposed to come?” Gabe strove for mild, but he couldn’t hide the heavy growl. “No coming, Angel.”

Shit!

Rafe redoubled his efforts, taking Gabe deep. Gabe snapped his hips, each thrust a punch that sent him deeper and deeper until he bumped the back of Rafe’s throat. Reflex had Rafe swallowing and that had Gabe yelling.

“Fuck!”

Gabe yanked him off and Rafe narrowed his eyes as he watched his lover stroke himself faster and faster. He’d wanted Gabe to come in his mouth.

“Lay on the bed,” Gabe growled. “Ass over the side.”

Rafe hurried to follow orders, his knees so weak he could barely stand. Before he was fully in place, Gabe was on him, straddling his back as he grunted over him.

“Gonna come on you,” Gabe bit out. “Mark you.”

“Yes.” Rafe bucked into the mattress, fisting the sheets in both hands. “Do it, *amado*.”

“Shit. Shit.” Gabe rocked on him and Rafe felt his hand working him closer and closer to the edge. “Coming, coming...”

Hot cream splashed on Rafe, hitting him at the base of his spine. He arched with a low cry, grinding his cock into the mattress. “Gabe. Gabe.”

“No fucking coming!”

“Fuck. Please.” Rafe bucked, almost unseating Gabe. The cum on his skin blazed a fiery path down his ass crack. Slick fingers pushed into him, two at a time and Rafe shouted.

“Don’t. Fucking. Come.” Gabe punctuated each word with a thrust of his fingers against Rafe’s prostate.

“I can’t—” Rafe panted. “Oh God.” Fire engulfed him, orange and bright. He squeezed his eyes shut as blood roared in his ears.

Gabe’s fingers disappeared then something else filled him. The plug.

“Oh!” Rafe clenched around the delicious intrusion. “*Amado*, please. Too much.”

“It’s enough, because I say it is.” Gabe worked the plug, retreating then advancing, fucking him with it. Rafe rocked back, taking it deeper, riding it.

“Ung. Fuck me, *amado*. So good.” The smooth plastic toy glided over his prostate, the pleasure blinding. Release churned in his balls and Rafe reached for it, reached for the climax.

Gabe stilled.

“Gabe. No.” He needed to come. He shook with it, he tasted it on his tongue. Fuck, even his gums ached with it.

Soft lips kissed a crooked trail up his back then stopped at his ear. “You’ll come when I say. Only then. The plug stays in.” Gabe rolled off him and onto the mattress. He dropped the bottle of lube to the floor and patted the spot next to him. “Come to bed.”

Rafe was going to kill him. Slowly. Right after he came.

Gabe hid a smile when his lover plopped down beside him with a huff. Frustration and need poured off his Angel as he ground into the mattress. Gabe slapped him on the ass. Angel moaned, low and hungry, rousing Gabe’s spent body.

“Be a good boy, suck that shit up and come back to bed.” He leaned over Angel’s body and turned off the lamp, casting the room in shadows. The moon shared its light from the windows and a warm, blue glow emanating from Angel’s ass. Gabe snickered.

“I hate you,” Angel grumbled.

“You love me,” Gabe shot back. He kissed Angel’s shoulder, sliding a hand down his back to his ass where he tap-tapped on the base of the plug. Angel growled, pushing back.

“I’m thinking of ways to kill you while you sleep.” Angel undulated, his voice strained.

“Hmm.” Dropping one last kiss on his shoulder blade, Gabe stopped touching his lover. He stretched out, ignoring Angel’s pants.

“Cop.”

Burying his face in the pillow, mixed with both his and Angel’s scents, Gabe grinned.

“Huh?”

“You sure you wanna leave me like this?” A very dangerous edge crept into his man’s voice. Anyone would be scared shitless by that growl, anyone but Gabe.

He jerked his head up, meeting Angel’s shining eyes in the dark. “I’m going to leave you like that, with your cock hard and your ass needy,” he spoke softly, clearly, turning himself on in the process. “So you know exactly who owns it. Who owns you.”

“Fuck you, cop.” Rafe rolled into him, body trembling as he pressed their foreheads together. “You think I don’t know? Do you?”

Gabe cupped the back of his head, kissed his nose. “I think you forgot.” He swallowed the lump blocking his throat, fucking with his ability to speak. “I think you read a letter that made you forget how much I would do and how far I would go. For you.”

“No!” Angel grabbed his wrist, nails biting in. “I didn’t forget. I would never forget.” He tilted his head up, exposed the gorgeous column of his neck and throat and Gabe nuzzled him, nipped at him. “I just never want to think of you with anybody else. I never want to know anyone else had their hands on you. On what’s mine.”

Gabe had to nod, because he felt the same way. He knew he’d want to merck someone if he thought for a second that anyone had even looked twice at his man. “You never have to worry. Not about me. Not about us.”

“I know this, cop.” Angel kissed him hard, bruising. “I know this.”

“Good.” Gabe smirked at him. “Now, why don’t you come here, lay your head on my shoulder and get some rest, huh?” He pursed his lips when Angel shifted then moaned. He was so freaking envious of that plug stretching his lover wide. “Maybe I’ll take mercy on you when we wake.”

Angel cursed him under his breath, but moved into his arms anyway, snuggling in until his body heat had Gabe sweating. As they lay face to face, Gabe kissed Angel on the chin.

“Sweet dreams, love.”

Angel snorted. “I’ll be dreaming of ways to kill you. Softly.”

“Aww. Love you too.”

Chapter Three

Gabe woke with the sun on his face and his bed partner snoring in his ear. He grinned as he stared at Angel, his face creased, mouth parted slightly. Maybe he should take a video on his phone, proof since Angel swore up and down he didn't snore.

Uh-huh.

He slid his gaze down Angel's back, over those fucking seriously mouth-watering tattoos and the taut ass he could never see himself getting tired of. Still plugged. His shaft twitched. He couldn't wait to get up in there, but he would.

He'd make Angel wait a little longer.

He crawled out the bed, pulled back on his PJ bottoms and made his way downstairs. In the kitchen he made coffee and stood over the sink, cup in hand as he allowed the fear from last night to go away.

He'd never been so scared. The hurt look in Angel's eyes. That murderous look on his face. Gabe had let him down. He felt as if he'd cheated, the little he actually did with poor Travis. Why had he kept those letters? Better yet, why had he written the damn things? His heart had lodged in his throat as he read the letter to Angel and when his lover turned from him, ran from him, that shit was too scary. Shit got real and for a split second he'd thought maybe Angel wouldn't ever look at him again.

Like he'd allow that to happen. He'd hiked up his big boy pants and made the first move. He'd be making a lot of those he figured out last night. And he had no problem with that. Last night he'd seen the other side of his lover, the one he seldom saw. The uncertain side. The insecure side. Angel still had those and it was Gabe's job as his lover, as his partner—soon to be husband—to erase the doubts. To make sure his lover knew that no matter what, he'd be there.

Always.

He placed his empty coffee cup in the sink as the house phone rang, startling him. Damn. He'd forgotten they had a house phone. Shit. And their first caller too.

He picked up the cordless off the countertop before the noise woke Angel. "Hello?"

"I'm looking for Rafe."

The purred words jacked up the hairs on Gabe's nape. He narrowed his eyes. "Who is this?"

The caller snorted. "If you don't know, why should I tell you?"

Say what?

"Put your man on the phone, cop."

"Ah no. My name is Gabe." No one else got to call him that. "What's yours?"

The man laughed. Too fucking carnal for words, that sound. "I'm whoever Angel wants me to be."

Those words held a challenge, one Gabe didn't rise to because he knew his lover too well. "Cool. Why don't you call back later when he's around and maybe I'll let you speak to him then."

"Hm. Yeah, no can do."

"Whatever. Bye."

"Jesus, can you be more fucking uptight?" The caller huffed. "Here I am, being all nice and shit and you're being a pit bull. Scared I'll take him from you?"

Now it was Gabe's turn to laugh. "Listen whoever you are, we're not going to do this. Call back later."

"Syren Rua."

"Huh?" Syren Who-ah?

"Really, he didn't tell you anything about me?" The man asked, incredulous. "Nothing at all?" He sounded comically hurt.

The name did jog his memory. Gabe remembered Angel telling him about working with someone named Syren to take down the Delatorre cartel, a dangerous outfit out of Brazil dealing with sex trafficking, drugs, guns and who the fuck knew what else.

"He may have mentioned you in passing."

"Ah, so he told you about me?"

Gabe shook his head at the hopeful words. "Maybe."

"You don't have to be jealous, Ashby." Syren's voice was all sex, man, all purr and heat. "I respect relationships. I think."

Dude was asking for a beat down. "Why are you calling?"

"Hm? Oh!" Syren giggled.

Jesus. The guy needed to tone that shit down.

“I sent you happy kids a housewarming gift.” He sounded too goddamn smug. “Should arrive later.”

Gabe frowned. “What is it?”

“Huh?”

He rolled his eyes. “The gift, what is it?”

“Shit, I don’t know. A plant?”

Gabe gritted his teeth. “You asking or telling?”

“Can’t please you, can I?”

Why did he sound so fucking put out? He was the one getting on Gabe’s last nerve.

“How does Angel put up with your attitude, I wonder?”

Jesus, what the fuck! “Call back later and you can ask him.” Gabe ended the call, staring at the phone clutched in his hand as he contemplated pelting the thing across the room.

Who was that guy, really? ‘Cause he sounded off his rocker and out of his mind.

He stood with his hip braced on the edge of the counter top and pinched the bridge of his nose. The stairs creaked and seconds later his lover came into view, looking adorably sleep-infused. Angel’s sleep-heavy eyes widened when he spotted Gabe.

