

Sinner's Haven Publishing



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Not My Sinner

Tommy has a ring on his finger and a killer in his bed. Only he gets to see the softer side of Mateo Oliveros. Despite who Mateo used to be—and still is—Tommy has never regretted his choice. No one else knows him and loves him like his husband does. And Tommy is happy...Even if there are things about Mateo that he refuses to share with his spouse.

Nothing is easy, definitely not marriage to a man who's been as broken as Tommy, but Mateo signed up for the long haul. He'll make sure his T knows he's loved, no matter how many bodies he has to drop, or how many secrets he has to keep. All those sacrifices will mean nothing, though, when Mateo's sordid past and Tommy's fragile future collide. In the wreckage of what used to be their love, they'll have to decide: Who stays, and who walks away?

Warning: *There will be blood. And knives and guns and...but it's the Sinners, so nothing new there. Also includes heartbreak and heartbreaking sex. This is an Avril Ashton production. Proceed at your own risk.*

Playlist

My Immortal - Evanescence
Chandelier - Sia
Smartphones - Trey Songz
Latch - Disclosure ft. Sam Smith
Simple Things - Miguel
2 On - Tinashe ft. Schoolboy Q
Lay With Me - Sam Smith
High For This - The Weeknd (Elle Goulding cover)
Crawl - Kings of Leon
Smoking Gun - JadaKiss ft. Jazmine Sullivan
Here We Are - The Fray
Closer - Kings of Leon
Heartbeat - The Fray
Set Fire to the Rain - Adele
Move Like a Sinner - What Now
Good Kisser- Usher
Are You Still in Love with Me? - Sanchez
Bonnie and Shine - Shyne ft. Barrington Levy
Do You like Drugs - Miguel
Pills and Potions - Nicki Minaj
Gangster's Anthem - Terror Fabulous
Do You Still Love Me? - Melissa Morgan
Nobody Has To Know - Kranium

Chapter One

After...

The windshield wipers swiped back and forth, furiously slashing at the rain. Huddled as he was in the backseat of the taxi he'd hopped in at the airport, he still saw the lightning flash, still heard the thunder as it rumbled overhead. He'd read—or was it saw?—somewhere that a car was the safest place to be in a lightning storm.

Or was it unsafe? He should have paid more attention to things like that.

He stared out of the car, barely making out anything of the dark Atlanta landscape as the driver maneuvered the soaked roads. He wasn't familiar with the area, didn't spend much time here, so he simply handed over the address he'd written on a torn piece of paper to the driver. *It was far*, the driver had cautioned. Didn't matter. He had money.

He shifted against the uncomfortable seat and clutched the backpack to his chest. He'd only grabbed that as he walked out. Inside were a change of clothes, his ID, his laptop and wallet. His fingers spasmed around the wet straps of the bag and he looked down. The sight made his heart constrict. His naked finger. A gold band once adorned his ring finger. Nothing fancy, but it was perfect. A symbol to let everyone know that he was owned, claimed. That he belonged to someone.

As of twenty-six hours ago, that was no longer true.

His throat worked, empty stomach rebelling. He wanted to throw up, but all he could do was gag while covering his mouth with one hand. There was nothing left. In him. In his body, in his soul. The events of the past day or so left him numb, unable to do anything except on instinct. Talk. Breathe. Live.

He unzipped one of the small pockets on the backpack and pulled it out. The slim letter opener. Silver. Sharp. He stared down at it, mouth salivating. That simple blade promised something he hadn't had in so long.

The ability to feel. To ache. To need. One shaky finger traced the length of it with such longing, it made his eyes burn, made them water. He dropped the backpack and curled his legs up under him on the car seat. His jeans were wet, his sneakers and socks soaked too, but he ignored that, keeping his gaze on the blade. Flashes of light from other vehicles filtered through the taxi and hit the letter opener.

It sparkled and glowed. He couldn't look away. He wasn't aware of the car pulling into a driveway, of the heartbroken sounds that tore from his throat. Tears slid down his cheeks and dripped off his chin, splashing onto the fingers that gripped the blade so tight.

He wanted it, all that the blade promised. To feel. But if he did, would he recover? If he went there, touched the pain he'd hidden so carefully, would he still be himself? Would he be able to stand, to breathe, or would the pain of his loss consume him?

If you leave, I'm coming for you. He recalled those words. Spoken at a time when he was happy. Carefree. When he was foolish enough to think love was all it took. When he'd been brave and full of hope. A time when he'd never thought he'd be here, lost and in need of anchor. He never thought he'd be the one to leave, to take off the ring that meant everything. *Everything.* To speak the words he'd never be able to re-call, the words that even now, echoed in his head.

I want a divorce.

Someone spoke, the sound filtering to him from far away, muffled so he couldn't understand it, couldn't decipher it. He ignored them, pressing the letter opener to his wrist. His sight blurred, wavered.

He'd been happy. Hadn't they been happy? He'd been loved. Hadn't he? In a flash what was up was now down. What he thought he knew...lies. They were lies.

The blade pressed against his skin and he shuddered. A wave of anguish swept through him and he bowed under the fierce force of it.

Cool air blasted him. Someone grabbed his ankle, yanked him down onto his back on the car seat. The blade went flying and he cried out.

"Tommy! What the fuck is going on?"

He managed to lift his lashes, blinking at the worry and fear in Pablo Castillo's eyes. Pablo was the one who held him by the ankle, who peered at him as if he didn't know him.

Another man crouched next to Pablo, his husband, Shane. "Tommy."

They both looked heartbroken. As if he'd hurt them. But he hadn't, he hadn't hurt anyone. Not even himself.

"Something's wrong with him." That was the taxi driver's voice. "He's been that way since he got into my car."

"Thank you for ringing the doorbell," Shane said tightly. He pulled out his wallet and Pablo got into the car, sitting next to Tommy.

"Tommy, talk to me." He touched Tommy's face, wiped away the tears. "What's wrong? How did you get here and where's Teo?"

"I'm calling him now," Shane said.

Tommy would have told him not to bother, but he just didn't have words, not then. He gazed up at Pablo and opened his mouth. A wail escaped. He clamped his jaw shut, and Pablo pulled him into his arms, held him tight. Tommy shook his head, trying to twist out of that comforting embrace.

"Tommy. God." Pablo's breath hitched. "Talk to me. Tell me what's wrong."

Everything. Everything was wrong. "I hurt." Those were the words he spoke instead. "I hurt."

"I know." Pablo's arms tightened around him. "Tell me why."

Shane ducked his head into the car. "Teo's on his way."

"No!" Tommy jerked away. Pablo held him despite his awkward flails. "No."

"Tommy." Pablo's voice was stern. "Tell me why you're hurting."

He stared up at Pablo, into his eyes so full of concern. His lips trembled and he bit down on the bottom one. "I'm not enough," he whispered. Those were the words he'd managed not to speak out loud, but there they were. "I left him."

Pablo and Shane cursed in unison.

"We're over, because I'm not enough."

Chapter Two

The calm...

“You plan to ignore me until I’m gone?”

Tommy kept his focus on his plate, ignoring Mateo’s question. The key to ignoring someone effectively was to act as if they didn’t exist. And right now, the man opposite him at the breakfast table didn’t exist. He forked scrambled eggs into his mouth while composing a text for the real estate guy.

“Aw, T. C’mon. I won’t be gone that long.” Mateo never liked when Tommy went silent on him. Which was precisely why Tommy did it now. He knew just how and where to hit.

As he reached for his glass of orange juice, Mateo’s larger palm closed around his. Tommy stilled.

“I’m sorry that I can’t tell you where I’m going,” Mateo said softly. “It’s business, and I want you far away from my business.”

The need to call *bullshit* made Tommy bite the inside of his cheek.

“I love you. Look at me.”

Fucking hell. Just as Tommy knew Mateo, so his husband knew him. When he pitched his voice low like that, Tommy would do anything. But he needed to get his point across. Mateo needed to know how he felt. He jerked his hand away from Mateo’s touch and brushed a lock of hair from his forehead.

“Fitch is gonna come over and stay with you while I’m gone.”

Oh, hell no.

“He’ll take you wherever you want to go, if you have to go somewhere.”

Obviously Mateo took Tommy’s silence as a request to continue talking. That clueless sonofabitch had no idea the hole he was digging for himself. “Don’t forget you promised to help Martin with that thing on his computer.”

Tommy lifted his head. “You’re cute.”

“Wha— Oh, you’re talking now?” Mateo glowered. “And don’t call me cute.”

“You’re telling me what to do and how to do it, so yeah,” Tommy dropped his fork and sat back, “you’re fucking cute.”

Mateo kept his gaze on Tommy as he rose from his chair and sank to his knees in front of Tommy. His eyes were serious, mouth set in a firm line as he put a palm on Tommy’s naked thigh and looked up at him. “You’re gonna do it, T. Fitch is gonna be with you until I get back, that shit isn’t negotiable.”

“What about the need to know where you’re going or why?” Tommy asked in an even tone. “Is that negotiable?”

Mateo sighed and looked away.

“We have two houses to look at today.” Tommy held up his phone. “Did you forget?”

“I didn’t forget,” Mateo said. “I’m making a judgment call that this what I’m doing is much more important right now. We’ll get whichever house you want, I don’t have to see it. If you want it, it’s yours.”

Tommy bent until they were nose to nose. "I'll tell you what I want—for my husband to not keep secrets from me." He moved to sit back, but Mateo held him in place with a hand at his nape. Tommy glared at him.

"I promise to tell you where I've been, and why, when I get back." Tommy opened his mouth, but Mateo cut him off. "I promise. I'll tell you when I get back, T." His eyes said he was being open and honest...about that, at least.

"How long will you be gone?"

Mateo shrugged. "Should be back tomorrow night, at the latest." He moved his hand up, grabbing a fistful of Tommy's hair. "Your silence cuts me," he confessed in a hushed tone. "You know I hate that shit."

"And you know I hate when you keep things from me."

"When I get back." Mateo brushed his mouth over Tommy's. "I'll tell you everything when I get back." His breath washed over Tommy's skin, making his eyelids drop and his cock stir in his boxers. "Reggie and Fitch are gonna be here soon," Mateo said. "but we've got enough time for this."

He kissed Tommy, yanking him down and off the chair. They tumbled backward on the floor, Tommy atop Mateo as their tongues twisted around each other. Tommy sighed into Mateo's mouth. The whole silence thing always hurt him more than Mateo. He didn't like it, but sometimes it was necessary.

Right now what was necessary was Mateo's hand sliding down Tommy's back, the rough material of his jeans scratching Tommy's exposed skin. He wore only his boxers, while Mateo was fully dressed. He rubbed all over Mateo, loving the taste and feel of Mateo underneath him. It was always a head trip being in this position. He flicked his tongue over Mateo's teeth then retreated, catching Mateo's bottom lip between his teeth.

Eyes dark with sexy arousal, Mateo watched him, the fingers he'd buried in Tommy's hair spasming. His hips lifted, crotch pressing against Tommy's. Hotter and tighter.

"You want me?" Tommy asked. He didn't let go of Mateo's bottom lip, holding the other man's gaze as he shifted, moving his right knee until it was where he wanted it, nudging Mateo's balls.

"Ungh." Mateo rubbed against his leg.

Tommy released his lip with a smile. "You're not getting any, not until you come back from wherever it is you're going in one piece."

Mateo's eyes narrowed. "Really, T?" He reached a hand between them and cupped Tommy's hard shaft. "You gonna leave us hanging because you're mad at me?"

"I'm not mad at you." Tommy kissed him then scrambled backward. He crouched there, staring at Mateo with his kissed-wet lips and hard cock. "You'll come back to me, because you know what's waiting for you. You know what you have to look forward to."

Mateo's gaze softened and he sat up, taking Tommy's hand in his. His left hand. "This," he traced the ring on Tommy's finger, "this ensures that I'll always come home." His eyes were fierce. "And even if my ring wasn't on your finger, T, you here? In my house, in my bed? I'll always be coming home to you."

Tommy gave him a crooked smile. "Our house. Our bed."

Mateo grinned. "Sho, you right." He sobered. "Fitch is your protection, because even if you don't think you need him, I do. He'll take you to Martin's place, and if you

want to go see houses he'll do that too." He cupped Tommy's jaw. "Don't fight me on this, please."

"Is there something I should know about?" Tommy frowned at him. "A threat?"

Mateo smiled as a knock came on the door. "There's always a threat, T. My job is to eliminate them." He got to his feet and held out a hand that Tommy took. Mateo pulled him into his arms. "That's gonna be Reggie and Fitch." He kissed Tommy then whispered, "I'm gonna make you pay for keeping that ass from me."

Tommy shuddered.

"Chew on that while I'm gone." Mateo chuckled as he went to answer the door.

Teo cracked his neck and let out a soft grunt. His ass was getting numb waiting for his target to put in an appearance. The sun had long set, but he was still sweating bullets inside the bungalow. What was up with that fucking A/C? He'd expected heat. Shit, he was in Puerto Rico, but still...this was on some other level.

"Shit." He shifted. Again.

Reggie laughed into his earpiece. Teo glowered in the dark. That fucker had the cushy job of watching their target from the outside where there were palm trees and shit.

"Shut up," he growled.

"Hey, I didn't say anything." Reggie coughed. "You should've put me and Fitch on this," he said after a while. "You didn't need to be here."

"Yes, I did." For Tommy, he did.

"You think he's gonna be happy about this?" Reggie asked. "Be grateful?"

Teo wasn't here for gratitude. "This isn't about T's gratitude," Mateo said. "This is about making sure that no one who's ever hurt him sees another sunrise."

"Why didn't you just tell him what was going on then?" Reggie asked. "He'd want to know. Hell, he'd probably want to pull the trigger himself. You know your boy can get blood thirsty."

"No." Teo shook his head in the dark. "I don't want him near any of it. Violence should never touch him." Never.

"Dunno if you realize, Teo, but everything about you is violent."

He did realize. But there was no changing who he was. He made sure to give Tommy the best, the very fucking best of him. It was what his husband deserved.

"She's on her way up."

Teo straightened, gun in his lap. He relaxed his shoulders. He saved the very bad parts for the people who hurt his family. His friends. His T.

Less than five minutes after Reggie gave him the heads up, footsteps approached the bungalow. A key sounded in the lock and then the door opened. A sliver of light behind the figure at the door broadcasted her gender.

She stepped inside, closing the door with one hand, flipping on the light with the other. With her back to the room, she didn't see him, so he got to watch her; long brown hair, pale skin covered in jean cut offs and a yellow tank top with green lines running diagonal. She wore flip flops on her feet. Definitely not shoes meant for running tonight.

She's been running for well over a year. Bet she never knew he had her in his sights.

"Andrea Rosen."

She spun, a hand at her throat, eyes wide, getting wider as she spotted him. She staggered backward, gaze flitting back and forth, from his face to the gun in his hand.

“Who are you?” she asked. A voice filled fear and confusion. Definitely not the voice of the cop she’d been.