“What’s wrong?”

Gabe shook his head, moving into Angel’s arms when his lover came close enough to touch. “We had our first caller on the house phone,” he murmured into Angel’s neck. He inhaled his lover’s skin. The musk never failed to get him all hard and achy.

“Okay?” Angel kissed his forehead, tunneling his fingers through Gabe’s hair. “Who was it?”

“Syren Who-ah.”

Angel snorted. “He get on your nerves?”

Gabe pulled away. “God, he’s a fucking bitch!”

Angel’s eyes danced. “Yeah, he’s best when served in small doses.”

“Ugh.” Gabe shuddered. “He said he sent us a house-warming gift. I don’t think we should open it when it comes.”

“Ah, he’s cool.” Angel pulled him close and rubbed against him. “He’s...um, I was gonna say harmless, but that’s so not the case.”

Gabe sank his teeth into Angel's left pec, quickly licking away the burn as his lover moaned. "Let's not talk about anything other than how you're going to make me a very happy cop right now."

"Oh?" Angel licked at Gabe's lips then kissed him, pushing inside and sinking in, taking him. Gabe ground his dick into Angel's belly, hard. "You gonna finish what you started last night?"

"Nope." Gabe pulled away and nodded to the bottle of olive oil on the counter. "Grab that." He ignored Angel's questioning gaze and stepped out of his PJ bottoms, stroking his wet cock as he bent over the island, gripping the edge with white knuckles. He looked over his shoulder to find his lover's eyes on his ass, nose flared, tongue hanging out.

"Figured if I lay it out, you'd know what to do with it."

"Shit." Angel moved closer, his jaw flexing. "Fucking plug is killing me, man."

"Then fuck me and maybe if you make me come, I'll do the same." Gabe grinned as he stroked himself, root to tip.

Angel dropped to his knees, at eye level with Gabe's ass. Oiled fingers grasped his cheeks, pulled them apart. A puff of heat warmed his crack, his hole, then Angel's tongue was on him, teasing, licking.

"Ah fuck!" Gabe bucked and nearly fell. He grabbed the counter's edge, pushing back on his man's face. His tongue. Angel moaned with him, groaned with him. Slicked digits pushed in, burning, stretching his entrance. Gabe panted, rocking back, rolling his hips as Angel prepped him good, tongue and fingers circling, diving in.

His body shook, especially at the greedy sounds his man made. Contentment, hunger and enjoyment in those sounds. Angel loved to love him like that, on his knees, face in his ass, tongue in his hole and Gabe wasn't a fool. He'd never turn away from that wicked act, so goddamn delicious, all kinds of sinful and carnal and right.

"God, Angel." He cupped his balls, hiked his ass higher, spreading his cheeks wider. "Get in me, fucker. In!"

Angel huffed a laugh and Gabe heard his movements, heard his grunts, then he was there, plunging in deep.

"Fuck!" The burn yanked away air. Made his head swim. His passage rippled.

Angel clutched his hips, mouth on his nape, teeth on his skin. Another sensation to tip him toward a way-too-quick climax.

“Shit. Tight.” Angel pulled out then eased in slower, deeper, until his heavy balls slapped against the back of Gabe’s thighs. “Love the way you grab me, cop.”

Gabe shook under the fullness, under the pleasure that wrapped around his spine and zinged all the way to his fingertips. That shit was crazy, the way he couldn’t speak or breathe or blink. The way Angel held him, all close and tight and right. The way he never wanted anything to come between them, not even air. The way Angel pounded into him like he owned him, knew him inside and out and he what he wanted, what Gabe needed.

Angel knocked against his prostate, made stars flash in front of his eyes. Gabe howled and clawed at the smooth, granite top, fighting to hold on to something. His fingers banged against the bowl of fruit set there, sending apples and pears rolling to the floor. His man bit him, on his shoulder, teeth sharp. He cupped Gabe’s balls and Gabe couldn’t hold on.

“G-Gonna blow.” He slammed back onto Angel and erupted. He bit his lip, the counter preventing him from doubling over. His seed spilled into his man’s palm and Angel’s breath hitched in his ear. “God. God.”

Gathering his waning strength, Gabe pushed Angel away and when his lover stumbled back, Gabe tackled him. They went down and he wrestled Angel to his stomach on the cold floor. Gabe slid down his lover’s back, his still-dripping cock leaving sticky, white cream on Angel’s skin. His lover undulated, legs widening and Gabe sank down, teeth sinking into his left ass cheek as he searched for and found the plug.

Angel cried out.

Gabe worked the plug, fucking his man as he licked Angel’s crack, bit his ass. He smacked him with an open palm, fingers pushing in, pulling out. He eased out the toy, smiling when Angel rose up on his knees, palms flat on the floor.

“Amado.”

The shuddered endearment. Too much. Gabe slammed three fingers into Angel. The hot, slick passage clutched at him, worked him as he pressed the pad of a finger to Angel’s prostate and watched him fall apart.

His lover roared, bucking wildly, almost dislodging Gabe and his fingers. His cum scented the air, pulling a dry climax from Gabe at the sight. He didn’t stop his fingers until

Angels limbs gave out and he fell, face forward onto the floor. Gabe released him and crawled up Angel's back. They lay on the floor, panting, bodies still shivering. Then Angel rolled then, arms holding Gabe tight as they lay side by side on their kitchen floor.

Angel looked at him, eyes low-riding, face stark in the aftermath of his orgasm. He touched Gabe's cheek, fingers shaking. "Fuck, cop. How you wreck me."

Gabe caught his fingers and brought them to his mouth. "It's my job. To wreck you and to fix you. Put you back together until I do it all over again."

"Yes."

* * * * *

Heavy steps pounded down the stairs. Gabe stood at the front door, hand on the knob as he waited for his lover to get over his attitude and get in the car. "Hurry up, damn it."

Angel came into view, a fierce scowl on his face. "You can go without me." He sounded way too hopeful.

"You wish." Gabe beckoned him closer. "It's been two weeks since we moved in. I'm taking you to the diner for breakfast. It's time you showed your face around the neighborhood."

Angel's face grew darker. "I don't need to meet no fucking neighbors. There's a reason I had the house built far away from everyone." He stalked Gabe, moving like a predator; cool and calm, but with that deadly focus in his eyes. He was dressed simply in a black t-shirt under a motorcycle jacket, with jeans and tan Timbos. His face, man, that look in his eyes.

Gabe crooked a finger and Angel came to him. "You got that face on," he murmured.

Angel frowned. "What face?"

"That gang face." Gabe smirked and cupped Angel's jaw, rubbing a thumb over the five o'clock shadow darkening his jaw. "That face that says you know exactly how a crook moves." He patted Angel's cheek. "Change it to your happy face, lover. You'll scare the ordinary folk."

Angel grunted. "Why?" he whined. "Why do I have to go outside?"

Gabe walked out the house and over to the Jeep. He waited until Angel climbed in with him and buckled up before he spoke. "I'm not going to let you hide inside the fucking house." He backed out their driveway. "Besides, I told that big-boobed chick down at the supermarket that I'm gay and taken. Imagine if you never showed your face around town, chick will be all over me." He glanced sideways at Angel, noticing the way his lover's lips curved.

"Got yourself an admirer, do ya?"

It was Gabe's turn to grunt. He'd taken a trip to the local supermarket for groceries and somehow caught the eye of one of the checkout girls. She'd fluttered her lashes, shoved her boobs in his face, and damn near climbed him until he let her know he wasn't interested. 'Course the second time he went, yesterday, she'd eyed him skeptically.

"The ring on my finger doesn't appear to be a deterrent," he told Angel. "Her interest has been piqued by the new guy in the neighborhood. Which is why I need you with me, you can scowl at anyone who looks at me too long."

"I do not."

"Uh-huh." He chuckled at the memory of them visit the local community center. One of the female workers there had held on to Gabe too long when they shook hands. He'd thought for a second Angel was gonna shoot the bitch. "You totally do."

Angel didn't speak and Gabe reached out, touched his knee. "I don't want you hiding, Angel. I want to be friendly with our neighbors and I want my partner to be at my side."

Angel covered his hand with his. "Fine, but I reserve the right to fuck up anyone who even look like they're gonna come on to you."

"Dunno, that can mess with my street cred."

They both chuckled.

The stares were curious as they sat at a table in the diner down the street from their home. Everyone stared openly, more so when Angel shrugged out of his jacket and his tattoos were put on display. Gabe watched him. His lover had no idea how good he looked, how dangerous. There was an air about Angel that changing his name and address could never get rid of. He was a predator.

Gabe wiggled. A very sexy predator. And his.

After they'd placed their orders, Gabe broached the topic that had been on his mind for some time. "We need to talk."

Angel's gaze flew from the sugar he'd been stirring into his coffee to Gabe's face. "What is it?"

"We never talked about me getting a job." Between the both of them and the monies they had in the bank, they didn't have to work if they didn't have to, but Angel had scored a job building a condominium for a friend of Syren Rua. Gabe wasn't in a hurry to get back to the grind, but he wasn't about to be a house husband either.

Angel blinked at his words. “Ah, no we didn’t.”

“I want something to keep me occupied when you lock yourself in your office all day.” He grabbed Angel’s hand. “Something that challenges me.”

“Okay?” Angel frowned. “I don’t—you know you can do whatever you want.” He put his elbows on the table and leaned forward. “Did you think I’d be opposed to you working?”

“Of course not.” Gabe shook his head. “I just wanted to make sure we’re on the same page.”