“We’ve got business, you and I.”

She shook her head and backed up into the door. “Who are you?” Something must have occurred to her because she started to cry. “I didn’t say anything. I didn’t say anything. Please, tell them—”

Ah. “Yeah, sorry. I’m not with the Nietos.” He crooked a finger. “Also. Could you back away from the door? My man is right outside so you’re not going out that way. At least not alive.”

“Who are you? What do you want?” Her gaze landed on his gun again and stayed.

“I’m not interested in whatever it is you’ve got going with the Nietos.” He paused. “Actually, I am, but only because it made you a dirty cop, one who decided to look the other way when Steven Nayers decided to terrorize my husband.”

Her expression was comical. Teo laughed.

“Normally, women and children are off limits, you feel me?” He stood.

She jumped back, tears and snot running down her face. Not a pretty sight.

“This ain’t even an exception,” he said once he stood in front of her. “You hurt mine, I hurt you worse. It’s that simple.”

She shook so bad, the knick knacks on the table next to the door joined in.

“What— Who is your husband?”

“Tommy Smith was the name he gave you at the hospital,” Teo said. “I doubt you remember him. You didn’t write up a report.”

“I do.” She sounded triumphant. Poor fool. “But—But I didn’t do anything to him!”

He pulled the silencer out of his pocket and screwed it on to his Glock. She cried louder. “I know. You just turned away while someone else did.” He shook his head. “I don’t have to tell you how much you fucked up with that move. You should’ve known better.”

“Please. Please.” She clasped her hands together, face red and wet. “I’m sorry. I had to, the Nietos would have killed me if I let anything happen to Steven. It was my job to protect him.”

Teo nodded. “See, I get that.” He did. “It’s also my job to protect Tommy. Part of that is making sure you’re not around to do what you did to anyone else.” He took a deep breathe and let it out slowly. “Piece of friendly advice, bit late but still...if you’re not ready to die at any given moment, this definitely was the wrong career move for you.” He punctuated his last word with a bullet, dead center.

Officer Rosen’s head jerked back then she crumpled to the floor.

He stepped over her body and opened the door. Reggie stood there like a sentry, keeping watch. But he wasn’t alone. Teo glared at Dane Hutchins.

“You following me, Fed?”

Dutch’s shoulders moved smoothly under the rumped gray suit he wore. “Just making sure you’re not doing anything stupid.”

“Then we’re good.”

Dutch looked over Teo’s shoulder. “You finally caught her.”

“I do my job,” Teo said. “Unlike some people I could name.”

“I told you to leave her to us.”

If he was angry or upset, nothing in Dutch’s demeanor gave it away. Teo had grown accustomed to that, and to Dutch popping in and out of his life at the most fucking inopportune times.

“And I told you to eat a dick.” Teo looked around. “Found one yet?”

Dutch got up in his face. “I could take you in for this. You know that, right?”

“Could you?” Teo winked. “I won’t tell if you won’t.”

They stared each other down, and like the other times they’d found themselves at an impasse, Dutch looked away first. It wasn’t a retreat or a surrender, Teo knew that. He didn’t know what it was, but sooner or later it would come back to bite him in the nuts.

For sure.

Dutch was a *devil you know* kinda situation.

“We gonna stand here all day and look tenderly into each other’s eyes?” he asked.

“Because I hate to tell you this, but I’m taken and he’s waiting for me to come home.”

Dutch’s nostrils flared. “Your man know where you’re at?” He lifted an eyebrow. “I’m betting no.” He pulled a phone from his jacket pocket. “How ’bout we call him up to say hello? You think he’ll still be waiting when you get home?”

Teo cocked his head. “Why, Dutch, was that a threat?” He smiled, all teeth. “You threatening me, Fed? Got yourself a death wish?” That fool must not want to see the sunrise.

“No more than you.” Dutch held up the phone. “You dropping bodies is bad for business. My business. If you don’t stay the fuck outta my way, I’ll be forced to make you.”

Teo folded his arms across his chest. “You know, I’m liking this new side of you. No care for your life or the lives of the people you care about. No thoughts to your job. Nah, you just go around dropping threats knowing full well what that could mean. I like it.”

Dutch’s jaw flexed. Teo grinned. He slapped a hand on Dutch’s shoulder.

“See you soon, Dutch.” He flicked a glance at the body on the floor. “Happy cleanup.” He jerked a chin to Reggie. “Let’s hit the road, I’ve got a stop to make.”

The dip of the mattress roused Tommy from sleep. Warm lips brushed across his shoulder.

“Mmm.”

“Hey, T.” Mateo pressed up against him, body heat immediately surrounding Tommy.

He remained in his position, curled on his left side, facing away. Mateo’s legs brushed against his. Tommy pushed back, bringing his naked ass to Mateo’s still-covered front. His man’s breath hitched. Tommy had planned for him once he’d gotten the text that Mateo was on his way. But that had been hours ago. He’d fallen asleep waiting.

Mateo kissed him, a wet trail down his spine. Tommy moaned, but he didn’t speak, nor did he open his eyes. He let Mateo have at him. Tommy missed him. Missed him like crazy. To that end, he hitched up his leg when Mateo’s fingers delved between his ass cheeks.

“Fuck.” Mateo moaned. “You’re open.” He pushed two fingers into Tommy’s stretched ass, still slick from the toy he’d used on himself earlier. “You’re open for me, T.”

“Then come inside,” Tommy murmured. He clenched around those digging digits. Mateo groaned then shifted. A zipper sounded. Clothes rustled. Then his naked body curved around Tommy’s, and with his teeth in Tommy’s shoulder and one hand in his hair, Mateo pushed into him. Tommy sighed. Mateo released his hair and grabbed his face, turning him to take his mouth, to thrust his tongue deep inside as he canted his hips and sank deeper into Tommy.

Tommy’s toes curled. He fisted the pillow.

“I love you,” Mateo spoke against his mouth. He pulled out then surged forward again. Tommy’s lashes fluttered, his channel contracted.

“Next time I’ll make you sorry for keeping this from me.” Mateo’s fingers dug into Tommy’s jaw, holding him steady as he fucked him deep and sure. “Next time. Right now I just wanna feel you, T. Just want to feel you take me, love me.”

Tommy reached up and touched Mateo’s face with the pad of one finger. “Love you.” He lifted up, took Mateo’s mouth just in time. Mateo picked up his pace, made it rough, made it hurt even as it felt good. Tommy touched himself, pinched his nipples then stroked himself, slamming back onto that cock in his ass, taking all of it with a grunt and the occasional whimper.

Felt good. Curled toes. The rush of fire curving his spine. Felt good. The dick splitting him in two and the nips of teeth on his shoulder, on his earlobe. Felt good.

More than good. He closed his eyes, gave himself over to the pleasure and with one more surge forward, Mateo had him coming, filling his palm with a low, tortured cry. Mateo followed him over the edge with a groan he let out against Tommy’s nape and the sticky heat he poured inside him.

Their bodies shook and jerked in the aftermath of it. Tommy’s toes uncurled. The fingers he’d wrapped around the pillow relaxed.

Mateo turned his head again. Kissed him again, nice and slow, using his tongue as a cock, doing Tommy’s mouth dirty.

“Love you,” Mateo whispered. “Love you bad, T.”

“Bad, huh?”

“Fucking bad.”

“I love you, too.” Tommy kissed him, a wet smack. “Tomorrow you tell me where you went. And why.”

“Yes”

Tommy turned and Mateo snuggled up to him, face buried in Tommy’s neck, cock still inside him. Tommy clenched. Mateo jerked and let out a curse.

Tommy smiled against his pillow. “Welcome home, husband.”

Chapter Three

A door slammed. Footsteps shuffled across the bedroom floor and the smell of coffee wafted to Tommy. His lashes fluttered. But he didn't move or open his eyes. The mattress dipped.

Silence echoed around him.

Behind his closed eyelids, he rolled his eyes. "Stop staring," he mumbled.

A soft chuckle reached his ears. "I'm not staring."

"You're staring." He didn't have to look. He felt Mateo's gaze as though it was a caress down his spine.

"Brought you coffee. Come get it."

Tommy finally managed to rouse himself. He sat up, finger-combing his hair out of his sleepy eyes. Mateo waited, wearing nothing but blue shorts and a smile, with two cups in hand as Tommy folded his legs under him, Indian-style, and sank back onto the pillows. Mateo's appreciative gaze slid over Tommy's naked body. He ignored it.

"Coffee in bed." Tommy took the cup Mateo held out with a raised brow. "You must have really fucked up."

"I didn't fuck up." Mateo stretched out on his stomach, his chin almost touching Tommy's knee. He placed his own cup on the mattress and palmed the top to keep it steady. "Can't a man do something nice for another man without that man thinking the other man fucked up?"

Tommy snorted before taking a sip of his coffee. "I know you. Tell me."

Mateo sighed. His eyes were somber, lips drawn in a thin line. "Promise not to get mad."

"How 'bout I promise not to kick your ass, how 'bout that?" Tommy jerked his chin. "Tell me."

"Fine." A stubborn edge roughened Mateo's voice. "I'm not going to apologize, okay?"

"Boy, you must've really outdone yourself." Tommy peered at him over the top of his cup. "I'm listening."

"Officer Rosen. I found her. I killed her." Mateo shrugged. "The end."

"Yeah, the end you say?" Tommy glared at him. "Your ass must be on crack. Put down that fucking pipe and get real."

"What did you expect, T? I wasn't about to let that dirty bitch live a cushy life in Puerto Rico after what she did to you."

"That's where you went, Puerto Rico?" Tommy lifted an eyebrow. "Did you have a nice time, Mateo?" He leaned forward. "I hope you did."

Mateo looked perplexed. Tommy damn sure wasn't about to thank him for killing someone in his name. Officer Rosen was dirty, no doubt, but she hadn't actually done anything to him. Besides, Dutch and his FBI team were on her trail since Rosen skipped town and fled the country. Dutch had promised he'd get her. Tommy never doubted he would. But Mateo was never the type to sit back and have someone do his dirty work. That could be a good thing. Right now, it most definitely was not.

"Would you have preferred I talked to you before I left?" Mateo asked. "Would you have given me the go ahead to do what needed to be done?"

“I didn’t ask you to kill for me,” Tommy said softly. “That shit might come easy for you, but I can assure you, it doesn’t come easy for me.”

“I know that,” Mateo said harshly. “Which is why I made the call. It had to be done. By me. I don’t want you involved in any kind of violence.”

Tommy barked a laugh and shook his head. “Bit late, don’t you think, husband? We’re married. I am your *husband*,” he stressed the word. “You are the fucking definition of violent, so don’t feed me that bullshit. I’m in it. I’m involved in it because I’m involved in you.”

Mateo stared at him, something dark and heavy shifting in his gaze.

“What?” Tommy demanded.

“I love you, you know that?”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Don’t pull that when I’m in the middle of telling you off.”

Mateo smiled, that crooked *aw shucks* smile reserved only for Tommy. “Nah, you can tell me off. I’m just sayin’ I love when you do.”

Mother of God. There was no staying mad at him, was there? Tommy tried to salvage his anger. “I’m not happy that you killed someone in my name. I’m not happy that you chose to tell me about it *after* the fact. I’m especially not happy that I had to sleep alone in our bed for two freaking nights.”

Mateo nodded. “Got it.”

“You also left me to deal with the realtor all by myself. We’re buying a house as a couple. We need to decide on one as couple.”

“Fuck, T.” Mateo rubbed his jaw. “I don’t care about the house.”

Tommy cocked his head. “I’m sorry, repeat that?”

“I’m saying, I don’t care what the house looks like,” Mateo said. “I don’t care how many bedrooms there are, as long as there is one. I don’t care if it’s a condo or a townhouse. Whatever you want, just say the word, T. I don’t gotta look at it. You want it, it’s yours.”

“As sweet as that sounds...” He grinned when Mateo grimaced. “That’s not very practical.”

“Fuck practical.” Mateo placed his cup on the nightstand on his side of the bed then picked up his jeans off the floor. He pulled an envelope from the back pocket and held it out to Tommy. “Here.” He took Tommy’s cup and placed it next to his.

Tommy frowned as he tore open the envelope. He read a few lines on the paper inside and gaped. “What the—”

“I called the realtor guy,” Mateo said slowly. He watched Tommy’s face carefully when he said, “Dundy said you went back to see one place three times.”

“Dudley.” Tommy couldn’t stop staring at the papers.

“Huh?”

“His name is Dudley.” Tommy looked at him. “You bought it?”

Mateo shrugged. “Well, it’s not a done deal yet, lots of things still need to be done on the legal side but yeah, technically I bought it.”

“But...” Tommy had really loved the duplex in Williamsburg with views of both the Brooklyn and Williamsburg bridges. It was gorgeous with lots of character and most of its original 1930’s detailing. But he’d been hesitant because he wasn’t sure Mateo

would like it. "I liked the duplex," he said, "But you bought the entire building. Was it even up for sale?"

"Eh, made someone an offer they couldn't refuse."

Couldn't or wouldn't. "Did you threaten anyone?"

"What is this, the mob?" Mateo nodded at the paperwork in Tommy's hand. "If you look lower you'll see the obscene amount of money I offered. Throw enough money at someone and anything can be bought." He winked.

Tommy didn't know if he should punch him or kiss him.

"Dude sent me some pictures while I was on the plane. I like the tub in the master bedroom." Mateo leered at him. "It's really big."

Tommy kissed him. He pressed his lips against Mateo's and hummed. Mateo hugged him close.

"Do you approve?" Mateo murmured. "I did good?"

"I think we shouldn't let your boys know just how much of a romantic you are," Tommy said against his lips. "Your tough guy image will never survive."

"Fuck that." Mateo grabbed Tommy's chin, forcing his head up until their eyes met. "Do you approve?"

Tommy dropped the papers and caught Mateo's face in both hands. "I approve," he whispered. "Thank you." He kissed the tip of Mateo's nose. "You did good, and I just might let that other stunt you pulled slide." When Mateo started to smile, Tommy pressed a finger to his lips. "I said might."

"I don't care about that, and I don't care about my street cred." Mateo's gaze was intense. "I care about you, about making you happy, about making sure you're safe. I care about us, our life and our future."

Tommy smiled at him. He knew how important he was to Mateo, just as Mateo was important to him. "You're the best thing, you know that? The best thing to happen to me. And I have to say, you're my favorite husband."

Mateo's gaze sharpened. "You saying there's gonna be others?"

"I'm saying play your cards right and there'll never be."

Mateo pushed him back onto the pillows and straddled him. "There won't be. This is a one and done deal, for both of us."

"Yeah?" Tommy grinned up at him. "You sure?"

Mateo fisted his hair, pulling to the point of pain. Tommy shuddered. "I'm sure." Mateo pressed a kiss to his neck, nuzzling him. "Dead sure."

Tommy hugged him close, sighing and arching when Mateo kissed his way down Tommy's neck and inhaled him loudly. Even though he was naked and aroused, Tommy didn't make a move to further their play, neither did Mateo. Despite the erection poking Tommy's midsection, Mateo seemed content to just kiss his neck and shoulder and tug on his hair.

He had no cause for complaints.

Mateo's phone went off.

"Damn it." Mateo kept one hand buried in Tommy's hair and fumbled for his phone with the other. "Crap, it's my moms."

"Oh shit." Tommy sat up. "I told her you were coming home today. She wants us to come over for brunch."

Mateo groaned. "Please tell me you told her we had something else to do." He stared at the ringing phone in his hand like it was a hissing snake.

"Hey, I don't lie to my mother-in-law. I actually want to have brunch with Trudy. She makes those awesome omelets. Mm." Tommy liked his lips.

The phone went silent. Mateo glared at Tommy. "Really? You're too damn weird. I don't even like spending time with my moms."

"That's because you're an ungrateful son." Tommy snickered as the phone went off again. He didn't have to look at the caller ID.

"Aw man!" Mateo rolled off Tommy and answered the phone on speaker. "Yeah, ma."

"Well, you're alive. I thought for sure you got killed wherever it is you went off to."

"What can I do for you, ma?"

"Oh, you know me?" Trudy's voice rose. "You haven't been answering any of my calls. I thought you forgot who I was."

Mateo rolled his eyes. "I was busy."

"Too busy for your mother, I see." She sniffed. "At least I have a son-in-law who actually calls me. That man of yours loves me more than you, Mateo. You don't love your mother."

Mateo shook his head and mouthed, *what the fuck?* to Tommy who covered his laugh with a hand over his mouth.

"I love you, ma. I'm just busy. Listen I gotta—"

"I expect you and Tommy at the house in half an hour."

"Ma, come on. I just got back and I want to spend some time with T."

"You should have thought about spending time with your husband before you took off to God knows where, Mateo. You're married now, you know."

Mateo wiped a hand over his face in a weary gesture. "Yes, Ma. I know I'm married. No need to remind you."

"Well, I'm your mother. It's my job to remind you, if you would answer your phone."

"Yes, ma."

"See you soon." And just like that, Trudy Foster-Oliveros signed off.

Mateo stared at the phone in his hand. Tommy pursed his lips.

"Oh, my God."

"We should get dressed," Tommy said softly.

"Oh, my God. What the hell was that?"

Tommy didn't know, but he knew they'd find out soon enough.

Chapter Four

Teo kept his head down, focusing on the food on his plate despite the stares he felt coming from his mother. She sat on the opposite side of the table next to his father while Tommy sat next to Teo. They'd all four made small talk, but Teo knew soon his mother would start with whatever it was that was riding her this time.

He loved the woman, but God knew, she was exhausting sometimes. He spread butter on the homemade rolls then forked some omelet into his mouth. One thing about his moms, she could throw down with the food. He might regret not coming over more often, if she didn't always lecture him when he did.

"Did you boys decide on a house yet?" The Captain asked. He didn't sound overly interested in the answer. He probably just wanted to fill the silence.

Mateo listened while Tommy talked about the gift he'd just received. The happiness in Tommy's voice never failed to hit Teo in the chest. Made his throat burn. Then he remembered where he'd been, why it took him overlong to get home from Puerto Rico, and the guilt set in.

He gulped down his juice and sat back. Some things he couldn't bring to Tommy and those things were getting harder and harder to ignore.

"Where were you, Mateo?" his mother asked.

Teo swallowed. "Uh, I had business out of town, Ma."

She put her fork down and wiped her mouth with a napkin. "What kind of business takes you away from your husband for days, Mateo?" She leaned forward. "You're married. Don't you think it's time you changed?"

Teo bristled. "What are you talking about?" What did she think he'd been doing?

"Trudy, it's okay," Tommy said. "I'm fine with it." He hadn't been, though.

His mother continued as if Tommy hadn't spoken. "Marriage is work, Mateo." She glanced at the Captain. "It can be enjoyable work, but it's work nonetheless. You've got to put in the time, nurture your relationship and your mate."

Teo shook his head. "I don't even know what you're talking about."

"Trudy, leave the boy alone," his father cautioned.

"Think about what you're doing before you wake up one day to find you have nothing to show for all these wasted time, and no one to show it to." His mother took a breath. "When do you plan on starting a family?"

Teo choked. "Ma!" What the hell?

"What?" She looked from him to Tommy and back. "Is it not my right to ask when you're gonna see fit to give me grandchildren? Mari is pregnant with her second child. I want to know when you two will start making babies."

Teo pinched the bridge of his nose. This was why he didn't like coming over here. She always pulled this crap. "Ma, Tommy and I aren't ready for that yet. We're taking our time."

She waved a hand. "You more than anyone know that time waits for no man. If you hadn't wasted all that time whoring all over the place instead of making things right with your man—"

“Trudy.” The Captain’s voice was hard when he spoke. “Stop attacking the boy. Listen to him when he speaks instead of railroading him.” He looked up at Mateo. “Son, don’t rush into anything that you two aren’t ready for.”

“Mario.” Trudy glared at the Captain who threw Teo a wink.

“Actually, Trudy. Mateo and I have talked about this and decided we’ll wait a few years to enjoy being a couple before we start the process of having children.” Tommy smiled at Teo then looked back at Trudy. “Yes, all our friends and family are having kids, but that simply means we’ll have time to learn before we try at it. We look forward to that.”

Trudy’s expression softened and she smiled at Tommy before reaching across the table to touch his face. “Aren’t you sweet? That’s a good idea.” She nodded. “I like it.”

Mateo rolled his eyes and made a disgusted sound. “Ma, I just told you that exact thing. How come you listen to him and not me?”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Are you raising your voice to me?”

Jesus H. “No, Ma.”

“Good. I listen to Tommy because he’s not telling me shit I want to hear.”

“Ma, language!”

The Captain snorted. Tommy giggled. Teo just wanted to throw his hands in the air.

His mother turned to him, eyes soft. “I know you think I’m always on your back—”

“You are.”

She smiled. “Maybe I am, but that’s because I want you to be happy.”

Damn it. He swallowed. “Ma, I’m happy. I have everything I could possibly need.” *Not everything*, a tiny voice in his head whispered. He nudged Tommy with his shoulder. “T makes sure of that.”

The Captain shifted and his feet shuffled under the table. Teo didn’t look at him. The Captain knew things Teo would never think to tell another soul. And his father knew him.

“That’s good,” his mother said. She pushed away from the table and stood. “Now, Tommy, come show me the pictures of that new place.” She walked into the kitchen and Tommy followed eagerly.

Teo sat at the table with the Captain. He felt his father’s disapproval in the air, but he waited.

“He’s stronger than you think,” his father said.

Teo shook his head. “No.”

The Captain just looked at him in that quiet, assessing way. He was a good looking man who’d gifted Teo his looks, including his brown eyes. Salt streaked through his short dark hair and blended nicely with his neatly trimmed moustache and sideburns. His father retained the fit and trim physique he’d had all of Teo’s life. He was a man who put his family first, who remained deeply in love with his wife all these years later. The Captain was his hero, the man Teo wanted to grow up to be.

“I won’t risk hurting him,” he said shortly.

The Captain shook his head. “Then you’ll lose him.”

Those words sliced through Teo, but he stilled himself from reacting. Tommy was his life. He'd do anything, whatever he had to in order to protect Tommy. That included making sure his two worlds didn't ever collide.

"You want more grandchildren?" he asked the Captain in an effort to change the subject.

His father shrugged. "You're my son and I love you. I want whatever you want."

Teo grinned. "Thanks, Cap." If only dealing with his mother could be that simple. He got up and went to his father, handing him his walking stick so the Captain could stand. When he got to his feet, the Captain pulled Teo into a one-armed hug, cupping the back of his head.

Teo hugged him tight, sighing as he inhaled his father's scent. From the time he was five years old to now, his father's comforting smell never changed. He could count on that. He could also count on the kiss the Captain placed on the top of his head and the murmured, "I love you, son," in his ear.

"Love you, too, Cap." Teo patted his father's shoulder. They released each other as his mother and Tommy emerged from the kitchen.

"You ready to go?" Teo asked Tommy.

His husband nodded. "Yep." He hugged Trudy and the Captain as he said his goodbyes.

At the door, Teo kissed his mother on the cheek. "Bye, Ma."

She held him close and rose on tiptoes. "You did good with that gift," she whispered in his ear. "I'm proud of you." She pulled back and cupped his face. "Next week. Same day, same time. Brunch."

He groaned. "Ma, come on."

"I need to see my son," she said defiantly. "I don't spend nearly enough time with you."

"I'm a grown ass man, Ma."

She gave his cheek a tender slap. "Language."

Teo just shook his head and took Tommy's hand as they walked out the house. Inside the car, he buckled up.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?" Tommy asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Not for your ass. She adores you." He pulled off with a shake of his head when Tommy laughed.

"Where are we going?"

"The penthouse."

"Why?"

"No phones. No escape. I want no interruptions when I'm having my way with that ass." He glanced over to see Tommy lick his lips. "Turn off your phone then do the same to mine. The rest of the day is all about us."

Tommy shuddered.

Teo grinned.

"Can we stop at Nathan's?" Tommy asked.

"T, you just ate like twenty minute ago."

Tommy grinned at the incredulous look on Mateo's face. "I'm a growing boy." He patted his flat stomach. "Feed me."

Mateo shook his head with a grunt, but pulled into one of the parking spaces between the building that housed Nathan's and the store on the other side. They got out and Tommy fed the meter. Side by side they walked over to Nathan's. It was still early so the place was as crowded as it usually was. They stood in line, side by side, and didn't have to wait long before Mateo was ordering his hot dog and a soda.

When they were finished they walked back to the car. The penthouse was only a few blocks away. He slid a hand into one of Mateo's back pockets, pinching his ass and chuckling when Mateo threw him a glare over his shoulder.

"Let's stay here for a bit." He chewed on his hot dog and leaned against the silver Jaguar V6 Coupe. From their position he could see the scattered people riding the different rides. Already the sticky sweet smell of funnel cakes and cotton candy filled the air, mixing with the salt of the ocean.

Teo sat on the hood of the car and motioned Tommy to sit between his legs. Tommy did, leaning back onto Mateo. He liked these moments. Just the two of them. Talking weren't necessary here in this space. Mateo's fingers climbed into his hair, lightly scraping his scalp. A group of young girls strode by, scantily clad, ogling the Jag and staring at the two of them. He'd gotten used to those stares, a mix of jealousy that he got to have Teo, and softness that the two of them had each other at all. Of course there were also stares of disgust, but luckily those were few and far between.

"Mateo Oliveros."

The accent-tinted voice rumbled just over Tommy's right shoulder so he glanced that way. Pressed so close to Mateo, he felt the instant his husband tensed up. Three men strode over to them, but it was the one in the middle who stole Tommy's attention and his breath. The man was tall, taller than Mateo, with short black hair and the lightest, most striking eyes Tommy had ever seen. And that was counting Syren Rua's gorgeous purple orbs. This guy's eyes were a pale mix of gray, blue and green. And they stood out, making him unforgettable. His nose was straight, cheekbones sky high and his strong jaw was covered with dark stubble framing full lips. He wore just a black t-shirt and tight, black jeans that still managed to sag, along with tan Timberlands. Both arms were covered with dark intricate tattoos and even more crept up under the neck of his t-shirt, wrapping around his throat. His fingers were covered with them, too, all except for his thumbs. His face was pierced, or rather his nose. And under his bottom lip.

"Mateo," he spoke again and Tommy caught a glint. Another piercing. His tongue?

"Dima." Mateo pushed away from Tommy and hopped off the car. He faced the guy—Dima—but didn't move to get close. In fact Mateo shoved his hands into his pockets. "Didn't think you were around these parts anymore."

"The old man died. I had to come back." Dima's gaze flicked to Tommy then back to Teo. "I'm in charge now."

Mateo pursed his lips and nodded. "Cool." He held out a hand to Tommy. "This is Tommy, my husband. T, this is Dima Zhirkov, seems he runs Coney Island now."

Russian. Tommy didn't ask what *runs Coney Island now* meant. He smiled at Dima, but the other man's gaze was locked on Mateo. Shock and something else in his gaze.

"Husband?" Dima muttered. "You're married."

“Yes.” Mateo’s hold on Tommy tightened and Tommy saw the taut lines bracketing Mateo’s mouth and eyes. He looked between both men, the heavy current between them battering him.

Dima stepped back. One step, as his gaze searched Mateo’s face. “Didn’t take you for the committed, settling down type.” There was a lot of things unspoken, hidden behind the words he did say.

Tommy’s stomach cramped. He tossed his half eaten hot dog in the nearby trash can.

“Things change,” Mateo said. His expression was blank. Hard. Cold.

Dima’s mouth quirked at the corners. “So I see.” He held Mateo’s gaze for a beat then turned to Tommy. “You must truly be someone special to catch the uncatchable Mateo Oliveros.” The smile that curved his mouth didn’t climb to his eyes. “Congratulations.”

Tommy nodded.

Dima turned back to Mateo. “My sources told me *Los P* was defunct.” His teeth appeared, sharp and white, reminding Tommy of a shark’s. The piercing in his tongue winked every time he spoke. “I didn’t believe before, but I do now.”

“I’ve got a place on West 23rd,” Mateo said. “Let your people know when they see me or mine, we’re not here for trouble. Your pops and I had an understanding.”

Dima nodded. “And that will continue, of course.” Stark yearning flashed in his light eyes then disappeared so quickly, Tommy almost swore he’d imagined it.

Almost.

“We gotta go,” Tommy said sharply. Something inside him was rebelling. He needed away from this, whatever this invisible, intangible, unspoken thing was that was slapping him so fucking hard in the face

Dima’s gaze shot to him, as if he’d forgotten Tommy stood right there. That chafed.

“Of course.” Dima touched Mateo’s face.

Tommy tensed. Mateo squeezed his hand.

“It was good seeing you again after so long, my friend,” Dima said. He released Mateo and stepped away. “Tommy, you’re a lucky man.”

“Yeah.” As if he didn’t know that. His disgruntled tone didn’t appear to faze Dima. The Russian smiled at him, a predatory gesture as he walked over to where his men stood waiting.

They all three got into a dark-tinted SUV and drove off.

Tommy pulled away from Mateo’s hold and got into the Jaguar. Through the windshield he watched his husband. He watched Mateo rake his fingers through his hair. He watched his chest rise and fall as Mateo took deep breaths. He watched Mateo scrub a hand over his face before finally turning, walking over and getting into the car.

They didn’t speak as Mateo secured his seatbelt. They didn’t speak as he drove them the rest of the way to the penthouse. When they parked in the underground parking space, Tommy unbuckled himself then watched as Mateo did the same.

“You two were together.”

Mateo’s jaw clenched and the word came out in a hiss. “Yes.”

Chapter Five

What the actual fuck? Teo gritted his teeth and stared up as the numbers on the elevator display blinked in and out. Seeing Dima again was... God, he didn't know what it was to him. It meant something to Tommy and that meant it had to mean something to Teo. It had to matter.