“We are.” Angel kissed his knuckles just as the waitress popped up with their orders. Her eyes widened a fraction, but she didn’t miss a beat and Angel didn’t let go of his hand. “We’re on the same page, babe. Tell me what you have in mind.”

“Remember Francis, the director at the community center?” Angel released his hand and Gabe dug into his bacon and eggs. When Angel nodded he continued. “He’s thinking about creating a program aimed at positive role models in the gay community.”

Angel sipped his coffee. “Okay. What does that have to do with you?”

“I’d be heading it up.”

Angel looked confused so Gabe rushed on. “I’d help as a sounding board, I guess. Talk to the kids, definitely give classes on self defense. The basics. I’d be helping.” And he wanted to help.

“You want that?”

He met his lover’s gaze and nodded. “I do.”

“Cool.” Angel’s mouth curved. “You’ll be good, cop.”

Gabe batted his lashes. “I’m always good.”

“Except when you’re bad.”

Gabe speared a strawberry off Angel’s plate. “Which you love.”

“Fucking A.” Angel winked then picked up a strawberry. He dragged it through the whipped cream on his waffles then offered it up to Gabe who took it with a moan.

“We might want to stop before the locals run us out of town.”

“I’d like to see them try.”

Gabe cast a discreet glance around. Nobody appeared to be paying them any attention anymore, which was a good thing. He leaned over and kissed his man, a quick swipe of his

tongue catching the whipped cream at the side of Angel's mouth. When he sat back down he said, "Don't forget Kane is coming this weekend."

"Ugh." Angel groaned. "Does he have to?"

Gabe grinned. "Yep." His brother and his lover had crossed paths back in Angel's gun dealing days when Kane arrested one of Angel's suppliers. Finding a half naked Angel in his brother's kitchen when he'd had no idea Gabe was into men hadn't helped mellow Kane's opinion of Angel. The two men did not like each other.

"But he hates me." Angel pouted. "Your brother hates me, babe."

"So?" Gabe folded his arms and sat back. "You'll still smile and nod when he comes by, right?"

"Do I have to?" Angel's eyes danced. "Will I be rewarded for being nice to the Marshal?"

Gabe barked a laugh. "Try and you'll see."

Angel bit into a sausage. "Fine, but if he gets on my nerves I won't be held responsible for stabbing him."

"I'm sure he'll issue the same warning when he comes by."

* * * * *

"Delicious meal, Liliana." Gabe didn't look up from his plate when he addressed Rafe's mother.

Rafe snickered. Every week they had a standing dinner date with his mother. She lived ten minutes away and had her own life, one that appeared to agree with her because her face was lighter, eyes brighter. She'd made friends in her community and was at ease. Rafe loved that. She looked younger and glancing from her to his lover, Rafe was once again reminded that he'd made the right choice in choosing this life over his previous existence.

"Thank you, honey." Liliana beamed at Gabe. "Eat up, put some meat on those bones."

Gabe and Rafe groaned as one, but Gabe did as commanded, digging in to the *Arroz con Pollo*.

"How are you, *Mami*?" Angel sipped his water, listening as his mother talked about visiting with her friends, enjoying life. Her face was animated and he smiled. She was happy. He was happy. All was good.

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you both,” Liliana said suddenly. “I wanted to ask something...” Her words drifted off and Rafe frowned. Gabe looked up from his plate.

“What is it, *Mami*?”

She twisted her napkin in her lap, the smile gone from her face.

“Liliana?”

Rafe grabbed her hand. “*Mami*, talk to us.” Her silence couldn’t bode well and he didn’t like the icy dread that settled on his skin. “*Mami*.”

“Angel.” She cupped his face. “It’s only you and me. We’re all that’s left.” Her gaze danced to Gabe and back. “What about— have you talked about children?”

Gabe’s fork clattered into his plate.

Rafe blinked. “Wha-what?”

On the other side of him, his lover made a sound and Rafe tore his gaze from his mother. Gabe’s face was white, stunned surprise in his eyes.

“Have you not talked about children?” his mother asked. “You’re a couple now. You’re getting married.”

“*Mami*.” Rafe slashed a hand through the air. She froze. “We haven’t...” He shook his head. “We haven’t discussed it.” The thought never crossed his mind. Kids.

Gabe didn’t move, his lover had apparently been turned to stone. His eyes though, they bled panic. Rafe touched Gabe’s shoulder. His partner tensed up more.

“Angel, I won’t live forever and after you, our family, our blood dies.” His mother’s words fell, but he barely registered the words. He couldn’t take his eyes off Gabe.

“Cop.” He gripped Gabe’s shoulder tighter when he didn’t stir. “Cop.”

Gabe jerked. He blinked up at Rafe, eyes haunted, then glanced away quickly. “No, we haven’t discussed kids.”

Something hollowed Rafe’s gut at those words, spoken without inflection. Without feeling.

“Do you want children, Gabe?” His mother spoke the words Rafe realized he should have asked way before now.

Gabe didn’t look at Liliana. He didn’t look at Rafe. He just shook his head. “No.”

His mother clapped a trembling hand over her mouth.

Rafe swallowed the pain he felt, like a kick to the chest. “We can’t talk about this here.” He rose, his chair falling behind him. “*Mami*, Gabe and I have—we need to talk.”

They didn’t speak when they walked out the house, didn’t look at each other in the car on their way home. Rafe gripped the steering wheel with knuckles long gone white. He hadn’t known until Gabe said no. He hadn’t known that yes, he did want kids. Only his lover didn’t.

Back at home, he parked the car while Gabe hopped out and opened the front door. Rafe ran after him, catching up to him in the kitchen where he stood, staring into the fridge.

Lost. He looked lost.

“Gabe, talk to me.”

“Why haven’t we talked about this before?” Gabe didn’t look at him, but he closed the fridge door. “Why did she bring it up?”

Rafe shrugged even though Gabe couldn’t see. “I don’t know. I-I didn’t give it a thought. It was never on my radar.”

“Good.” Gabe ducked around him and started walking away.

“But it is now.” Rafe spoke loud enough for the other man to catch every word when he said, “*Mami*’s words forced me to acknowledge that yes,” he whispered. “I want them. Gabe, I want kids.”

Gabe froze. He grabbed on to the counter nearest him and leaned on it. Rafe couldn’t see his face.

“I want children,” Rafe said again. “But I can see from your reaction that you don’t.” Those words couldn’t be real. He heard them, felt them as they dropped in the quiet like Rocket Propelled Grenades, but Rafe couldn’t believe they could be real. “Look at me.” He clenched his fists, walked closer to Gabe. “Look in my eyes and tell me, cop. Tell me you don’t want a family with me. Tell me you don’t want to build a family with me.”

Gabe shuffled. He moved, turned around, and fixed those eyes on Rafe. “I don’t want kids.” His facial expression didn’t change even as he dropped that fucking bomb.

Rafe’s throat worked and Gabe? That son of a bitch walked away.

Chapter Four

They lived in the same house, slept in the same bed, but they lived two separate lives. In the blink of an eye, with one earth-shattering question, Rafe found his life tilted once again.

He and Gabe moved around each other like strangers in their home. They barely spoke and when they did, Rafe was the one to initiate it; he was the one begging for answers and explanations while Gabe froze him out. He didn't understand it.

Three days and they barely touched, barely speaking ten words between them. The tense silence grated, worked on Rafe's nerves. Every day he locked himself in his office and went over the events of that night in his mind.

Kids.

Who'd have known that would've been the one thing to make Gabe pull away from him? But why? It wasn't as if Rafe had brought home a squealing baby. They'd only just broached the subject and this was the result.

Why?

He needed answers and his lover wasn't forthcoming. In fact, Gabe had done his damndest to not even be in the same room with Rafe. He woke way before Rafe and left the house for the majority of the day, coming home late at night to crawl into bed and roll away, his back to Rafe. It wasn't lost on Rafe how quickly his Happy Ever After had changed. How dramatically and yet, he had no idea why.

Now, he sat in his office, staring down over the beach as Gabe and his brother sat on the sand. At least they were talking. Would Gabe tell his brother why he'd pulled away, why he'd done a complete one-eighty? When he'd left his office to greet Kane earlier that morning, Rafe saw the frown on the marshal's brow. Kane probably picked up on the tension, on the way Rafe and Gabe didn't even meet each other's eyes, but he didn't ask.

After that Rafe made himself scarce. The brothers needed time and he needed to feel like he was wanted. He didn't feel wanted. He didn't feel like he and Gabe were who they'd been. He felt alone and confused and he didn't like the way that made his head hurt and his stomach churn.

He wanted his lover back. He wanted their lives back the way it was only days before.

Shaking his head as if to remove the morose thoughts, he turned back to his work, to the plans he needed to draw up for a condo in Charleston. He bent his head and focused on the things he could immediately fix, looking up only when a knock came on his office door.

“Yeah?” He glanced at the clock. An hour and a half gone already.

“It’s Kane.” The marshal’s tone was hushed, hesitant. “Can I come in?”

Rafe scrubbed a hand over his face with a sigh. Gabe must have talked to his brother then. “Yeah, come in.”

Kane crept inside, his face carefully blank, and took a seat opposite Rafe. “I like your house.” Kane smiled, but it didn’t reach his cold, blue eyes. “Especially the beach. You’re good.”

Rafe nodded his gratitude. “What can I do for you, Marshal?”

“What’s going on between you and my brother?” Kane leaned forward. “I’ve never seen him so...quiet.”

“Have you asked your brother what’s going on between him and me?”

Kane rolled his eyes. “Fuck yeah, but he’s icing me out.”

Rafe snorted. “Welcome to the club then.”