The elevator doors opened and Tommy charged out, using the key on his keychain to open the penthouse door.

"T." Teo went after him, kicking the door closed. He reached out for Tommy, but the other man swung around to face him before Teo could touch him.

"He touched you." Tommy dashed his keys onto a nearby table. "He touched you," he repeated, "and you just stood there and let him." He sounded strangled, chest heaving as if he was struggling to breathe.

"No. T, I just..." Truth was he'd been too much in shock to do much of anything. Dima represented a time in his life when Teo was careening off the fucking rails.

Tommy's eyes flashed fire. Stubborn and angry. "I don't give a fuck who he is, what he runs, he doesn't get to touch you. Get me?"

It would be sexy, this furor. But Teo didn't want Tommy to feel threatened by Dima.

"T." He strode to Tommy, but the younger man backed up, both hands out in front of him to stop Teo from advancing. Teo narrowed his gaze.

"Tell me about you and him."

God, what good would that do? Teo shook his head. "T, come on. You don't need to know anything except that Dima and I were a long time ago. This is the first time I've seen him in years." He'd managed to put that time in his life to bed. But the covers were suddenly flung off.

Tommy brushed away a lock of hair that had fallen into his eyes. "You're operating under the mistaken assumption that that was a request." His jaw ticked. "You think loving you, being loved by you, makes me weak? Unable to handle the hard truths about you and your fucked up lifestyle?"

"No. That's not what—"

"It strengthens me." Tommy balled a fist and pressed it to his chest. "It makes me stronger."

"I'm glad." Teo moved closer and this time Tommy didn't step back.

"Then tell me about the man who just regarded me as someone insignificant. Who just put his hands on you as if he had that right." He cocked his head. "Does he have that right?"

"Fuck, you know the answer to that."

"Do I?" Tommy's chin quivered. "He shook you," he said softly. "He put you off your game, and my husband is *never* off his game."

"I'm sorry." That was the truth, though. Dima's appearance rocked him, but only because he'd forgotten that part of his life. He'd buried it so deep. "We were in a relationship." Teo's only attempt at one until Tommy. "It lasted almost a year, longer than it should have. We had lots of things in common."

Tommy's eyes closed and he brought his fist to his mouth. "Your kinks."

Teo nodded even though Tommy couldn't see. "Dima is a switch. We—he liked to share. Liked to bring women to our bed. Everything was a jumbled haze of sex and violence."

Tommy opened his eyes. They were bright. Wet. "You shared everything then." His voice broke at *everything*. "Why did it end? Sounds like heaven to me."

Sarcasm dripped from Tommy's stiff voice. Things had to end with Dima. The only thing that kept them glued to each other was Teo's need to take charge, and Dima's need for what Teo could provide. The women helped in the beginning to spice it up, but that got to be too much. Dima's constant pushing for more, more danger, more excitement took a toll. "Dima wanted what I couldn't give."

"What did he want?"

"Forever. He wanted permanence." Teo swallowed the memories. "I don't do permanent."

"No?" Tommy angled his head. "You do with me."

"Because you're mine," Teo said fiercely. "You're the exception. You're every exception. To every fucking rule." His heart lurched into his throat and he grabbed Tommy. "T, babe, it's you and me." His hand shook where he clasped Tommy's upper arm. "When it comes to you I've got blinders. It's all about you."

Tommy touched his face, placing his hand on the spot where Dima's had been. "Prove it."

Teo yanked him off his feet and Tommy wrapped his legs around his waist. Their lips crashed together. Anger and heat and need. And Teo, needing to show and prove. Tommy fistfisted his hair, pulled on him as their teeth connected. Tommy nipped his tongue, bit his lip and Teo palmed his ass. No one was gonna make Tommy doubt himself, doubt them. Tommy kissed him wildly, wet, tongue sliding over him quick. Needy. Teo clung to him, Tommy did the same. His cock pressed against his zipper, harder than a rock and aching when Tommy wiggled on him, riding him.

Breath hissed between his teeth as they staggered. Teo pulled away and Tommy stared at him with lips on swole, eyes on low. So sexy. His. So fucking his that shit made his eyes burn. Made his heart stutter in his chest. It was crazy, this emotion thing. He set Tommy on his feet and while he wavered, Teo slid down his body, onto his knees. Tommy tore off his t-shirt and gazed down at him.

He needed to know. This shit was no joke. This wasn't them playing at love. This was it. The real thing, and it was fragile. So Goddamn fragile. He wrapped his arms around Tommy's waist. Tommy grabbed his hair, yanked his head back. Teo's cock throbbed. Tommy's own need pressed against Teo's cheek, like pulsing steel.

"Show me," Tommy whispered. "Who gets to touch you. Who gets to fuck you. Who gets to love you. Show me."

"You." Teo removed his own t-shirt then pulled on Tommy's belt, loosened it enough to draw his zipper down. He poked a shaking hand inside Tommy's fly and fished him out, veins pronounced, his cock head slick and red, the slit gaping. "You."

Tommy's cheeks were bright, his nostrils flared as he pushed Teo's hand away and grasped his dick. He stroked himself. Teo cupped his own shaft, squeezing until his eyes crossed. Tommy canted his hip, brushing Teo's lips with his wet crown.

Teo grunted, licking up the pre-cum Tommy left behind. Tommy did it again, bumped the spongy slick head of his cock against Teo's lips. Teo flicked out his tongue, caught him before he shifted away and Tommy snarled.

"Open."

Teo did and Tommy plunged in, fucking his mouth in nothing less than a punishing pace. Teo held tight to Tommy's waist otherwise he'd be falling over. Pre-cum soaked him, his balls ached. It was all good.

He took everything Tommy gave, sucking him to the back of his throat, head snapping back when Tommy switched up and began dicking his throat deep and hard. Tommy was rough, he needed to be, and Teo wanted what Tommy wanted. His husband needed to own him, to show that he did, and Teo was all for that. Nothing pleased him more than pleasing Tommy.

His jaw ached. He didn't care. Saliva rolled out the corners of his mouth and down his chin. He didn't care. The grip Tommy had on his hair made his head hurt. Teo didn't care. Tommy fed him his cock, fucked his throat, sawing in and out, and Teo... God, Teo loved it.

The cries that fell from Tommy's throat, the gurgling sounds that left Teo's throat. They fired the moment, added to the desperation that crawled down Teo's spine and anchored in his balls and ass. He yanked at Tommy's jeans, trying to pull them off his hips without allowing his throat to give up its prize.

Tommy pushed him off roughly, kicking off his jeans and before they were completely gone, Teo was on him again, taking him deep, gagging on him. He shoved a hand under the waistband of his jeans, fisted himself and jerked his cock roughly despite the tight fit.

"Fuck. Fuck." Tommy slammed into him again and again. He lifted on his toes, pulling Teo's hair until Teo lifted his gaze to peer at him. A furious hunger blazed in Tommy's eyes, hot and dangerous.

Teo fucking shuddered.

"I know who you belong to." Tommy's voice was a fucking whip, sharp, stinging. Leaving its marks all over Teo. "Me." He shoved himself deeper down Teo's throat. He couldn't breathe. "I get to touch you." Tommy pulled out, all the way out of Teo's mouth. Teo gasped for air.

"I get to do all the things you'd never let anyone else do." Tommy grabbed Teo's face, slapping his cock against Teo's cheek. "I get the pleasure of having you on your knees. With my dick down your throat and my fist in your hair."

Teo squeezed the tip of his shaft to fight off the orgasm, but it wasn't helping. Fucking God, he'd never been this turned on by Tommy ever. "T." He was hoarse. A cock down your windpipe would do that. "Need you. Need to feel you. Take me..." His plans went out the window and he was operating on need. His. Tommy's. He needed to feel Tommy and his husband needed to own him.

Tommy pushed his way into Teo's mouth again. Teo sucked him with a happy sigh.

"Come for me," Tommy commanded. "It's mine and I want to see it."

Yes. He hissed the word in his mind as he came, filling his palm. His ass clenched. His head swam and his toes curled as heat blasted through him. Tommy retreated and Teo panted. "Goddamn it. T." He needed that cock.

Tommy stepped out of the jeans pooled around his ankles and underwear then came down to him, on his knees, taking Teo's mouth, tongue pushing into Teo's mouth. "Use that cum." Tommy bit his bottom lip. Hard. "Get yourself open for me."

Teo didn't need to be told twice. He tugged his jeans down to his knees with one hand, reached behind himself and smeared the hot cum all over his ass, pushing two fingers into him. Tommy helped pull his jeans all the way off then yanked Teo's hand away, shoved him backward and pressed into him.

"Oh fuck!" He was shouting. Tommy was shouting. Teo couldn't find his bearings, his everything centered on the cock sinking into him, burning him. Tommy pinched his nipple. Teo yelped. He grabbed at Tommy, nails scraping his back, leaving marks for sure.

Tommy sank in, balls deep and Teo spread the palm with his residue cum on Tommy's lower belly, right above his pubic bone, touching him, feeling Tommy's stomach clench. He stared up at Tommy.

"T."

His husband smiled. His cock flexed inside Teo. "Got you on your back." Tommy leaned down and kissed him, flicking his tongue into Teo's mouth. "Got my dick in your ass."

Teo blew out a breath, heard it rattle. "Yeah." God, yeah.

Tommy pulled out slowly. Teo wanted to fucking cry at that retreat. Then Tommy slammed in and Teo shouted out his pleasure.

When the intense wave faded, he reached out and cupped Tommy's cheek. "You got nothing to prove to me." His throat hurt. "I love you. I'm yours."

Tommy kissed him. "You're fucking right you're mine." He pulled out all the way and Teo grunted in disappointment. Tommy spread out on the floor, on his back. "Come ride me."

Teo scrambled up and climbed him two seconds flat. Holding Tommy's slick erection steady, Teo sank down on him with his head thrown back. Tommy filled him, stretched him, took him over.

Teo couldn't smother the needy sounds in his throat as he wrapped himself all around Tommy. He positioned himself so his legs were on either side of Tommy's body and Tommy sat up, holding him tight, taking his mouth.

"Ung." Teo clawed at Tommy's back, riding him. "Come inside me." He was fucking begging, man. Begging for it.

Tommy palmed his ass, body jerking under him, his eyes wild, pupils dilated. He looked out of his mind with pleasure, in charge of them *and* who he was. In tune with Teo, with their bodies. Teo couldn't love him more in that moment. He couldn't be more turned on by the way Tommy handled him. His nose couldn't be more open.

"Inside you," Tommy murmured against his lips. "Coming inside you."

"Yes." Teo latched on to Tommy's neck, sucking the salty skin hard, biting him.

Tommy bucked, hips slamming up. His cock rammed into Teo, hitting him right where he wanted it. His eyes dimmed as the orgasm took over. He wasn't even touching himself with his cock trapped between their bodies straining so tightly together, but he was coming again.

"T. Oh, fuck. God." He heard himself calling from far away, loud and plaintive. Tommy answered him.

“Fucking love you.”

Teo searched for and found Tommy’s lips blindly as he let go, spilling between them. Tommy cried out into his mouth, tensing as his cum flowed into Teo in a hot, thick stream. Tommy remained still and Teo didn’t move either. Inside him Tommy throbbed, still hard. In tune with their heart beats, with their panted breaths. Teo loved that.

He felt Tommy’s muscles relaxed and he fell backward onto the floor, taking Teo with him. They stayed like that.

Chapter Six

Tommy lay atop Mateo, his head on Mateo's hipbone. Shit. He couldn't recall how they came to be on the couch. The rush of anger and fear that had washed over him was faded. Not gone entirely, though. He'd needed something, anything, to wipe away the scene he'd witnessed between Mateo and that Russian dude.

Even in the midst of his proving himself he'd recognized there wasn't any need for it. Rationale had long deserted him. He shifted and realized the thick blanket that normally decorated the back of the couch was now spread over his calves.

Fragrant smoke drifted to him. His nose twitched and he lifted his head. Mateo stared down at him with heavy lashes, a lit joint between his lips, a bottle of Moet in the other hand.

Tommy cleared his throat. "We celebrating something?"

"No." He winked and took a pull on his joint before handing it to Tommy. "Smoke with me, babe." A thick cloud emerged from his lips, obscuring his face there for a second.

Tommy smothered a smile, but took the offered spliff and took a pull while holding Mateo's stare. They'd taken to sharing this on several occasions. Tommy wasn't a pothead by any stretch of the imagination, but sharing a joint with Mateo was one of his indulges.

"Drink." Mateo took the weed back and handed over the bottle of champagne.

It was warm, but Tommy drank it anyway, moaning when the liquid hit his throat. Damn. He'd fucked Mateo until his throat was raw. He licked his lips, dick stirring. Below him, Mateo was naked and Tommy couldn't resist dipping his head, tracing the curve of Mateo's hipbone.

Mateo didn't break his stare as he smoked then handed it back to Tommy. They went back and forth, with the weed and the Moet. Puff. Puff. Pass. Then chase the taste of the bud with the champagne. And every time, Tommy licked Mateo, dragging his tongue flat against Mateo's hipbone.

Fuck words.

Mateo's shaft hardened and jerked with every swipe of Tommy's tongue. He flipped fully onto his stomach and buried his face in Mateo's pubes, inhaling him, sweat and cum and Mateo. A rough sound left Mateo and his hips moved, marginally, infinitesimally, but he moved, asking for it. Tommy grasped him, the whole throbbing length of him, and cocked an eyebrow up at Mateo.

"Kiss it." Mateo leaned down slightly to make another joint hand off.

Tommy took it, filled his lungs with smoke and dipped his head, blowing the smoke out onto Mateo's cockhead. When he finished, he pressed his lips to it then took the entire length into his mouth. The other man tensed. Tommy licked over Mateo's crown.

"Mmm." Mateo bucked.

Tommy went down and down, till his nose was pressed to Mateo's curly dark pubes and his lungs burned from the weed smoke and lack of air. He contracted his throat and when Mateo's hips moved with him, he retreated, pulling all the way off. Mateo's wet cock slapped onto his tattooed stomach.

Tommy grabbed the bottle of champagne and gulped it down. Mateo watched him.

“What?” He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Now I’ve got you in my space, I won’t let go of you. Got you shackled in my embrace, I’m latching onto you.”

Tommy frowned before he realized Mateo was singing to him. His cheeks burned, but he grinned. “Turned you into a singer, did I?”

“Turned me into a lot of things, T.” Mateo’s face was serious. “I love all of them.”

Tommy filled his mouth with the champagne and dipped his head to hide the blush heating his face. He sucked Mateo’s cock into his mouth along with the liquid. Mateo hissed and bucked, grabbing onto Tommy’s shoulder.

“Fuck.”

Tommy let some of the liquid dribble down onto Mateo as he grinned. “You wanted me to kiss it.”

Mateo licked his lips. “And can’t nobody kiss it like you.” He held out the joint. “More?”