“What’s going on?” Kane stared him down. “What did you do to him?”

Ain’t that some shit? Immediately Kane puts the blame on him? “First, watch your fucking tone. I would do nothing to hurt your brother. You and he should know this.” He leaned back in his chair. “Gabe is my life. I’d bleed for him. I’ve already killed and died for him.”

It could have been his imagination, but Kane’s eyes appeared to soften a bit. “Then help me understand why you two can’t stand to be in the same room together.”

Rafe looked away as emotion roiled in his gut. “We had dinner with my mother a few nights ago. She asked us about children, she wants grandchildren.”

“Wow.” Kane sank back into his chair, eyes wide. “That’s huge.”

“Yes.” Rafe nodded. “Until that moment I hadn’t even entertained that thought.” He looked down at the pencil clenched tightly between his fingers. “She asked Gabe if he wanted kids, he said no.”

“Damn.” Kane looked as if he’d been punched.

“My thoughts exactly, because you see, I want them. I asked your brother point blank if he wanted to raise a family with me.” Rafe’s breath caught and he inhaled deeply before continuing, “He told me no.”

“Oh man.” Kane shook his head.

“I’ve been asking for answers, for explanations, but he’s not talking to me. He’s barely looking at me.”

Kane rubbed his chin and regarded Rafe thoughtfully. “Is that like a deal breaker? You want them, he doesn’t, so that’s it? You guys are done?”

Those words made Rafe feel sick to his stomach. “Not to me. It’s not like I’ve got children standing by at the ready. I just want him to tell me why, to make me understand.”

Kane nodded. “He ducks me when I ask about the two of you. I don’t know if he’ll talk to me about the kids thing, but I can try?” He lifted a brow in question.

Rafe mulled over Kane’s words then shook his head. “No. He’s not ready now, but he will be and I want to hear it from him. Something has him running scared and I can’t know what, I can’t fix it until he tells me.”

“Knowing Gabe, that could take forever.”

Rafe shrugged. “I have forever.”

“You love him,” Kane said softly. His lips curved. “You really love him. Shit.”

“That’s news to you, Marshal?”

“I’ve had my doubts about the two of you, mostly you.”

Rafe grimaced. “Right. Thanks then.”

“Hey.” Rafe threw up his hands. “You’re not who I would have chosen for my brother, I’m man enough to admit that, but he chose you and I can see here and now, how much you love him.” His smile fell away and he frowned. “You were right when you said he’s running.”

“What?”

“Uh, he mentioned coming back with me to Connecticut.”

Words failed Rafe, completely abandoned him. Something snapped and he blinked down at the pencil he’d broken in two. He cleared his throat once, twice. “Really.”

“I think you need to stop waiting for him to come to you, yeah?” Kane got to his feet. “He’s taking me to the diner down the street for dinner later and afterwards I think I can make myself scarce.”

“You’re giving me permission to...what?” Rafe looked up at him with a squint.

“To do whatever you have to in order to make your man talk to you.” Kane winked. “But come on, do you really need my permission?”

No, he didn’t, but having it from Kane was tantamount to having the marshal’s blessing, wasn’t it? Rafe nodded at Kane. “Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

* * * * *

Rafe bided his time, watching in silence as Gabe and his brother left then came back, an hour so later. He caught Kane’s wink before the marshal disappeared into one of the guest rooms down the hall from the master suite. Rafe entered the bedroom he shared with Gabe and locked and bolted the door. The shower was running, so Gabe was occupied.

Rafe looked around. A duffel bag sat in the corner and he searched it, his chest hurting when he saw some of Gabe’s clothes. He was packing to leave. What did that mean for them? What did it mean that Gabe wanted away from him?

Rafe closed the glass sliding doors and pulled the blinds, blocking out sunlight and the outside world. He sank onto the edge of the bed, heart in his throat, a pit in his stomach and waited. He tried blocking out the tangible sight of Gabe’s plan to leave him. For a weekend or for good?

He needed answers.

The shower cut off and Rafe tensed. Gabe exited the bathroom in a hot cloud of steam, smelling like Irish Spring. He stopped short when he saw Rafe, gaze going from Rafe’s face to the duffel bag that sat at his feet.

Gabe didn’t speak. He went about getting dressed, towel around his neck as he flipped on the overhead light and pulled on a pair of boxers.

“I want to know what’s going on,” Rafe said. He cleared his throat. “I want to know what’s happening with us.”

Gabe tensed at his first word, but didn’t turn around. He continued digging through drawers, pulling out a t-shirt that he dropped onto the bed.

“Gabe, it’s been three days. Talk to me,” Rafe pleaded. He hated that he had to do this, beg his lover to throw him a fucking bone. He hated how he couldn’t breathe easy until Gabe smiled at him, touched him.

“Nothing’s happening with us.”

Rafe blinked at the mumbled words. “So you’re not planning to leave me?” he asked. “You’re not planning to leave with your brother when he heads back to Connecticut tonight?”

Gabe shrugged. “It’s only for a few days.”

Fuck that! Rafe took two steps and grabbed Gabe’s shoulder, turning him roughly to face him. Gabe’s expression remained that fucking blank slate. “When were you gonna tell me? Kane leaves tonight. When would I have known that you planned to fucking slink away?”

“It’s not a big deal, I just want to—”

“To what?” Rafe growled. “To what, Gabe? Escape, abandon me and our home?”

Fire flashed in Gabe’s eyes, the first sight of life in a long time. “You mean like you abandoned me when you went to prison?”

Rafe gaped. “What? What? That’s—” His throat burned. “I thought you forgave me, I thought you understood why I did what I did?” Why was this happening now? Rafe pressed a palm to his eyes, felt it tremble. “I thought we were past all this?”

“I forgave you, I haven’t forgotten.”

“Really, Gabe? Really? You pull this shit now?” Rafe didn’t bother hiding the tremors in his voice, running through his body. “Why?”

Gabe shrugged and turned away. Rafe pulled the gun from his waist band.

“Look at me, you son of a bitch.” Funny, the gun didn’t waver.

Gabe’s eyes flared. “Put that shit away.”

“No.” Rafe stepped closer, finger tapping the trigger. “No one’s leaving. Your words, Gabe. Yours, and I’m holding you to that. You take a step out that door and you and me are going down, together.”

“Fuck you.”

“Fuck you!” Angel roared. He punched Gabe in the jaw. “Fuck you.”

Gabe punched him back, a blow to the chest that staggered Rafe’s breath and sent him reeling backwards. He fell into the door and Gabe grabbed his throat, choking him. The gun fell to the floor and Rafe found his hands free so he wrapped both hands around Gabe’s neck and swept his feet, knocking Gabe off balance and to the floor.

Rafe went down with him and scrambled for the gun. He straddled Gabe and pressed the gun to his forehead. "You are not fucking leaving," he snarled. "Not for a minute, not for a weekend."

Gabe glared up at him, fury on his face.

Rafe's eyes burned. "Cop," he whispered. "I don't understand. Make me understand what's happening to us." He wanted to bury his face in Gabe's neck and bawl, inhale his lover, but he couldn't. Not yet.

Gabe's throat worked.

"Talk to me." Rafe shook Gabe. "Make me understand, so I can fix it. Please." He moved off Gabe and sat next to him. Gabe didn't move. "I miss you, I miss my partner. I miss us. We're a team and now I feel like we're fractured. How do I fix it? How do I make us like we were? Because I want it, I want that whole thing back."

Gabe sat up slowly. His eyes were red, filled with pain and hurt when he said, "I need to go."

"No." Rafe meant to yell, but the word was a sob, pure fear. "I can't let you go." He grabbed Gabe's hand, held on tight. "Why? Tell me why? Does this have to do with children, because I can do without them," he said quickly. "We don't need them, as long as we have us."

Gabe shook his head. "I need to breathe. I need to think."

Rafe stared at him, actually hearing his heart tearing in his chest. "You can't breathe here? You can't think here?"

"Angel, please."

"Don't Angel me," Rafe spat. "You want to end us, is that it? You want my blessing to walk away from me, from us and our home?"

"I love you," Gabe said softly. He touched Rafe's face then pulled back quickly. "I just need you to let me go."

Let him go. Let his heart break. Let his world disappear. Rafe bent his head, hiding the tears running down his face. He wished he was the kind of person to force someone to stay where they didn't want to be.

"You promised me forever, cop. You promised me a lifetime of us. I am fucking well holding you to it." He lifted his head and chased the tears from his eyes with a fist. "You go." He leaned forward, pushed his face up to Gabe's. "That ring on your finger better never come off."

Gabe rubbed his eyes.

“When you come back, whenever you come back, you’re going to tell me why.” Rafe promised. “You’re going to tell me, make me understand and you’re going to let me fix it.” He got to his feet and walked out the room, locking himself in his office with a bottle of Jack Daniels.

He must have fallen asleep, because when he lifted his head off his desk, the house was eerily silent.

He got up and walked through the place, gripping the bottle of J. D. No one was around. A note sat on the dresser in Kane’s room. *I’ll take care of him. Try not to worry. – K.*

Rafe threw the half empty bottle of Jack against the wall and sank to the floor with a low cry. Gone. Gabe was gone and he may never come back.

Three weeks, two days later.

Gabe shut the door behind him quietly and stood in the foyer, listening. The house was in darkness, nothing moved.

“Angel?” He walked inside and dropped his bag on the couch in the living room, turning on the lights as he went. He shouldn’t dread seeing his lover the way he did. Nothing could change the feeling burning his guts, the one that said he’d fucked up. Big. That he’d made the wrong move. The weekend he’d promised Angel wasn’t a big deal had turned into an almost one month stay in Connecticut, hiding out in his brother’s house without trying to reach out to Angel.

“Angel?” He approached Angel’s office with hesitant steps. Finding the door closed, he turned the knob then poked his head in when it swung open. The office was in darkness. So where was Angel? Gabe searched the entire downstairs of their home before climbing the stairs to the second floor. He started with their bedroom. The door was open, lights on so he strode inside.

And found Angel.

His lover was sprawled face down on the bed, an empty bottle of Jameson on the floor nearby. The doors were open, cool breeze from the beach blowing in.

“Jesus!” Gabe sprinted to the bed and grabbed Angel by the shoulder, yanking him upright. “Angel, wake up. I’m home.”

Angel's gold eyes were open and lucid. Guess he wasn't sleeping after all. He didn't look drunk either, just exhausted and pissed. Dark circles framed eyes that glared up at Gabe. "Get off me." Angel pushed him off and sat up.

"Are you okay?" Gabe touched his knee and Angel flinched away.

"Don't. Fucking. Touch me." He moved off the bed and got to his feet, blue sleep pants hanging of his hips. The same pants Gabe could've sworn fit him way closer only weeks before.

What had he done?

"Angel, I'm so sorry."

Angel made a harsh sound. He stalked to the door as if to walk out then paused and began punching the wall. "Fuck! Fuck!"

Gabe rushed to him when he heard bones snap. "Angel. Please. I'm sorry." He moved in close, but didn't dare touch the other man. "Please. I'm sorry," he whispered.

"You're sorry?" Angel cried. "You're sorry?" He swung around, his right hand limp at his side. "Tell me then. Tell me why you're sorry." His eyes, they were beyond wounded, the pain residing there stark and real and way too much for one man to bear.

Pain Gabe caused. His fault. "I'm sorry I left," he told Angel. "I'm sorry I abandoned you. I'm sorry I didn't tell you why I wanted to go. I'm sorry I stayed away for so long without calling, without reaching out."

Angel sagged into the wall. He fixed red-rimmed eyes on Gabe and the corners of his mouth lifted. It wasn't a smile, nothing about amusement. A cruel gesture, more like. Self-deprecating too. "I'm sorry too." Angel swallowed. "I'm sorry I trusted you." Tears slid down his face and Gabe choked.

"Angel."

"My name is Rafe," he snapped. "Use it. The man who calls me Angel, my cop, my lover, is not you."

That cut sliced deep, grated against bone, and Gabe bled. "No." Gabe shook his head. "I had to clear my head, I had to. Please, try to understand." He'd needed time to deal with the terror the idea of kids brought. He'd needed to figure out why he was so afraid.

"I don't have to understand." Angel's Adam's apple slid up and down. "Three weeks. You packed an overnight bag and didn't come home for three weeks. I heard nothing from you, nothing."

“I’m sorry.”

“I don’t need your sorry!” Angel yelled. “I need answers. I need to understand how you can lie to me like that. You’re the one person I knew would never hurt me and you did,” he cried. “You did. You fucked me over but good, didn’t you?”

“I was afraid,” Gabe admitted. He touched Angel’s shoulder briefly. “I was afraid, I’m still afraid of what the idea of kids would mean for us.”

“And I’m not?” Angel bowed his head; using the black wife-beater he wore to wipe his face. When he looked up again, his eyes were dry, but still red. Still wild. Still hauntingly pained. “We’re a team. I expected discussions and arguments.” He shook his head. “What I didn’t expect was for you to walk out. And to stay away for three weeks. Three weeks, Gabe.” He turned and walked out the bedroom.

“Babe, please.” Gabe followed him down the stairs to the kitchen. He needed Angel to understand why he left. “I’d never thought about kids before your mom brought them up, then you say you want them and all I can think is you have a past that will not go away just because you change your name and the address on your bills. How can we bring children into that?”

Angel drained the glass he drink water out off then threw it across the room. Gabe watched it shatter without a flinch.

“No one’s leaving, you said.” Angel mocked him. “Whatever happens we deal with it. You said.” He pointed at Gabe. “You’re a liar. You’re a liar and I can’t trust you. I can’t.”

“You can.” Gabe grabbed the finger Angel held up. “I panicked. I was stupid. I didn’t trust you to understand and I’m sorry for that.”

As he watched Angel seemed to crumble. “Trust. Gabe, we don’t have it.” His mouth trembled and he bit down on his bottom lip. “You walked away so fucking easily. You left me behind like emotional road-kill and you just kept on going.”

“Angel, please. I wish I could take it back.” Gabe cupped his jaw, Angel’s stubble pricking his palm. “I love you.”

Angel barked a rusted laugh. “If this is the way you show it,” he leaned closer, got in Gabe’s face, “then you never should’ve loved me,” he rasped, voice breaking. “You never should’ve loved me. You damn sure never should’ve said it.”

Tears blinded Gabe. “No, I’ll say it every day. I’ll never stop saying it because it’s true.” How had they ended up there?

“You can’t take it back, what you did to us.” Angel backed away. “I thought you were ready for this.” He waved a hand at the room. “I thought you were ready, but Gabe, you’re not.”

“Don’t fucking say that.” Gabe went to him, caught him around the waist. His lover stiffened, but didn’t move away. “I love you. I love you,” he whispered, pressing his forehead to Angel’s. “That is as true today as it was the first time we met. I love you.”

“Here’s a thought for you.” Angel held his gaze with eyes glittering gold. “Love isn’t enough, not if you can turn tail and run so quickly. So easily. Our love,” he heaved a sigh, “maybe it’s not what we thought it to be.”

Gabe had no problem scoffing at that. “Fuck that, what we feel for each other goes beyond love.” It was more, much more.

“It does, huh?” Angel moved away from him then, one hand on the edge of the island keeping him balanced. “You made promises to me, they’re now broken. You promised a future, that’s now in doubt. I had no idea how true my statement was when I said you wreck me.”

Gabe blinked at him. “What?”

“You took a wrecking ball to everything I knew about us.” Angel caught his left hand in his right and stared down at the ring on his finger. He twisted it without looking at Gabe. “You broke us,” Angel’s voice trembled, “and I don’t know if we can still be fixed, if we can still work.”

Oh God. Gabe’s gut roiled. “We’ll be fine, I swear.” Why couldn’t Angel see that? Why couldn’t he understand? He grabbed Angel’s chin, forced him to meet his eyes. “If you want us and I want us then we’ll be fine.”

Something pinged onto the countertop. Gabe dropped his gaze and watched, transfixed in horror, as Angel’s ring spun, dancing atop the smooth granite.

“But do I want us?” Angel whispered. He pointed at the ring as it finally stilled and lay there. “Do I want that, what it represents—what it should represent?”

Gabe’s eyes burned. “Angel.”

“In our best moments, we’re great.” Angel’s voice shook so badly there was no hiding it. “And it turns out, in our bad moments, we’re worse.”

“Please.” Gabe grabbed his arm. Held on like a lifeline. “Please, Angel, don’t—”

“We’ve ruined it.” Angel balled up a fist and pressed it to his mouth. “All of it, the plans and the sacrifices. Ruined.”

“No!”

Angel yanked away his hand. “Keep the ring.” He walked off.

Gabe dropped to his knees and threw up on the kitchen floor.

Chapter Five

Gabe had a moment, just one moment, when he could've sworn his heart stopped beating. When he could've sworn his lungs no longer worked. His throat burned and his knees hurt, but the pain in his chest, that was the beast that drove him off his knees and racing through the house.

"Angel! Angel!" In their bathroom upstairs, he quickly swished mouthwash before resuming his search. Angel had disappeared, no sounds no sights of him lingered.

Gabe wasn't about to give up, he wasn't about to give Angel his wish. He'd been stupid. God, so stupid and he'd fucked up, but that shit could and would be fixed. He just had to make Angel see that. Accept that.

He didn't want to be without Angel, not even a little bit. The time away made that abundantly clear. He'd cleared his doubts and the insecurities from his mind, ruining his relationship in the process. Why now? Why did everything have to happen now, when they were so close to realizing their dreams and why had he been so foolish to let his fear rule his actions and chase him from the only person he never wanted to leave?

His head hurt, exhaustion rode him, but he scrubbed a hand over his face. He picked the gun Angel had dropped on the floor of their bedroom and checked the clip. With the frame of mind Angel was in, God only knew what he'd do. Where he'd go. Gabe had to find him. Had to make sure nothing jeopardized the life they were building.

No more than he'd fucked it up, at any rate.

Tucking the gun into his waistband, he went back downstairs and walked onto the porch barefoot. It was already dark out, but the lights clicked on. The garage door rumbled open. He pulled the gun and vaulted over the side of steps.

He found his lover.

Angel sat atop his Kawasaki, the engine running while cloudy exhaust filled the garage. He wore only a thin leather jacket over a rumpled t-shirt and ripped jeans. Despite the heavy boots on his feet, he appeared ready to ride out with no helmet.

"Angel, let's talk." Gabe approached him slowly, carefully, but Angel gave no indication that he even heard him. He had the look on his face that Gabe hated, the one that said he wasn't Rafe Soto and he wasn't there, in North Carolina. No. He had a lust for blood in his eyes, pain on

his face and in every line of his body and he was back in Brooklyn, back in that gang banger persona.

He was Angelo Pagan once more and Angelo was out to do damage.

“Babe. Look at me.”

Angel glanced up at him, eyes blood-shot. “Move out of my way.”

“No.” Gabe shook his head. “Let’s talk, babe. Please.” He held out a hand. Both men watched it shake. “I’m begging, Angel.”