Tommy took it with a nod and sat up between Mateo’s legs. He tried to gather his thoughts as he smoked. When they were together like this, all the other heavy bullshit didn’t appear to matter that much. But he knew better. They did.

“You been hiding yourself from me,” he said finally.

Mateo froze. “What?”

“Your needs, you’ve been hiding them from me.”

Mateo looked away. Tommy climbed his body, laying atop him naked chest to naked chest, cocks lined up. He stared into Mateo’s eyes. “Do you agree that you’ve been keeping that from me?”

“For good reason, babe.”

Tommy nodded. He brought the joint to Mateo’s mouth, placing it between his husband’s lips when Mateo parted them. “I married you, didn’t I? You with your freaky ways and your cocky, dangerous attitude and all the shit in your past that can come out and bite us anytime?” Like today.

“Yeah.” Mateo killed the lit end of the joint and placed the roach down onto the floor next to the couch.

“I need you,” Tommy whispered. He reached up and nipped Mateo’s chin. “All of you. You’re holding back.”

“T.” Mateo sounded anguished. He closed his eyes then opened them. There. *Anguish.* “I can’t.”

“I trust you.” Tommy cupped his face. “I trusted you when you said you’d never be with another person in that way. Did you mean that?” he asked.

Mateo wrapped his arms around him. “I meant it. I mean it.” The arms holding Tommy trembled. “I won’t disrespect you like that. I’m not going that route with anyone else. Ever.” Steel behind those words. Letting Tommy know how serious Mateo was about that.

“But that promise doesn’t make your needs go away,” Tommy pointed out. “You have me. Use me.” God. Just saying those last two words made his toes curl into the

cushions on the couch. He was scared. For sure. But anticipation was also present. He wanted to see. To know. To experience it all.

“T, baby, you don’t know what you’re asking.” Mateo shook his head. “All the things you’ve been through, I can’t. I won’t.”

Stubborn determination. Tommy could work with that because he knew the buttons to push.

“I know what I’m asking.” He traced the contours of Mateo’s lips with a finger. “There’s a level of intimacy, of trust, inherent in that…” He grasped Mateo’s chin. “I want it with you. I want to share it with you.” He blinked rapidly to ward off the sudden wetness in his eyes. “You’ve given it to people who hold less significance than me.” Pushing a finger into Mateo’s mouth he asked, “Am I your partner?”

Mateo shuddered. “Yes.” His tongue flickered over Tommy’s finger.

He added another finger, watched Mateo’s pupils dilate. “Am I your lover?”

“Yes.” Mateo’s nostrils flared. His eyes promised a particularly dangerous payback.

Tommy gave him another finger, fucking them deep into Mateo’s mouth. “Am I your husband?” He ground his thigh against Mateo’s cock and felt the other man’s breath hitch.

Mateo nodded. His eyes slid shut and he sucked on Tommy’s fingers as he rolled his hips. “Umph.”

Tommy pressed his cock into Mateo’s hard belly. Handling his husband was the fiercest, hottest pull. He throbbed with an all over need to cum. The power he had, the pleasures that power provided. It hit him in the balls and he was suddenly humping Mateo.

“Am I your life?” he whispered hoarsely.

Mateo’s eyes flew open. His body jerked once and hot cream spilled onto Tommy’s thigh. Mateo’s throat convulsed around his fingers. That pull jacked up Tommy’s balls and he came too, staring into Mateo’s eyes.

Mother of God. His vision swam. He removed his fingers from Mateo’s mouth and Mateo grabbed a fistful of Tommy’s hair, keeping him still.

“Do you just play my body like a fucking musical instrument?” A feral glint sparkled in his eyes.

Tommy licked his lips. “Um…yeah?”

Mateo’s mouth curved. “You think you can handle me?”

Well… “I kinda just did.”

“Goddamn, T.” Mateo barked a laugh. “You’re right. And yes, you are my life.” He traced a finger down Tommy’s cheek. “I’m taking you up on your challenge, husband. I will use you.”

Tommy’s pulse slowed to a crawl then sped up with a burst of speed. Holy— “Really?”

“Really.” Mateo brushed his nose over Tommy’s. “You’re mine.” His voice was all promise; of darkness, of pain. “Bout time I showed you what that truly meant.” He slid his tongue over Tommy’s cheek. Rough and wet.

Tommy gulped. *Mercy.*

Chapter Seven

“Yow, wha dis??”

Teo grinned. Israel Storm’s voice boomed over the loud dancehall thumping throughout his fenced-in backyard. Teo glanced over to make sure Reggie was with Tommy before he waded through the crowd to get to the other side to meet Israel.

“Is.” Teo didn’t know if the other man heard him, but as he drew closer he held out a hand in greeting. Is grasped his palm and pulled him into a hug, slapping him on the back before stepping back. “Looking good, Is.” Teo glanced around at the people grinding around each other while Shabba Ranks chanted *Wicked Inna Bed* before turning back to his friend.

Is wore a yellow t-shirt and dark jeans with boots, but his massive frame was commanding. His hair was cut close to the scalp. He had striking features, too severe to be called good looking, but hardly forgettable. Is drew attention wherever he went, his looks and his charming personality working hand in hand.

Israel’s teeth flashed bright against his dark skin. “Always.” He threw Teo a wink. “You know how I do.”

“I do.” Teo did. He lifted an eyebrow. “Didn’t know you’d moved back to the hood.” He and Israel had been classmates and childhood friends, until Is’s family moved from Brooklyn to Queens when they were in their teens. Over time their paths crossed, but not as often as Teo would have liked. It also didn’t help that Teo was heavily entrenched with Los P while Is became the public and infamous face of the Rude Boys, the Jamaican gang who ruled the streets of Queens. They used to be the Yardies, a smaller gang, until Is and his crew came in and took over, merging a bunch of smaller units into one major stronghold.

“Haven’t made the move official yet.” Is glanced away, smiling at a woman who waved at him as he said, “that depends on you.”

Right. The reason Teo had made the trek all the way to Flatbush.

“Let’s talk business inside.” Is turned away and Tommy followed as he caught Reggie’s eye. This wasn’t exactly how he’d planned to spend his Friday night, but Is’s message, coming so out of the blue, intrigued him. Tommy was up for it, so here they were.

He followed Is into the small house filled with even more people. The music from the huge speakers rattled the building, but no one seemed to mind. Is ignored everyone and walked straight up the stairs to the upper level. Teo followed him into a large well-lit room, empty except for a small table and two chairs placed near a window that looked out over the party in the backyard.

Buju Banton’s *Browning* came on and the crowd went wild.

“Sounds like a throw back party over here,” he said as he took a seat opposite Is.

Is gave him a nod. “90’s dancehall. The best.” He regarded Teo. “You need a beer or some’n?”

Teo shook his head. “Nah. Let’s talk business. That message you sent intrigued me, as you knew it would.”

Is rubbed his chest and barked a laugh. “Business, no chat? We haffi catch up. Cah mi ’ear sey Teo get married.” He lifted an eyebrow. “Mi seh nah man, not my bwoy, Teo. ’Im nah go do dis and not send me an invite.”

Teo shrugged. “Had no way to get ahold of you. You’re a hard man to pin down.”
“Really?” Is’s dry tone let Teo know his old friend wasn’t buying that shit. “And where is she? You brought your boys to a party and not wifey?”

Teo glanced down into the backyard. Reggie and Tommy was easy enough to spot; Reggie with his red button down and Tommy sticking extra close to him.

“I bet she’s a fine one,” Is said. “You always got them bad bitches.”

Is never knew Teo liked men. It just wasn’t something Teo chose to share with his friend. “Come here.” He crooked a finger and Is came over to him. Teo pointed to where Reggie and Tommy stood, both men drinking from a red Solo cup. “See the guy standing next to the one in red? White shirt, long dark hair?”

The place was flooded with light, so Is had no trouble spotting them. He nodded. “Uh huh?”

“That’s who I’m married to.”

Is tensed next to him. “Yo, don’t fuck with me, B.”

Teo chuckled. He’d always admired how Is transitioned back and forth from the Jamaican dialect to street talk. Seamless.

“Trust me, Is. I’m not fucking with you.”

Is stared at him, shock in his eyes. His friend sank back into his chair and they sat in silence. “You’re serious.” His gaze flicked from Teo back to the window. “You’re gay?”

“If you’re asking if I’m happy the answer is yes.” He placed his left hand on the table and leaned closer to Is. “If you’re asking if I’m going home with the dude downstairs wearing my ring that would also be an affirmative.”

Is sat back and watched him, face expressionless.

“We gonna have us a problem, Is?” That was a genuine question. Despite the years they hadn’t seen each other, the long stretches of time they go without being in contact, that didn’t mean Teo didn’t consider Israel a friend.

“Do you know why I finally reached out to you after all this time?” Is asked.

Teo shook his head. “Why?”

“Because one of my men saw you in my territory a couple nights ago.” Is leaned in, bringing their foreheads together. “You were coming out of Jessa’s house.”

Fuck. Teo didn’t speak. Is didn’t give him time to, anyway.

“I wonder, why are you creeping out of another woman’s house at three in the morning if you’re married? To a man at that?”

“Off limits,” Teo said through clenched teeth. “That topic is off limits.” He wasn’t talking about that shit out loud. Definitely not to Is and not at a place like this.

“I thought you and her had something going.” Is grinned. “I remember you two. At the club, the last time we saw each other. You hit it that night, didn’t you?”

“Is, c’mon man.” He ran agitated fingers through his hair.

“Aight.” Is jerked a nod after a while. “I’mma dead the issue.” He stared at Teo. “You got yourself in some trouble there?”

“Yeah, but it’s trouble I made. Mine to deal with.” He had to deal with it too. Sooner than later.

“Let’s talk about why I made contact.” Is leaned in again. “I want Brooklyn.”

Teo frowned. “Fuck Is, you’re acting like BK is mine to give.”

“It is. Since y’all Los P mu’fuckers decided to go all legit and shit,” Is paused, “there’s a story there, isn’t there?”

“Like I’m ’bout to let you in on it.” Teo chuckled.

“Fine.” Is waved a hand in dismissal. “Keep that on lock for now. The only area that’s owned right now is the Island,” he said, referring to Coney Island. “Heard that bloodthirsty Russian bastard dead off. I’m about to make my move then the son pops up like a fucking jack in a box.”

Teo hid his grin. Dima did tend to do that. “What does that have to do with me?”

“You and him used to run gyal together.”

Teo’s eyes widened.

“I hear things.” Is shrugged. “You know him.”

“I do.” He nodded.

Is smiled by degrees. Creepy as hell. “Then you can get the job done.”

“What’s the job?” Teo didn’t like that look in Is’s eyes. When they were younger it meant Is was up to something shady. Guaranteed to bring down a whole lotta trouble on a whole lotta heads.

“I want you to kill him.” Is was all business-like with that shit. “I want Brooklyn. He’s in the way.”

“Is, damn man. Why so cold? You been spending too much time around that boss of yours.” While Is was the face in front of the Rude Boys, his cousin was the power behind him. “How is he, by the way?”

Is rolled his eyes. “I’m here with you so how do you think he is? He wants the Island.”

“Well, you can tell Xavier that I’m not looking to hire out my services. I’m staying out of this one. If you and Xavier want the Island you’ll have to declare war.” And maybe Teo should talk Tommy into buying a new house out of state instead.

“He wants to avoid unnecessary conflicts.” Is rubbed his chin. “I’d like that, too. A quick and clean kill to take care of that Russian kid should handle that. You’re the perfect man for the job.”

Teo snorted. “I’m flattered. You can’t avoid a war. If Dima comes up dead they’ll know where the hit came from. Doesn’t matter who pulls the trigger. It’s not gonna be me, though.”

Is’s expression hardened. “Marriage turned you soft.” He cocked his head. “Or is it the being married to a man thing?”

“Careful, Is. Being my friend doesn’t mean I won’t fuck you up if you disrespect me.”

“What the fuck, though? I remember when you used to like pussy.”

Teo grinned. “I like pussy fine, Bruh. I just happen to love dick.”

“You gon handle my Russian problem?”

“I can’t. This is between your two factions and I don’t—I can’t pick sides.”

Is shook his head. “Nah, don’t gimme that neutral bullshit. If we’re going to war you’ll have to pick a side, Teo.”

“I’m on the winning side, Is. Whichever one that turns out to be.” He glanced out the window, but didn’t see Tommy or Reggie. “Here’s a piece of friendly advice, and this shit is free. Don’t ever discount or under-estimate the Russians and Dima Zhirkov.” Dima

in bed and Dima on the streets were two completely different beasts. The operative word being beast. “Xavier needs to know who Dima is. You need to know who he is.”

“Okay.” Is shifted in his chair. “Who is he?”

“Untouchable.” Teo shook his head. “Don’t sleep on that crazy bastard. You won’t ever see him coming.”

Is searched his gaze. “You sound almost as if you’re afraid of him.”

“I’m not. I’m aware of just how dangerous he is.” Teo wasn’t scared of Dima. He had the tools within his arsenal to deal with and neutralize Dima if need be, and none of his weapons were tangible. He knew who Dima was, but he wouldn’t tell Is. The man was a friend, but he’d have to see Dima in action to fully appreciate the threat the Russian was. If Is chose to ignore Teo’s warnings, that would be on the Jamaican.

“What about a truce between you guys and the Russians,” he asked. “Can’t X work something out for you guys to at least co-exist? *Los P* had a sort of treaty wit them. It worked out fine. We all made money.”

“Xavier isn’t interested in that.” Is snorted. “My cuz is a greedy bastard.”

Well damn. “You want me to talk to him?” He could if he thought it would help.

“I’ll tell him what you said and we’ll see.” Is got to his feet. “You’ve changed, Teo. Not sure how I feel about the...that.” He jerked his chin in the direction of Teo’s hand where it rested on the table. His ring was visible.

“Is this the part where your Jamaican side takes over and you call me Batty Boy and all that shit?” Teo got to his feet. He knew how some people were. He didn’t think Is was that way, but he couldn’t be sure. He’d be disappointed if his friend was.

“I don’t get it.” Is’s face turned pensive. “It’s not for me, you feel me? I love pussy too much, but you’re my friend. I’ve known you for ages.” He walked over to the window and braced both hands against the glass as he looked down. “He must be special, this guy. Yeah? ’Cause even when you was getting pussy on the regular no one chick ever had you locked down.”

Teo nodded. “He’s special.”

“And Jessa—”

“Is my business,” Teo said firmly.

“Well if you’re gonna drive by for a random fix, keep that shit under tighter wraps.”

“Noted.” Teo didn’t look at Is. He didn’t want to think about Jessa. He should. She’d already called him twice today and he’d ignored it each time, sending her to voicemail. He had to deal with her. He had no choice.

Teo didn’t like not having choices. He felt cornered. And when he felt cornered he lashed out. That shit was never pretty.

“You gonna introduce us?” Is asked.

Teo blinked. “Yeah? You want to meet him?”