Anger twisted his lover’s face. “Well, since you’re begging.” His right wrist moved and the motorcycle’s front wheel lifted slightly off the ground. He’d applied the throttle. “No. Now move or I’ll move you.”

“Angel, I’m not moving. I want you to talk to me. I want to talk to you.”

Angel laughed as his fingers tightened around the handlebars. “Isn’t it funny how that works?” He eased up on the gas and lowered one foot to the ground. “For days I begged for the same thing, I begged you to talk to me. To say something, anything.” He shrugged. “You didn’t and now? I won’t.” He gassed the motorcycle again. “You made your decision and I’ve made mine.”

“I was an idiot.” Gabe raised his voice over the roar of the bike’s engine. “I was a fool.” He should have known better, but he’d been so caught up in his head, in the emotions erupting within him he’d completely shut out the man he loved.

“No,” Angel barked. “I was the fool. Your fool. Always. Even now, I’m your fool.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Move, Gabe.” Angel eased the bike forward.

Gabe took a step back then pulled the Glock. He pointed it at Angel. “Babe, please. Let’s not do this.”

Fury sparked in Angel’s eyes. “Oh, we’re gonna do this.” The roar of the bike’s engine grew louder and louder.

“Don’t make me hurt you.” Tears rolled down Gabe’s face and dripped off his nose. His mind rebelled at the stance he took, feet braced apart, weapon pointed at the man he claimed to love. At what point did they throw the towel in? At what point did he cut his losses and call it a day without causing more pain?

“You’ve already hurt me!” Angel moved the foot he had on the ground and suddenly the bike was barreling toward Gabe.

He pulled the trigger. Twice.

The bullets went into the front wheel and the bike wobbled crazily, careening a hair’s breadth from where Gabe stood. Angel lost control and went flying off, over the handlebars, landing on their paved driveway with a thud.

“Oh fuck!” Gabe ran to him. “Jesus, babe. Are you okay?” He placed the gun on the ground next to them and ran his hands over his lover’s body.

“Now you want to know if I’m okay?” Angel got up slowly, his expression thunderous. “Now? That shit is three weeks too late, Gabe.” He tried to get up and Gabe grasped his elbow, helped him to his feet and held on to him when Angel would’ve shrugged him off.

“You’re bleeding.” He swiped a thumb at the blood at the corner of the other man’s mouth.

“You must be so proud,” Angel murmured. His gold eyes mocked Gabe when he said, “I made you bleed, now it’s your turn.”

Gabe frowned at him. “You think I want this?” he asked. “You actually think I want this fucking tit for tat we have going, that I want to hurt you?” Did Angel think that low of him?

“I think I don’t know who you are.” Angel didn’t look at him, he stared at the wreckage of his motorcycle. “I think all we are can be summed up by what just happened.”

“That’s not fair.” Gabe moved into his space and touched him, a slide of his index finger over Angel’s Adam’s apple. “This is only one part of us, not the sum total of who we are or what we feel.” Not by a long shot.

“You hurt me. I hurt you.” Angel’s gaze flickered to him then away. A muscle in his jaw twitched. “We each leave our marks as we destroy each other.” He met Gabe’s gaze, held it. “I could devastate you. The way you make me hurt, the way you make me feel, I can do some serious shit.”

Gabe nodded. He knew that. Knew the person his lover used to be wasn’t completely wiped away with the name change. That man was deadly and unpredictable. “We can leave our marks, physical proof of how hard we fight, how hard we love, but nothing changes for us.” He cupped Angel’s jaw. “We love hard,” he whispered fiercely. “And we’re fucking *good* at it.”

“We’re good...until we’re not.” Angel moved away and walked up to the porch where he sank onto one of the benches.

Gabe followed him up there. He leaned against the rails, his back to it and faced his lover. “You’re willing to do this?” he asked quietly. “End what we have because I fucked up?” His heart hurt, his entire body ached, but he fisted his hands and waited for Angel to speak.

“It’s clear to me that the mention of kids tripped some kind of switch.” Angel sighed and tilted his head back. “I want the truth. I want answers. I want to know this thing in me,” he grabbed the front of his t-shirt and bunched it in his fist, “this heart that beats for you isn’t wrong. That my trust isn’t misplaced.”

He had the words, they burned on Gabe’s tongue, but speaking them would shatter the peace they seemed to have somehow cultivated in the past few minutes. “I—” He squeezed his eyes shut. “I’m about to hurt you even more and I’m sorry.”

Angel looked at him and Gabe saw him mentally brace himself for the blow.

“I love you,” he prefaced his words with the most crucial point. “I love you, that shit isn’t negotiable. It’s a love that holds no regrets, no what ifs, no maybes. That kind of love. It’s what I feel. How I feel. Please remember that.”

Angel licked his lips. His features remained inscrutable.

“Do you remember Trish?”

“The woman you lived with? Yes.” Angel nodded.

“She wanted a family. Wanted a family with me.” Gabe’s lips twisted as he remembered all the arguments he’d had with Trish about them starting a family. “I didn’t want to. Early on it was just that I didn’t feel the urge and then you came into my life and I wanted you, not her, so talking about a family was a moot point.”

“Okay.”

“I never thought about it once you and I got together.” He waved a hand with a hard laugh. “Bigger things to deal with.”

Angel nodded again.

“Your mom spoke those words and a fucking wave of emotions fell on me, one after the other.” His breathing grew heavier, palms grew moist. The hard part was coming up and he wished he didn’t have to speak it out loud. “First, it was yes, kids. Of course. Then I think, why wasn’t I that enthusiastic about it when Trish brought it? After that is the thought I’d be having a

family with a man. That everything's changed, nothing is as it was. I'm in love with a man, living with a man, about to marry a man, and I think about bringing kids into our world where we've got some major secrets."

Angel leaned forward, gaze searching Gabe's, his mouth drawn into a tight, white line. Gabe continued speaking before he lost his nerve.

"Our life isn't the most kid-friendly. Yes, we love each other and we have money, but that's not all of it."

Angel's eyes darkened.

"It will be hard, no matter what, it will be harder than it should be." He held Angel's gaze. "Because we're two men." Gabe wanted to go to Angel, touch him, but instead he forced out the last piece. "I found myself wishing it wasn't. Wishing it wasn't so hard. Wishing I hadn't done it, hadn't fallen in love with a man. With you."

Angel jerked as if he'd been punched. His mouth opened and closed. Then he got up and walked off the porch. Away from their house and away from Gabe.

* * * * *

Two and a half hours in the emergency room getting his hand x-rayed and bandaged didn't help Rafe much. In fact, all he had was time. Time by himself to think, to go over every words Gabe said to him.

I found myself wishing I hadn't done it, hadn't fallen in love with a man. With you.

He'd thought his heart couldn't break any more when Gabe left. How nice to see he'd been wrong. The need to hurt someone, to spill blood rode him. He could let himself go, wreak some havoc, but in the end he'd still be left in the same position. He'd still be floundering to grasp the fact that he was in the middle of the demise of his relationship, watching that shit combust in slow motion.

His lover wished he didn't feel the way he felt. Nothing Rafe could do about that. Nothing he could do to change Gabe's mind or force him to feel what he didn't. He had no control over that, so Rafe did the next best. He waved a cab down in front of the hospital and had the driver take him to the nearest watering hole. He had no idea where he was, no sense of direction or time, what he did know was he needed to get drunk.

Fast.

He got out when the driver finally stopped, and awkwardly threw some money at him with his good hand before stumbling into the place. Loud music, bright lights, and people. He bee-lined for the bar.

The only time he lifted his head was to ask the bartender for a top up and even that grew less as the big burly man with the bushy moustache had long grown attuned to his need for “more.” So Rafe sat there, ignoring his phone as it buzzed and vibrated.

He still knew his name, still felt the pain of Gabe’s words in his chest, so obviously he wasn’t getting faded fast enough. He lifted his bandaged hand—oh, that didn’t hurt nearly as much so...yay—and the bartender shook his head.

“Sorry. That’s gonna be it for you, buddy.”

The fuck? Buddy? Rafe raised an eyebrow. “One, I’m not your buddy. Two, I’ve already thrown enough money your way for you to shut the fuck up and pour, got me?” Oh, yeah. He was spoiling for a fight and the way the guy’s face hardened he was gonna get it.

“Not gonna happen.” Pity flashed in the bartender’s eyes. “Getting drunk isn’t gonna fix what’s eating at you, trust me.” He used the towel he’d thrown over his shoulder to wipe the smooth wood surface. “Go find your woman and grovel, take my advice.”

“It’s a man and he’s the one who needs to grovel.” Fucking stupid advice.

Bartender shrugged. “Go find him then. How can he grovel if you’re nowhere around?”

Rafe rolled his eyes and drained the last drop of whiskey from the glass. “Shouldn’t you be pouring someone a drink? Someone like me?”

The other man grinned. “Someone? Sure. Just not you.” He moved away.

Rafe scowled. His phone went off again and he glanced at it. His mother. Goddamn it. He answered. “*Mami.*”

“Angel, where are you? Are you okay?” The questions came fast and furious and he winced at the worry in her voice.

“Yes, *Mami.* I’m fine.” He’d been keeping her at arms’ length the past few weeks. He couldn’t deal with the questions when he had no answers to give.

“Where are you?” his mother cried. “I’ve been calling and you’ve—”

“Been ignoring you, yes. I’m sorry.” He pressed a couple fingers to his temple. “*Mami,* I have to call you back”

“No. Do not hang up, Angel.” His mother’s yells reverberated in his head. “Where are you? Answer me, damn it!”