“Why not?”

Teo smiled. “Cool.” He nodded at Is, hoping his friend caught the gratitude in his eyes. “Good looking out, Is.”

“What are friends for?”

Teo pulled out his phone and dialed Reggie.

“Yo.”

“Where you at?”

“We’re in the car,” Reggie said. “T needed to make some calls.”

“Aight. Is and I are headed your way.” He hung up and led Is downstairs and out the house, over to where they’d parked a few blocks over. They made small talk on the walk over, laughing and reminiscing. It was good to have friends like Is. It didn’t matter how long they went without seeing each other. What mattered was that time never seemed to pass when they did get together again. And Teo appreciated his friend not treating him differently because of who he married.

As they approached the car they passed a small group of men arguing loudly. Teo ignored them when they hailed up Is. His friend nodded at them, but kept on walking. Reggie and Tommy stood outside the car, leaning against the Jag. Teo walked over to Tommy and slid a hand around his waist.

“T, there’s someone I’d like you to meet.” He gestured to Is. “This guy here is Israel Storm. A childhood friend. He runs the Rude Boys out of Queens,” he paused, “Is, this is Tommy. The husband.”

Tommy and Is shook hands. Teo kissed Tommy’s temple as he smiled and made nice with Is.

“Yo, bun ah fyah!”

“Batty Bwoy fi dead!”

The sound of fire crackers stunned Teo for a second and he stared until he realized the shouts were from the group of men they’d passed earlier, and the fire crackers were actually fucking gun shots. He ducked, yanking Tommy down with him. They hit the ground hard and Teo’s heart stopped when Tommy hissed in pain.

Fuck. Fuck. He crawled on top of Tommy and sat with his back against the car, pulling his gun from his waist. “T.” He lifted his head. Tommy’s face was pressed to the ground. “T. You okay?”

From the side, he spotted Reggie crouched, peeking out the other side of the car, his gun at the ready.

“T,” Teo yelled. “Fucking answer me.”

From somewhere on the opposite side of the car, Is was cursing a blue streak and under Teo Tommy wasn’t making a sound. Nor was he *fucking moving*.

Chapter Eight

“T, you better answer me.”

The words were slurred, sounding far away. Tommy shifted, groaning when a shot of pain lanced from the front of his head to the back. He opened his eyes, but for a second there he couldn't see anything and he panicked. What was happening?

“Swear to God, T. You don't want me to lose my shit right now.”

Tommy parted his lips to speak, but a groan was all he managed. He heard other people talking above him, around him. He smelled the hot tar on the paved road when he inhaled. He was on the ground...well, his lower body was, because instinctively he knew his head rested in Teo's lap. Shaky fingers brushed his cheek.

He lifted his lashes, blinking up at Teo. “Teo?” He tried for a frown, but was pretty sure he only pulled off a pained grimace. “What's-What happened?”

Teo's face was blank, expressionless, but his eyes were murderous. They belied the shaky hand Teo used to touch Tommy, wiping away the sticky moisture he knew was blood from his temple.

“We offended some people,” Teo said calmly. His gaze flicked to the side as someone, probably Reggie, spoke to him. “You're okay. Think you just knocked yourself out when we hit the ground.” He looked up and shifted away. “Reggie will take you home.”

“Wha—?” Tommy tried to reach for Teo, but his husband was quick, moving away and handing Tommy off to Reggie.

“Let's go.” Reggie grasped him around the waist, holding Tommy steady when his stupid knees tried to buckle.

“No. Teo,” he called after his husband. Teo didn't look back. “Where is he going?”

Reggie shook his head. “Those guys, they gotta pay. Israel got them back at the party.”

Tommy frowned. How long was he out? “They know who did it?”

“Yeah. Stupid bastards didn't even think to run.” Reggie scoffed. “Let's go.”

Tommy shrugged away his hold even though his head throbbed. “No. I want to go—Take me to the house.”

Reggie gaped at him. “What I look like, a fool? Teo says take you home, we're going home.”

“No.” Tommy pushed him away, at least he tried to, but he still wasn't fully together and his push was really an aggressive stroke of Reggie's chest. “I'm going,” he said firmly. “Up to you if you follow, but I'm not going home while my husband does...” he waved a hand, “Whatever he plans to do.” Which would be nothing good.

Reggie rolled his eyes. “You two fuckers are gonna give me high blood pressure, you know that?”

Tommy took that as a yes, and it couldn't have come at a more appropriate time because he took a step and almost sank to the ground. Reggie caught him around the waist.

“Get in the damn car. We'll drive over.”

Tommy did, with lots of help from Reggie. He took the time to wipe the blood from his face and temple. He had no other injuries save for the pain in his head that was making his left eyebrow twitch. That he had to ignore.

Back in front the house, Reggie parked and helped Tommy out, escorting him inside the yard and up to the front door despite the small crowd that had gathered. The music was still playing but no one seemed interested in dancing or having a good time. Their attention was riveted to the house that was eerily silent.

Reggie pushed the door open and Tommy followed him in. The house was empty. Tommy frowned. "Where's—"

"Upstairs." Reggie took the stairs two at a time and Tommy followed slowly behind. Apparently he'd hurt his knees when he fell, cause those fuckers were killing him.

He made it to the top of the stairs just as Reggie disappeared into a room down the hall. Tommy limped after him. He entered the room as Teo gun-butted someone, causing the man to stagger then fall to his knees.

Tommy halted.

Teo's friend, Israel, held another man at gun point.

"You're new to my town," Teo spoke calmly, "so let me enlighten you. Don't fuck with me unless you suicidal." He kicked the sniffling guy in the head and when the man sprawled backward on the floor, Teo planted his booted feet at his throat then pointed his gun in his face.

Tommy couldn't move. Seeing Teo in this form was a rarity. Tommy couldn't remember the last time he'd seen Teo this cold, this focused, this intense. It brought goose bumps to his skin. He tuned out everybody else and focused on his man.

"I can't even begin to explain how fucked you are right now. And in how many ways." Teo smiled. "'bout to time you realize, us Batty Bwoys can and will fight back. Some of us even like it." He glanced over at Israel. "Now, my man Is tells me you're mine to do with as I will, so I think it's only fair that I tell you both..." He looked between the two men. "You're dying tonight."

Tommy spoke then. "Mateo."

Teo stiffened. Hell, Israel and the two men on their knees stiffened, but Tommy only had eyes for one man.

"You shouldn't be here, T." Teo didn't look back. His foot didn't move from the guy's throat. The gun didn't waver.

"You're here," Tommy said softly. "Where else should I be?"

"Reggie."

Over in the corner, Reggie shrugged at the growl in Mateo's voice. "You know how stubborn he is."

"I don't want this," Tommy whispered.

Nobody spoke. Even the men on the floor had stopped their whimpering.

"Teo, look at me," Tommy begged. "Please. I don't want you to do this."

"Fuck, Reggie get him outta here," Teo snarled.

"No!" Tommy crossed his arms over his chest. His legs were steadier despite the pain in his head. "I'm staying," he told Teo. "So do it. You wanna pull that trigger, then I'm watching you." He was shaking, but he remained defiant. He didn't want this. They

were fine, no one got hurt. They could walk away. Except if Teo did what he wanted to, if he pulled that trigger, there'd be no walking away. At least not for Tommy.

Israel watched them, his face devoid of expression, gaze flitting back and forth between Tommy and Teo.

"There's a crowd downstairs," Reggie said. "Small, but still..."

The warning was clear. They had witnesses.

Teo cursed savagely and dropped to his knees beside his guy. He grabbed him by the throat. "I want their names. I want to know everything fucking thing about them." He dug into the guy's pocket and pulled out his wallet while Israel did the same. "Jerome Sylvester," Teo read out the name and an address in the Bronx with a grin.

"Patrick Albright," Israel repeated his guy's name. "Address in the Bronx as well."

Teo stared into his target's eyes. "You can thank the guy you tried to kill, my husband, for me sparing you tonight." He shook his head. "I'm not as forgiving, though. This Batty Bwoy," he poked a finger at his own chest, "knows your name and where you live. I owe you something. Don't think I won't give it to you."

He got to his feet and strode to Tommy. "Let's go."

"I—"

Pfft. Pfft.

Tommy spun around the same time Mateo. A small cry fell from him when he saw the bodies of the two men on the floor, blood running down their faces from the gunshot wound to their foreheads. Israel stood over them.

"They disrespected me and my friends," Israel's voice rumbled in the stillness. "They had to be put down."

"Shit." Reggie pushed away from the shadows. "You've got a bunch of people downstairs, man."

"Ah my people dat, bredreen," Israel said firmly. "I ain't worried bout nuthin."

"Is." Teo held out a hand and Israel strode over, a cocky grin on his face. They shook hands then hugged. "Thanks, man."

Israel looked at Tommy then back to Teo. "Not a problem. Take your man home."

Teo nodded. "Reggie, help Is. Whatever he needs." He turned to Tommy, taking his hand and linking their fingers. They walked out the room, down the stairs like that, and out the house just like that. Tommy was relieved to see only a few stragglers remained in front the house and that the street was near deserted.

He laid his head back, trying not to think as Teo drove them home. They didn't speak. Tommy didn't know what to say. He kept replaying the moment when he'd first heard the gunshots, when Teo yanked him to the ground. His heart beat escalated and his breathing grew difficult.

Someone had shot at them. Because of who they were. Because they were together.

"Ssh. Ssh." Fingers combed through his hair. "Breathe. Take your time and breathe for me."

Tommy gulped air into his lungs. Tears burned his eyes and his throat hurt suddenly. His heart raced so fast he feared it might burst out of his chest.

"I've got you, T." Mateo whispered to him, lips at Tommy's ear. "I've got you. Always."

He turned into that comforting embrace without opening his eyes, burrowing deep into that warmth. Into the solid wall of Teo's chest.

"It's okay. It's okay." Teo kept repeating that, dropping kisses on Tommy's head while caressing his nape.

He allowed Teo to hold him, to scoop him up in his arms and carry him into their home. To undress him and carry him to the shower, to lock him in his arms and hold him under the spray of water. Tommy couldn't help, all he could do was cling to Teo and break, sobbing all over his husband's chest. He cried until he couldn't and through it all Teo held him, never letting go until it was time to get out the shower.

Teo sat him on the edge of the bed and knelt in front of him, tending to his scraped knees. It was only when Tommy glanced down that he realized Teo's hands were shaking as he used a Q-tip dipped in peroxide to clean the blood from Tommy's bruised up skin.

He reached down and grabbed Teo's hand.

"Teo."

Teo buried his face in Tommy's lap, his entire body shaking. And it was Tommy's turn to provide comfort, his turn to whisper the encouraging words. His turn to take care of his husband, and he did. Headache and fucked up knees forgotten, ignoring their nakedness, skin still wet, he dragged Teo up onto the bed with him. They lay facing each other, Teo's face in Tommy's neck, his trembling fingers running over Tommy's body. Tommy held him, kissed him, his aching throat long past being able to offer up words.

But the way Tommy figured it, with Teo in his arms like this they didn't need words.

They came out of the attempted shooting fiasco in a sort of holding pattern. Their plans for what they were going to do that night got waylaid and Teo showed no interest in trying it again. A week had long come and gone, and Tommy kept waiting to see if Teo would bring it up.

He didn't.

They'd reached an agreement and they'd taken certain steps to cement that agreement, but he didn't see any progress. He actually looked forward to it, maybe in an attempt to get it over with, but still...

He'd let Teo spank him. With his open palm, until it stung and Tommy cried, actual, real fucking tears. He'd succumbed to that and had difficulty sitting down for a good while. But he'd given in and it was different. He still wasn't sure if it was good different or bad different. Just that it was.

He rose from his chair in his office and walked through the house until he found Teo outside, pacing the walkway leading up to the house, his phone in his ear. There'd been a tension to him lately that Tommy couldn't explain, and he didn't think it had anything to do with the shooting. Teo didn't let things like that worry him. No, something else was wrong. Of course, if it was business Teo wouldn't tell him so Tommy wasn't even sure if he should ask.

"Don't fucking push me," Teo snarled into the phone. He spun around and the out of control look in his eyes disappeared when he spotted Tommy.

Tommy frowned, but remained standing there, waiting for Mateo to finish his call.

“Look, I gotta go.” Teo ended the call abruptly and stared at Tommy. “What’s up?”

“You good?” Tommy squinted at him. Yeah, something was definitely off.

“Been good.” Teo walked up to him. “You need me for something?”

Tommy looked him in the eye and nodded. “Don’t you think it’s time you finish what you started?”

Teo shook his head, confusion in his eyes. “Finish what?”

“There’s a box in my closet that remains unopened,” Tommy murmured. “When do you think you’ll gather the guts to do that?”

Teo’s eyes flared. Because he knew what Tommy was saying, even if he acted like he didn’t want to hear it. “T.”

“You promised. And I want it, so you better fucking deliver.” He didn’t even know why he was pushing for this so hard, except...maybe he did.

“You think you do.” Teo sighed. “T, you only thing you’re ready for this.”

“Don’t do that. I let you spank me, I let you use the paddle, didn’t I?” That had hurt. Mother fucker, that had hurt. Tommy stepped back. “I’m gonna take a shower.” He let that settle between them before turning and walking back into the house.

Trepidation made his movements jerky, but he ignored it as he took his time in the shower. He knew Teo was scared that what they were about to do might trigger something, in some way, but Tommy didn’t think so. Maybe he was being stupid or naïve, but he didn’t think having Teo tie him would send him hurtling back to dealing with his long buried demons. He’d never forget what he’d been through, but he worked damn hard for that shit not to define him, his relationship, or his life.

His husband deserved someone who could go toe to toe with him in all areas and Tommy wasn’t about to sit back and have Teo out there pining for something that someone else might be able to provide.

But it wasn’t all about Teo. Tommy was strong, he’d come so far from who he used to be; the lost boy who hurt himself and shut out the world. He wasn’t that person anymore. He refused to dwell on all the bad things that happened to him. They happened. Past tense. While he could never erase or forget, he could move beyond it. He didn’t cut himself anymore. He didn’t have the nightmares anymore. He wasn’t that kid, that victim, and he had to prove to himself.

In the far corner of his closet sat a box. In that box was a flogger. It was time.

He shut off the water and stepped out the shower. In their bedroom he dried his skin and pulled on a pair of boxers then with the damp towel around his neck, hair still dripping, he went to find Teo.

“Teo?” Tommy looked around. If Teo left, Tommy was gonna—

“Basement.”

He followed Teo’s shout and descended into their finished basement. Teo stood there. He’d moved the love seat and pool table and placed them against the wall, and he stood there in gray sweats and rode low on his hips and cupped his groin, and nothing else. His arms were folded, the gorgeous and colorful tattoos on display. His face was expressionless, but his eyes they burned where they rested on Tommy’s face.

“You remember our talk?”

Tommy dropped his gaze to the coil of rope in Teo's hand. His heart rate increased at warped speed and he swallowed with a nod.

"Speak."

He jumped at the barked word. "Y-Yes."

Teo walked over, slowly, deliberately, letting Tommy know he was prey. "Tell me."

"R-Red is my safe word. I use it if I want you to stop. I use it and I mean it. Don't hesitate. Yellow means slow down or I need a breather." He licked his dry lips and forced himself to continue. "Green means go."

Teo held up the rope. "I'm gonna tie you to the beam there." He pointed to the low beam that ran along the top of the basement. He'd had his punching bag secured to it, but that was now gone too. "This rope," Teo unbound the coil while keeping his gaze on Tommy's face, "it's twisty cotton. Gonna leave marks. Not for long, but that's why I chose them for you." His nostrils flared then. "Because I want to see it, the evidence of your surrender."

Fucking. Fucking. Fuck. There it was, that thing Tommy had never seen before in Teo. Kinda like when he was about to shoot the guy at Israel's party, but where there'd been rage and the need to kill in his eyes then, now there was a different urgency. All focused on Tommy. In Teo's eyes Tommy saw danger and a ferocious fire threatening to eat him alive. He couldn't move nor could he look away. It was fascinating because while all that was going on in Teo's eyes, his body language was completely different. He looked at ease. Calm. In his element.

Teo reached up and pulled the towel from Tommy's neck. "Undress for me."

His tone, it was smooth and calm and Tommy scrambled to do as Teo wanted, because he liked it, the way Teo spoke then. With authority, fully knowing there was no way in hell Tommy was about to deny him a motherfucking thing. He kicked off his boxers and followed when Teo led him over to the beam.

Tommy hoped he appeared calm, but he knew he wasn't, because he could hear his heart thumping. Teo had to hear it as well. And he was shaking so Goddamn bad, Teo had to notice when he clasped Tommy's wrists together and brought them up, over his head to the beam.

"I thought of this," Teo murmured as he tied Tommy's wrist, securing him to the beam. "I thought of this, before you let me kiss you that very first time, before you even lifted your gorgeous eyes and looked at me the first day you came to *Los P*, I saw you, T, and I thought of this."

He pulled the ropes and they ran against each other, making a low rumbling sound. *Drrrrr*. Tommy swallowed. And he swallowed some more. His body was scared, but turned on. That made for some very interesting sensations.

When he was secured, Teo turned away and bent, picking up something. The box. Tommy made a sound. Teo smiled. He opened the box and pulled out the flogger. He'd told Tommy what to order, what site to go to and Tommy bought it, but he'd put his own twist on it and Teo was seeing for the first time.

Tommy's name, engraved in the Milo Wood handle.

Teo bowed his head slightly then he looked up. The smooth mask he'd presented before was gone and his face was a stormy twist of emotion that hit Tommy in the gut. Teo leaned into him, grabbing Tommy's hair and fisting it.

“I love you, T. Do you know? Do you fucking know how much?”

“Y-Yes.” Tommy could barely speak.

“I love you and you want me to hurt you.” Anguish darkened Teo’s face. “You want me to bring you pain.”

Tommy flicked his tongue out, moistening his dry bottom lip. “Because—” his voice cracked. “Because it brings you pleasure.”

Teo kissed him. Hard. A punishment, Tommy figured. He didn’t mind it. His hands were bound, he was naked and he wanted what came next. He wanted. Teo yanked himself away, licking his lips, chest heaving. The mask slipped back in place and he was once again in control. Tommy’s breath quickened. He dared to speak, to let Teo know what was boiling inside his chest.

“I want you, in all ways. I trust you with my heart, with my body.” He held Teo’s gaze when he said, “No one should see you the way you look now but me. You’re so fucking sexy, you take my breath away. You’re in your element and it belongs to me.” Fuck, was he crying? He sounded like he was, but he hadn’t meant to. “It belongs to me, so yes, I’m sure. I trust you with my pleasure. Why wouldn’t I trust you with my pain?”

Teo stared at him then with a jerk of his head he grasped the flogger and walked around to Tommy’s back. Tommy tensed.

Teo touched him, not with his hands with the falls of the flogger, caressing him. “I remember the first time I touched your skin,” Teo murmured as he brushed the flogger down Tommy’s back and over his ass. “So fucking pale, T, and so soft. I loved it then. I love it now.”

The flogger fell on Tommy’s upper back, not too hard, but definitely not a caress. He gasped. It fell again, opposite side. A little bit harder. His skin tingled and he knew he’d flushed a plum red. He remembered to breathe and tried to focus on Teo. The blows fell consistently now, morphing gradually from soft to hard and biting, his upper back on opposite sides of his spine. He rose on his toes, wrists twisting where they were trapped by cotton-soft rope.

Teo spoke, his voice a steady, sexy drone. “I knew I loved you at our first kiss, when you gasped into my mouth. When you clutched me as if you were drowning and I was the only one you’d chosen to save you.” He hit Tommy again, on the same spot like before, and his skin lit afire.

He heard himself panting, fighting the instinct to dance away from the pain while needing to stay right there and take more of it. He bowed his head, closing his eyes as he groaned.

“This is what I love, T, your sounds. The way you sound out your pleasure. I want to hear you scream.” He hit Tommy on his ass.

He grunted and bit his lip, fighting a cry.

Teo kept hitting him on that one spot, his left butt cheek, over and over and Tommy couldn’t hold back the sounds. His cries got louder as his body burned hotter.

“Scream. Wake the neighbors from their sleep.” Teo switched up, softening the blows. Tommy didn’t know what to do, how to respond. Then he went harder yet and Tommy did it, he screamed.

Pressure coiled in his body, needing to be released, but he didn’t know how or what to do to reach that goal. And all the while Teo kept at him, hitting him higher on his back again, one spot, over and over until Tommy was just plain ole screaming his head

off. Because it hurt, it burned, it ate at his entire body, but he didn't want it to stop. There had to be more somewhere.

He shook and he knew he was sweating, but he didn't see the moisture. Or he would, if only he could open his eyes. He didn't want to, but he didn't know why. He just wanted to experience it, the sound of the flogger, the sweet, confusing burn of it on his skin, and his husband, taking to him in that infallible voice, comforting. Loving.

Teo hit him on the back of his left thigh. Tommy jerked at that blow and the pressure in his body cracked. Teo did it again. More cracks. With one last blow there, Tommy cried out as the pressure broke, beginning in his balls. He hadn't even been aware of his erection, but he came, the hot cream dripping down his thighs as he floated.

"T."

Gentle hands touched his cheek and Tommy blinked up into Mateo's bright eyes.

"T-Teo?" They were on the floor and his wrists were unbound, but Tommy couldn't see straight. Felt like he was drunk. Wobbly, cloudy.

"Yeah, babe. You okay?" Teo peered at him. So much concern.

"Mm." Tommy wasn't sure. "Mmm." He snuggled into Teo's side then opened his eyes again. "I did good?"

Teo barked a laugh and a tear rolled down his cheek. "Fuck T. You did. You did good."

"Good." He needed to sleep for a week. So tired. But he managed to lift a heavy hand and swipe at the tear on Teo's cheek. "Good."

Chapter Nine

The Storm...

Teo reclined on the bed with a sleeping Tommy on top of him. He'd carried Tommy upstairs after their scene in the basement. His arms cramped, but he couldn't make himself stop hugging Tommy, stop touch him. He hadn't expected Tommy to take the decision out of his hands, to demand to be flogged.

Teo's heart had been in his throat the entire time, and he'd tried damn hard to make sure he read every line of Tommy's body. Every sound his husband made he'd analyzed. He didn't want this enough to irrevocably hurt Tommy, but his fear had been unwarranted. Much like everything else, Tommy handled himself beautifully. It had been the most powerful thing, being in that moment and watching Tommy surrender.

Beautiful and gorgeous and...

He'd peaked, watching Tommy break, watching him reach the subspace Teo was pretty sure Tommy hadn't been aware he'd reached. He'd come just like that, one flick of his wrist, watching the flogger fall on Tommy's bright red skin, hearing him cry out. Teo had come.

Powerful. He'd been so scared to begin this thing, to go down this road. Tommy didn't have the some concerns, he'd never had them. It was all Teo, wanting to keep Tommy protected, wanting to keep away anything that would hurt him, that could cause him pain.

Next to him on the mattress his phone vibrated, making Tommy shift and whimper in his sleep. Teo snatched the phone up and checked the caller ID. It wasn't as if he wasn't aware of who the caller could be.

Jessa.

She needed to be neutralized. He couldn't think of a way to do that without heaping even more shit on his and Tommy's head. He had to tell Tommy and that, more than anything else, that scared him. He didn't marry Tommy to hurt him, but he would. He hadn't meant to hurt him, but he had. He didn't want to lose Tommy, but he could. That knowledge burned him. It burned.

Just when everything was going fine, just when they moving past into something bigger. Tonight was a step toward that, but with only a few words Teo would shatter their world. Call him selfish, but if he could, he'd take his secret to the grave, if only to avoid seeing the hurt and disappointment in Tommy's eyes.

His phone went off again and he quickly answered before the vibrations completely woke Tommy.

"Jessa."

"That's what you do, Mateo?" She was angry, he could tell that from her shrill voice and the way her words shot off at full speed. "You drop a fucking bomb on me then ignore my calls?"

"I'm not having this discussion over the phone." Teo glanced down to make sure Tommy was still asleep.

"But you can tell me you're fucking gay over the phone, yeah? You can tell me you're married to a man over the phone?"

Fuck. "I'll be over there later tomorrow. We'll talk then."

She snorted. "If you think I'm letting you anywhere near me—"

“Don’t think you’re in any position to issue ultimatums, Jessa.” He kept his voice steady when he wanted to punch the Goddamn wall. “And don’t mistake me for one of those weak-spined fools you like to fuck around with. I can’t be handled and it’s a suicide mission for you to try.”

“Fuck you, you son of—”

He hit *end* and cut off her yells. Goddamn it. He regretted it. So much, but that couldn’t be changed. He just had to deal with the shit he’d done. He just had to make sure Tommy forgave him, because Tommy was all that mattered.

With a soft sigh, Tommy lifted his head off Teo’s stomach. “Mm.” He blinked owlishly at Teo. “Hey.”

Teo smiled at him. “Hey.”

“You okay? Who was that on the phone?”

Teo cupped his jaw and looked deep into Tommy’s eyes as he lied. “Reggie.” He pressed his lips to Tommy’s. “Thank you for trusting me. For what happened in the basement.”

Tommy bit his bottom lip and searched Teo’s gaze. “Kinda intrinsic in the marriage vows.” He lowered his lashes and looked up at Teo. “I-It was more than I expected.”

Teo nodded. More than either of them expected.

“But I didn’t hate it,” Tommy hastened to add. “I liked it.” His bottom lip trembled. “Really liked it.”

“Then we’ll do it again.”

“And more.” Tommy lifted his chin defiantly. “I want more.”

Teo laughed. “Then I’ll give you more. That is my job, after all.” He pressed a kiss to Tommy’s lips, humming low in his throat. “I’m gonna go shower and when I come out I want you slick and open for me. Y’heard?”

Tommy blushed, but his nostrils flared and he nodded once. “I heard.”

Teo rolled away with a grin, hurrying to the bathroom. He couldn’t give this up. It was all he wanted, all he needed, he couldn’t give it up. He had to see Jessa tomorrow and she’d know then where he stood once and for all. Then he’d tell Tommy. He’d make him understand. Tommy would understand.

He completed his shower in under twenty minutes and rushed back out without bothering to grab a towel off the rack. He found Tommy in the middle of their California King, on his hands and knees, ass in the air, driving a glass dildo into his hole.

“Fuck” He just stood there for a second, watching Tommy ride the toy with eyes glazed over, head thrown back. His body moved so beautifully, the red marks on his back telling of his surrender.

Teo fisted himself and stroked, just watching. He could do that, just watch, but not tonight. Not now. He wanted in. He crossed over to the bed and picked up the lube, slicking himself up without even tearing his gaze from Tommy’s ass. That Goddamn dildo just kept sliding in and out, sinking deeper and deeper. And Tommy’s sounds. God. Teo loved his sounds. His hungry whimpers and the wanton moans. The low growls and the sharp, high-pitched cries. He loved it.

“Fuck. That ass, T.” He got onto the bed behind Tommy, still stroking his shaft. He loved that ass. So pale and tight. Flawless. “Bout to get all up in it.”

Tommy whimpered and dropped his head down to the pillows while arching his back. That brought his ass up higher. Teo touched him, wrapped his finger around the dildo, right next to Tommy's and helped him. They shoved it in, pulled it out. Tommy cried out and Teo's cock dripped pre-cum onto the sheets. He pushed the glass toy in again, watched it with his teeth biting into his bottom lip, until his knuckles grazed Tommy's ass.

"Please. Teo."

Tommy begging. *Oh baby*. He didn't know. He didn't know how that fucked with Teo, how it made him want to do anything, anything for Tommy. Or maybe he knew. Either way, Teo didn't care. He pulled the dildo all the way out and Tommy flinched then moaned, a disappointed sound.

Teo grasped his slick shaft, brought it to Tommy's hole and teased him, rubbed it all over his entrance, up and down his crack.

Tommy's breath hitched. Teo wasn't faring all that well either. He was two seconds from coming.

"Teo. God." There he went with the begging.

"All you gotta do is ask, T. S' All you gotta do." Teo pushed in. He watched the head disappear, swallowed up by all that fucking tight heat. Tommy grabbed at him, muscles clenching and Teo bucked. "God. Fuck."

Tommy was greedy, pushing back before Teo was all the way deep, slamming back. Teo grabbed his hair, yanked him backward and with a hand in Tommy's hair and the other clamped onto his hip, he bottomed out.

Tommy's muscles were going crazy, rippling like waves in a fucking pond, killing him with the sensations. He gulped air into his lungs and retreated, rearing back. Tommy wasn't having it, he clenched around him.

"Shit." Teo slammed in. Then he pulled out and slammed in again. Tommy arched, panting against Teo. "Feel you," he muttered against Tommy's neck. "Fuck, T. I feel you." He circled his hips, loving the way Tommy's nails sank into his thighs. "Work it for me. Work that ass for me."

Tommy did. He lifted a hand, hanging on to Teo's neck from behind, and rode him. Hard and needy. Teo just held on, gritting his teeth as Tommy fucked himself on Teo's cock.

"Deeper," Tommy groaned. His head rolled back onto Teo's chest, hair wet with sweat. "Want you deeper."

So Teo bit him there on his shoulder and set to work, driving into him, over and over, until he heard Tommy's cries, until Tommy shook for him, until that ass spasmed for him and when the orgasm got too big and too hot to be ignored, he reached in front and stroked Tommy until he screamed and hot spunk spilled onto Teo's fist. Then Teo let go, emptying his balls with one savage push into Tommy.

In the aftermath there really wasn't much happening except for the kisses, because Teo couldn't get enough of that, and the fingers that Tommy slicked up and pushed into him. Teo couldn't get enough of that either.