Well. Since she asked so nicely. “The man I love told me he wished he didn’t love me, *Mami*. Where do you think I am? At a bar getting drunk.”

She inhaled sharply. “What’s the address?”

He frowned at the phone. “What address?”

“Where you are, Angel. Pay attention.”

“*Mami*—”

“Address. Now.”

Shit. Rafe asked the bartender for the address and relayed it to her.

“Twenty minutes, Angel. Do not move.”

She hung up and Angel sat for a while, wondering what the hell he’d just done. He was losing his mind and his mother was about to pick him up from a bar. Him. A grown ass man. “Fuck.” He hopped off the stool and made his way outside. He’d need a clear head to deal with his mother. She’d want answers and she’d want to fix whatever was wrong and hurting him. Too bad she couldn’t, otherwise he’d let her.

He stood in the shadows, watching people stagger in and out and waited, no dreaded—that would be the word—dreaded his mother’s arrival. When the familiar vehicle pulled up, it was not his mother’s car but Gabe’s Jeep, and that sure as fuck wasn’t his mother in the driver’s seat.

She played him.

If he wasn’t so pissed he’d laugh. Or maybe cry. His feet were already moving so what the hell? He climbed into the passenger seat and buckled up.

“I thought *Mami* was coming.” He didn’t look at Gabe so he didn’t know if Gabe looked at him.

“Liliana called me. Yelled at me, actually, before she ordered me to come get you.”

Rafe snorted. The tension was too much and he had to put the window down, had to turn his face to the wind in order to breathe.

“How’s your hand?” Gabe asked quietly.

“Sprained.” He flexed his fingers.

They didn't speak again for the remainder of the drive home. Rafe kept his attention straight ahead, never making eye contact. Gabe's words, his actions, lay between them, thick in the air. So many things Rafe wanted to say, but he swallowed them all. He was too exhausted, too emotionally drained to deal with it.

He escaped inside the house while Gabe parked. In the bathroom, he locked the door and stepped into the shower, struggling to get clean when he couldn't even wet the damn bandages around his right wrist. He was hiding, and he could admit it as he stared up at the shower head. He could admit he didn't want to be in the same room as the man he loved.

He could admit that. He also had to admit he didn't know what the next move was or even whose move it was on the fucking chess board their lives had become.

After finishing up his one-handed shower, he pulled on pajama bottoms and crept downstairs when he didn't see Gabe. Maybe he was also hiding.

In the living room, he sank onto the couch with a sigh. A dull ache started in his temple and spread. "Fuck." He threw his head back, eyes closed, and took deep breaths. *Don't think about it. Don't think about it.* What the hell else was he supposed to think about?

"Look at me."

Rafe tensed at the sound of Gabe's voice. He opened his eyes and looked down. Gabe sat at his feet, face sad and hopeful, staring up at him.

Rafe shook his head. "Gabe, I can't right now. I can't deal with this."

"Please, I'll talk. Just listen to me. Just look at me." Gabe touched his knee. "I want to make some things clear and when I'm down, you can make your decision."

Decision. Now he had a decision?

"I have never questioned you, your love for me. I have never doubted how much you love me." Gabe smiled. "I can't. It's everything and it's everywhere, the way you feel. It's massive and overpowering and it makes me feel...loved." He stretched his legs out, made himself comfortable, then continued. "I never doubted us, I've only ever doubted me." He poked his chest. "This is all about me, doubting I can love you thy way you love me. If I can stand by you the way you stand by me. If I can protect you the way you protect me."

Rafe bit his tongue to keep from interrupting. Instead he held Gabe's gaze and did his best to listen.

“I have to be strong for you the way you’re strong for me and I wondered if I could. I doubted I could. After promising you a lifetime and more, suddenly I’m doubting myself and I couldn’t bring that to you. I had to work it out myself.” He shook his head slowly. “I should have, should’ve let you in on my fears, should’ve let you in on why I needed to think, but I didn’t know the words to use.”

Rafe swallowed. He didn’t want to soften toward Gabe, but Rafe knew doubts. He knew all about fears and how they could cripple.

“I’m scared.” Gabe choked. “I’m scared of how happy you make me, how easy it is to love you.”

“Gabe.” Damn it, Rafe couldn’t help but reach for him.

“No, I need to say this. Let me say this.” Gabe’s voice broke. “I was so stupid to leave you alone. I was selfish.” His eyes glittered. “I remember how fucking decimated I was when you went away. I remember the sleepless nights and the nightmares. I remember reaching out for you in the middle of the night and finding only cold, empty air. I still remember feeling gutted every single time the sun woke me in the mornings and you weren’t beside me.”

Rafe squeezed his eyes shut at the pain in Gabe’s eyes. He wanted to comfort him, hold him in his arms and never let go. He wanted to push him away, to continue to punish him. He didn’t know what the hell he wanted.

“You know what I learned in Connecticut?” Gabe asked. “I learned that I needed you. That whatever the hell was worrying me, I needed to share with you because you’ll make it better. I learned that I needed you beside me at night to fall asleep. I learned that I’d do anything to keep you in my life. I learned that nothing matters if you don’t love me.”

“Then why did you stay away?” The anguished words burst from Rafe. “Why didn’t you at least call?”

Gabe grabbed his fingers—the good ones—and squeezed. “I didn’t have the words to tell you why I’d fucked up. I didn’t know how to tell you what I felt. I kept putting it off, kept putting you off. I was thinking about me, not about how messed up I was making you.”

“Messed up?” Rafe lurched upright. “I was out of my mind, Gabe.”

Gabe nodded. “I know.” He got up on his knees and moved between Rafe’s thighs. “I love how you love me, baby. Every time you tell me you love me, I can hear the million ‘ways’

and ‘whys’ behind the words.” He swallowed. “But do you hear the same when I tell you I love you?”

Rafe frowned.

“Because when I say I love you, it means I love the way you never fail to eye-fuck me whenever I enter a room, how you always reach for me in your sleep, how you swear you don’t snore, but you do.”

Rafe cracked a smile.

“Every time I say I love you, it means I love that you always let me cook since we both know you can’t do nothing worth fuck-all in the kitchen. It means that I can’t fucking breathe for needing you. It means I don’t want to be anywhere but where you are.”

Rafe’s eyes burned. He pinched his nose and tore his eyes away. He couldn’t function with Gabe staring at him. “Pretty words, except the past few weeks have been more about actions. Yours.”

“Yes and I want your forgiveness. I want you to forgive me for fucking up, because I’ll do it again. I’ll mess up again and you will too.” Gabe leaned in closer, smiling through the tears in his eyes. “We will both mess up, hopefully not this big ever again. But Angel,” his face got serious, focused, “I need you to never let me go.”

Rafe tilted his face to the ceiling, hating that once again he was an emotional mess. His eyes watered and his sinuses burned. He could continue down the road they’d been traveling or they could attempt something different. Do something new.

“You’re mine,” Gabe vowed softly. His breath feathered over Rafe’s chin. “I am yours. We’re us. I’m your cop and you’re my Angel and we deserve this life. We deserve to grow old together and raise children who’ll wreak fucking havoc on the public at large.” His knuckles grazed Rafe’s jaw then moved away. “I lost my sense of direction momentarily, got turned around, but I made it back to where I belong. Where I started and you,” his voice cracked, “you are my heart. I’m not whole without you.” He paused. “Say you’ll be my husband again.”

Rafe’s eyes popped open. Gabe held his hand out, palm up. Two rings sat there, waiting. He looked at Rafe.

“Mine and yours. Your choice. We put them on together now, or they stay off. Permanently.”

Chapter Six

Rafe stared into Gabe's eyes, into those eyes he knew so intimately. Fear and hope stared back. His own heart pounded. He could take the step forward Gabe offered or he could stay put.

"I hurt you," Gabe said. "I know I did, but I'm asking that you give me a chance to make it right. To remove the devastated look I put in your eyes." His chin quivered, eyes wet.

So many fucking tears spilled in the past few weeks. So many chances lost.

"I remember the first time I saw you," Rafe whispered. "You walked into that interrogation room like you owned it, like you were about to own me." He grinned. "Didn't expect what you found, did you?"

"No, but I intend to keep what I found. You looked at me and I lost my fucking mind."

"And I lost my heart," Rafe pointed out. "Just like that." He snapped his fingers. "You became the focal point of everything I did. With one look." Those days were long gone now. The days of hiding, of being afraid, of having to make tough choices to be with the man he loved.

"It was the same with me," Gabe murmured. "What we have, babe, it's *everything*. Everything."

Rafe nodded. He clasped Gabe by the side of the neck and pulled him in close. "It's everything." Simple truth. But there was nothing simple about the heart beating in his chest. Beating for Gabe. "I couldn't be Angelo and be with you," he said softly, "And I can't be Rafe and be without you."

Gabe shuddered, pulse racing under Rafe's touch, as he tried to hold himself still. His hand holding the ring was up, trapped between their bodies. He'd asked Rafe a question and he deserved an answer. Rafe put his mouth to Gabe's ear and spoke.

"I love you." He inhaled Gabe's skin, his sweat and his musk, took him deep into his lungs, but it didn't really matter; his body had already imprinted Gabe's scent on his senses. Gabe was in his veins. "I love the little contented sounds you make in your sleep. That's because of me. I love that you always take the last piece of food off my plate, because you know it's yours." Gabe's hands lifted, circled his shoulders and Rafe hugged him, squeezed him tighter. "I love the way you lay claim to me, to my body, every single time we make love."

Gabe made a wet sound and buried his face in Rafe's neck, body shaking. Rafe swallowed the thick emotion lodged in his throat. He'd always known they'd end up where they

were, in each other's arms. It simply took some time, took some pain and some anger, but they eventually found where they were supposed to be.

"Nothing and no one, not even you, can stop me from loving the shit outta you," he said fiercely. "I will always be here, with you. I will always be your Angel. I will always be yours." Fucking tears blinded him and he tilted his head, let them run free. He would never apologize for feeling what he felt for the man in his arms. He would never regret loving him or putting it all on the line for him. He'd do again. Any day.

"I've been yours for so very long." He cupped Gabe's nape and leaned away until their eyes met. "I've been yours for so fucking long, cop."

Gabe laughed through the tears, brushing at them with his knuckles.

"Becoming your husband will just be a formality, legalizing what we already know." He released Gabe and held out his left hand. "We already know this shit is to the death."

Gabe's lashes were clumped together, his eyes gone dark as he stared up at Rafe. His nostrils flared. He grabbed Rafe's hand and kissed his palm then pressed it to his cheek. "Say the words," he begged.

"I forgive you." Rafe smiled.

"And?"

"I'll never let you go."

"Why?" Gabe gazed at him. "Why won't you let me go?"

Rafe bent and brought their foreheads together. "Because this shit is to the death and ain't neither of us about to die off any time soon." He kissed Gabe on the nose. "Gimme my ring, *amado*."

Gabe held him steady—as best he could with his own shaky hand—and slid the ring on his finger. Once the gold circle was where it was supposed to be, Rafe took the other one from Gabe and put it on him. With his head bent to his task, he wasn't meeting Gabe's eyes, but he felt his lover's stare like a hot brand of possession on his bare skin.

"There." Rafe kissed Gabe's knuckles, kissed the ring. "Back where it's supposed to be."

Gabe stared down at his hand.

"Hey." When his lover looked up, Rafe tapped his thigh. "Come here."

Gabe straddled him with a curve to his mouth. Rafe circled his waist and just held him close, burying his nose in the other man's shoulder.

Gabe pressed small kisses to his neck and shoulder and Rafe melted into it, into him, stroking down his back. Gabe shifted, leaned back then his mouth was on Rafe's, hard and insistent, forcing him open. Grabbing the back of his head, Rafe held him steady, matching the hurried, needy swipe of his tongue. Gabe writhed on him, quickly bringing his dick to attention and his muscles straining to get closer.

"Fuck me." Gabe caught Rafe's bottom lip between his teeth. "Fuck me. I want your hands all over me. Need your skin on my skin." He reached up and pulled off his shirt.

Rafe hissed at the skin on skin contact. Gabe's skin was hot, on fire. He licked a wet trail from Gabe's ear to his clavicle, biting, nipping.

"Mm." Gabe rocked back and forth. "Take me, Angel. Now."

Shit. Angel jerked away. "Get naked."

Gabe scrambled off his lap and unbuckled his belt while he kept his hooded gaze on Rafe. He stepped out of his jeans and kicked them to the side, fisting his flushed cock, already wet with pre-cum. Rafe watched his body move, watched his muscles flex and licked his lips. All that was his; the tanned skin, corded muscles and flat stomach.

A needy groan escaped him and Gabe answered it with a smirk. Rafe crooked a finger. Gabe stepped forward and Rafe buried his face in his groin, a breath shuddering through him. He sucked Gabe into his mouth, moaning at the salty taste and the hot, smooth feel, so hard and pulsing for him.

Gabe grabbed the back of his head, pushing himself deeper down Rafe's throat. "Fuck, babe. You feel so damn good." He thrust into Rafe's mouth even as he grunted. "I need you to fuck me. Been too long and I won't last."

Rafe palmed him with his left hand, tracing the underside of his balls with a finger. Gabe's breath hitched. Easing off his shaft, Rafe licked his lips.

"Lube."

Gabe's lashes fluttered. "Upstairs."

Fuck. Why hadn't they stored the slick all over the place? They fucked in every room of the house. "Olive oil."

Gabe raced to the kitchen and Rafe got to his feet, kicking off his pants as he followed. He met Gabe coming out of the kitchen and backed him into the room. He took his lover's mouth, walking him backwards until he stopped at the island.

Gabe broke the kiss with a small laugh. “Déjà vu.”

“Yeah.” He took the oil and poured some on his fingers as he motioned for Gabe to sit on the edge of the smooth counter.

“Lots of Lysol later,” Gabe quipped as he hopped up and fisted his dick. “Your job.”

Chuckling, Rafe pushed two fingers into him, sinking deep and twisting hard. Gabe bucked and grunted. Pain and pleasure coalesced in his eyes, blowing his pupils and turning the gray about five shades darker. Rafe fucked him, loving the grunts as his own body begged for release.

“Too fucking long,” he murmured before flicking his tongue out to taste one of Gabe’s nipples. “Too long since we touched each other.”

“Yess.” Gabe pulled on his cock, hips lifting as he rode the fingers Rafe worked him with. “Need you now.”

Rafe did too, so he oiled himself up, making a sloppy mess of things, and stepped forward. He lined himself up at Gabe’s entrance and kept his eyes glued there as he pushed in.

“Uunng.” Gabe tensed below him.

His body clenched, tried one last ditch effort to keep him out, but Rafe pushed forward and the muscles collapsed, allowed him entry. He sank deep, the hot clasp of Gabe’s passage yanking a curse from his dry lips.

“Oh God.” Gabe convulsed. “Feel so fucking good.” The length of his body shook violently and Rafe glanced up. Unshed tears sparkled in his lover’s eyes, shining like diamonds against the dark backdrop.

“Gabe.” Rafe held himself still for Gabe to get used to him. “I love you, *amado*.”

Gabe’s throat worked, Adam’s apple bobbing rapidly. “I know. And I,” his lashes fluttered then rose, “I love you. So much.” He tightened around Rafe.

“Shit!” Rafe reared back and slammed in. “Shit!” He pounded into his lover, rapid thrusts that had Gabe jerking, writhing as he pumped his erection and rolled his hips.

“So deep.” Gabe threw his head back. “I feel you so Goddamn deep.”

Rafe grabbed both of Gabe’s legs and wrapped them around his waist. He pulled Gabe to a seating position and held him steady with his good hand. The sprained wrist hurt, but the pleasure coursing through his body dulled it. Holding Gabe’s gaze, Rafe pushed into him and watched his eyelids flutter, his nostrils flare and the pulse in his throat speed up.

All for him.

Gabe bent and licked Rafe's nipples, catching the small silver hoops there between his teeth and tugging.

"Ah, fuck. Cop." He dug his nails into Gabe's hip. His marks would show there for sure. Gabe tightened his legs around Rafe, restricting his movements while Gabe lifted up and plunged down on him.

"God." Rafe gritted his teeth. "Too much." His muscles trembled as he fought the orgasm. "Too much."

Gabe ignored him, working that fucking magic, plunging up and down on Rafe's cock until he couldn't hold back, couldn't think, and the orgasm slammed through him.

"Christ!" He couldn't stop coming, emptying himself inside his lover, flooding him, marking him. Gabe's cries grew louder and Rafe pulled out of him and pushed three fingers in.

"Fuck!" Gabe screamed. He doubled over. Rafe pushed his legs back, opened him up and dug him out, working his prostate. Gabe howled. He reached down, grabbed Rafe's wrist and held him there, inside him. "Do it," he gritted. "Make me come."

Not like Rafe needed permission. He pressed up against the sweet spot, driving his lover to orgasm as Rafe's seed leaked out around his fingers.

"Come for me, *amado*. Let me see you come apart for me." He kissed the inside of Gabe's thigh, bit down and Gabe jerked, his channel tightened around Rafe's fingers and he shot all over his stomach.

"I think two will be good," Gabe murmured in Rafe's ear. They lay in bed, finally crawling in after scrubbing the countertops and taking a shower. Exhaustion pulled Rafe toward sleep, but Gabe's words stirred him.

"Huh?"

"Two kids." Gabe lifted his head off Rafe's chest. "That's a good number, isn't it?" His eyes twinkled.

"Two's good." Rafe bit back a sleepy smile. "We can discuss it tomorrow."

"Surrogates," Gabe continued. "Adoption is a very last resort."

"Uh, yeah." Rafe yawned.

"On our one year anniversary."

Rafe blinked. “What?”

Gabe smiled down at him. “Pay attention, babe. First we make this shit legal then on the first anniversary of our *wedding*,” his eyebrows rose dramatically, “we begin the next chapter of our life together.”

Now Rafe was awake and now his heart was pounding out of his chest. He rolled them until he was atop Gabe. “What are you saying, cop?” He held the back of Gabe’s head with both hands, hardly giving a motherfuck that they were shaking.

Badly.

“Repeat yourself.”

Smiling, Gabe cupped his cheek. “We’re having two kids.” He kissed Rafe’s eyebrows. “Via surrogacy. Adoption is plan B.” He trailed a finger down Rafe’s nose. “One child each, biologically.”

Rafe closed his eyes. Everything was as it should be. His future, his life, was in his arms. In the eyes of the man in his arms. He opened his eyes and stared at Gabe. “When?”

“Our one year anniversary.” The smile left Gabe’s eyes. He was all serious when he said, “The sooner you make an honest man out of me, the sooner I can have your baby.”

Rafe barked a laugh. “Fuck, cop. What you do to me.”

Gabe grinned up at him. “I do everything you want me to do to you.”

“Yes.” Rafe kissed him. “And more.” He kissed him again. Took his time, because they had it. They had time. And plans. And each other. “*Te Amo, amado.*”

“I love you, Angel.”

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