Not for the first time since he'd left the house that morning, Tommy wondered just what the fuck he was doing. In all the time he'd been with Teo, he'd never once

doubted his husband. He'd never once questioned himself, questioned Teo, or them, but he did last night.

The sex didn't do a damn thing to get the phone call he'd overheard out of his mind. That didn't hurt so much as the knowledge that Teo had looked him dead in the eye and lied to him.

Lied.

To Tommy.

And he had to know now, Tommy had to know, who this Jessa person was. He had to know why Teo was threatening her, why she'd been yelling at Teo through the phone. Because he'd heard the voice though he hadn't been able to make out the words. She'd been yelling at Teo, who decided that Tommy didn't need to know about her and their conversation. So Tommy had to find out on his own.

He'd followed Teo. He'd followed him downtown to some kind of office and now here they were, headed to Queens. A coil of tension sat in the middle of Tommy's stomach. Dread and fear, because he just knew something was wrong. How or why, he had no idea. But if Teo was keeping secrets from him, it had to be big and bad.

Why was he suddenly here, spying on his spouse? He wasn't that type. They weren't that couple who didn't trust each other, who suspected each other. At least before last night he hadn't thought so. Turned out they *were* that couple.

He watched Teo pulled into the parking lot of a Chili's restaurant and get out. He didn't look any different than when he'd kissed Tommy gently on the lips and told him he was off to hang with his brothers. His eyes were covered in reflective sunglasses and he wore a red t-shirt and dark jeans to match the red and black Jordans on his feet. His phone was in his hand as he walked the few steps across the parking lot and into the restaurant.

Tommy debated between staying put and just going back home. But he wanted to know. And he was there, so no, he was staying right there until Teo came back out. He blanked his mind, trying not to jump to conclusions, trying not to imagine the worst. He played Candy Crush on his phone and fucked around on Facebook and Twitter, even sent a few emails to the clients whose websites he was building. But it was hard and he was quickly losing his ability to remain seated in his car. To act like he wasn't coming out of his skin with fear and dread.

Forty minutes later Teo emerged from the restaurant. Only this time he wasn't alone. Nope. He was with a woman, a slender caramel-skinned woman with short hair and a curvy body. And in between Teo and that woman, who Tommy could only assume was the infamous Jessa, was a little boy.

A little boy. Teo held one of the kid's hands and the woman held the other. They were talking, Teo and the woman. She looked furious. He looked unruffled. And the kid between them, he just skipped along as the adults walked and talked.

Tommy sat there, staring at them from his car. Trying to make his mind work. His body was shutting down.

Think. Think. He picked up his phone and quickly took some pictures. Three shots, zooming in on their faces. Catching them just as Teo turned and picked up the little boy. In his arms. The boy was in Teo's arms, his arms were around Teo's neck. He turned, the little boy turned toward Tommy as if staring right at him, and Tommy cried out.

Breaking. His heart was breaking. The phone fell from his fingers and to the floor of the car. He didn't even try to pick it up. He couldn't move. He couldn't think. He just watched, a bystander as his husband kissed that little boy and put him in the backseat of a car, strapping him into his car seat. Tommy watched, helplessly, as Teo and the woman exchanged a few more words then she got into the car and drove off. She passed right next to him and he angled his face away, making sure to catch her license plate and commit it to memory.

He just stared after the car, long after it had disappeared. His mind couldn't fully grasp what he'd just seen. Didn't want to believe what he'd been witness to.

His phone rang, startling him. He jerked, wiping at the moisture soaking his cheeks. He picked his phone up from the floor and debated answering it when he saw Teo was calling.

He answered on auto-pilot. "Hello." His throat felt scratchy.

"T, listen, you wanna go out? Do dinner or something later?"

He looked around. Teo was walking back to his car, phone to his ear.

"T, you there?"

"No. I—Yes, I'm here, but no, I don't want to go out." He stared down at his free hand. He'd fisted it and it shook where he rested it on his thigh. "I gotta go." He couldn't. He just...He couldn't. He hung up and peeled away from the curb, fresh tears blinding him.

"T, I'm home."

Tommy took a deep breath and remained seated, despite wanting to get up and run to confront Teo. He'd driven back home and immediately did some digging. He remained sitting on the edge of the bed, the papers he'd printed out scattered next to him on the mattress. He placed his palms flat on his thighs and breathed in and out, in and out. He didn't want to move, too afraid he'd shatter into a million pieces.

Teo's footsteps drew closer and closer and Tommy's throat convulsed.

His life. This was his life suddenly.

"Hey." Teo appeared in the bedroom doorway, squinting at Tommy. "You okay?" he asked as he walked into the room. "I brought Chinese. I was thinking—"

"I was thinking too," Tommy rasped. He pressed a fist to his mouth. He couldn't breathe, why couldn't he breathe?

"What's going on?" Teo grabbed his hand. Tommy jerked away and Teo frowned. "T, what's wrong?"

Tommy laughed. "You can ask me that?" he asked. "You can seriously stand there and ask me that, Teo?"

Teo shook his head. He was confused. Well, so was Tommy.

"I don't know what—"

"There are lots of things I know." Tommy touched his chest. "And lots of things I thought I knew."

The confusion didn't move from Teo's face. He sat next to Tommy on the bed, facing him. He opened his mouth to speak and Tommy cut him off.

"Some things were always set in stone for me," Tommy said softly. "Me and you, you and me. I knew us, I knew you. I knew you wouldn't hurt me. I knew you wouldn't

cheat on me. I knew you'd never lie or deceive me. I was wrong." He picked up one of the papers on the bed, held it up. It was the one with the picture he'd printed out.

The three of them. Teo literally blanched when he realized what Tommy was showing him.

"Oh fuck. T, I'm sorry." He reached for Tommy, who evaded his hand by jumping to his feet.

"I have some questions," Tommy said as calmly as he could. "And the future of our relationship depends completely on how you answer those questions. Do you get me?"

Teo swiped a hand over his face. "T, let me explain. Please, I—"

Tommy slashed a hand through the air, cutting him off. He didn't want excuses. He wanted answers.

"I followed you today," he said.

Teo jerked as if he'd been slapped. "T, I swear—"

"You think I give a fuck what you swear?" Tommy snarled. "I watched you with that woman and the little boy. I watched you take him in your arms and when he turned, he took my breath away. Because I saw you. In that little boy's face, in his eyes, I saw my husband."

Teo just sat there, looking so deflated while Tommy unraveled.

"Is he your son?"

Teo nodded. "Yes."

Tommy blinked rapidly. "How old is he?"

"A-Almost two."

They'd been together almost two years. "How long have you known about him?"

Teo lifted his head, his eyes pleading. "T."

"Tell me," Tommy shouted.

"Three months."

Tommy started sobbing. "Why? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't—" Teo's eyes, they looked so sad as he pleaded with Tommy. "I didn't want to hurt you."

Tommy slapped him. Hard across the face. Then he slapped him again. And again as he cried, as he sobbed. He slapped him. "I hate you. I hate you." Teo sat there and took it. Tommy couldn't stop crying, or slapping Teo, and he wanted to die, because the man he could've sworn would never hurt him, had broken him.

Chapter Ten

Teo couldn't speak. He had no words big enough, powerful enough to erase the heartbreak in Tommy's eyes. So he sat there and took it, the slaps to his face. He should beg, plead, make Tommy understand why they were where they were, but he couldn't do it.

Tommy sank to the floor, face red and awash with tears. And the sight killed Teo, slayed him. He grabbed Tommy's hands finally, caught both of Tommy's wrist in his and held on. Just held on and watched as his husband cried.

"You lied to me," Tommy cried. "You looked me in the eye and you lied right to my face."

It was by no means a question, but Teo nodded anyway. He answered anyway. "Yes."

"And this is you loving me? This is you caring for me?"

Teo tugged him close, wanting to wrap his arms around him, but Tommy wasn't having it. He struggled with Teo, trying to get away. Teo wasn't letting him. "I wanted to protect you," he said in a hoarse whisper. "When I found out, I wanted to wait until I got the blood test done. And by then it was even longer and I just...I didn't want to remind you of who I used to be."

Tommy barked a laugh and shook his head. His eyes were red and distrusting. The tears had stopped falling, but they were there, shimmering on his skin and in his eyes. Teo wanted to look away, but he had to watch, he had to look at the results of what he'd done. He had no right, but his heart broke too. With every sob, every tear that fell from Tommy's eyes, Teo's heart broke and bled as well.

"Who are you?" Tommy asked in a raspy whisper. "Who are you? My protector? You're gonna protect me from being hurt, from having my heart broken? Is that it?" He yanked his hands away and Teo released him. Tommy sat on the floor and looked up at Teo. The love Teo normally saw there was gone, replaced with anger and disgust, pain and anguish. "I should tell you that you failed. Because I'm hurt." His lips trembled. "I'm hurt. And I'm broken. My heart is broken." He covered his mouth with a trembling hand. "By you. Because of you."

"I'm so sorry." The reality of what he'd done grabbed Teo by the throat and he could barely sound out the words. "I wanted to keep you—"

"You don't trust me." Tommy looked as if he'd been punched. "You don't trust that I'm stronger than that scared, fucked-up kid you first met. You don't trust that I can deal with the difficulties of being with you."

"That's—" That was the truth, wasn't it? Teo was scared of what might happen if Tommy had to face the tough side of who he was. Of what he'd done back when he'd spiraled out of control. "I didn't want you to have to face any of that, to compromise all the progress you'd made. I wanted to fix it, to prevent all the ugliness from touching you."

Tommy made a harsh sound and looked away. His mouth opened and closed rapidly, but he didn't speak. Teo reached out and touched his cheek, catching a tear with his knuckle.

"I fucked up," he said. "I know that. T, please, let me make it right."

Tommy turned back to him. "Why did you marry me?"

“Wh-What?” What kind of question was that?

“If you didn’t trust me, if you didn’t trust that I was strong enough to stand on my own two feet, if you didn’t trust that I wouldn’t lose my mind when faced with hard choices and tough times, *why did you marry me?*” He screamed the last part.

“Because I love you.”

“Do you see me?” Tommy poked his own chest. “Do you see me, what you’ve done? You got me on my knees. You hurt me, and now you tell me you love me?” He clasped his right hand with his left. “Some kinda love, isn’t it? You have an entire life, separate from me. I’m supposed to be your partner, your husband, and you have another life. One I know nothing of. You lie to me like it’s nothing. You keep something as monumental as you having a child from me and you have *the motherfucking balls* to tell me you love me?”

He was shaking. Teo went to him, pulling him into his arms. Tommy didn’t fight, but he didn’t accept it either. He just sat there, shaking, teeth chattering.

“I thought I was doing the right thing,” Teo murmured into his hair. “I thought I was minimizing the pain that the appearance of a child into our lives would cause. I thought I was protecting you, protecting us.” He bit the inside of his cheek when his words shook. “T, I just wanted you happy. I swear. I just want you happy.”

“I was happy,” Tommy responded in a toneless whisper. “Turns out it was a lie, because you chose to lie to me.” His breath hitched. “You keep seeing me as a victim. I’ll always be the victim to you. I’ll always need to be handled with kid gloves. I’ll always need to be protected.” His words wobbled then broke.

Teo clutched him tighter. “No, T. Please. Please.”

“Why can’t you love me?” Tommy pulled back. “Why can’t you see me? Why do I have to be fixed, to be coddled? Why can’t I be treated as your partner, your equal, instead of poor Tommy, the victim who can’t handle things?”

“You can. I will.” Teo cupped his face. “I’m sorry. It won’t happen again, I promise.”

Tommy licked the tears off his lips then nodded. “I know that. It won’t happen again.” He took Teo’s hand and kissed his open palm then pressed something into it. Teo looked down.

His heart seized.

“I want a divorce.” Tommy whispered the words at Teo’s ear then got to his feet. By the time Teo tore his gaze from the ring in his hand, Tommy’s wedding ring, the room was empty.

He rode the train. For a while he’d wandered the streets in a daze, but when it started raining Tommy had ducked into the nearby subway for shelter. So he rode the B train until his ass hurt from sitting down so long. He didn’t even know where he was, where to go. He couldn’t think straight. He didn’t want to think. Then he got off at the Atlantic Avenue/Barclay’s Center stop and sat on one of the benches there, staring off into space.

People milled about. Trains arrived and trains left. He didn’t know how long he sat there. Could’ve been five minutes or five hours. His eyes hurt. His throat, too. His fingers ached from him clenching his fists. And his ass for sitting too Goddamn long.

“There is a local Q train to Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue approaching the station.”

He jerked his head up at the announcement and stood. He got on the Q train, found an empty seat way in the back of the car he'd entered and hugged his backpack to his chest. He looked down, caught sight of his ring finger and the deep tan line there, and bit his lip to cover his sobs.

He zoned out and almost missed it when the train got to the Coney Island stop. Hands stuffed into his pockets, he exited at the Stillwell and Surf entrance and stood there. It was well after eight o'clock at night, but Coney Island was still busy. It was Friday and in the summertime they had a fireworks display every Friday night. They'd been there to witness a few times, him and Teo.

There'd be no him and Teo now. Not after today. He pursed his lips and started walking. He was going to head to the condo, try to get some rest and something to eat then he'd figure out what to do. Where to go. How to proceed. He'd done this before, gone out on his own. He'd been running from Teo then, too.

The last time, it had hurt to walk away. This time he felt as if he was walking around with his chest cut open, his battered heart exposed. What Teo had done, what he'd done to them, Tommy didn't know how to deal with it. How to get over it. What he needed, Teo didn't seem capable of giving.

Tommy wanted to be seen. He wanted to be included. To be involved. Teo insisted on wrapping him in bubble wrap and keeping him in a box somewhere off to the side. Unaware of what was going on in his own fucking life. Tommy wasn't having it. What kind of relationship was that? What kind of marriage were they building?

All the lies. He'd been so oblivious. Teo had a child. A child. And Tommy had been home, living a happy life under false pretenses while his husband shared a child with someone else. He couldn't even attempt to deal with that yet. If he tried to examine how he felt about that, he'd fall to the floor and never get up. He wasn't going there yet.

He couldn't.

“Mateo's Tommy, is it?”

He froze when a large hand touched his nape.

“You look lost.”

Tommy looked up when he recognized the accent-tinged words. Goddamn Dima What's-His-Face gazed down at him with those weirdly fascinating eyes and the predatory smile Tommy hated.

“What?” Tommy looked around. Where the hell had the big Russian come from?

“I said, you look lost.” Dima's gaze flitted around them. “Where's your husband, Tommy? He let you off the leash?”

Oh, were they going to do this now?

“I'm not lost.” He shrugged away Dima's hold and stepped back. “We have a place here, so I'm going there.”

Dima stared at him, gaze piercing. “Where's your husband?”

“Where do you think he is?” He rolled his eyes. “Not here.”

Dima crossed his arms. “You need to find him because I'm not letting you onto my streets alone.”

Really. “Are you gonna be a problem?” Tommy asked. “Because I'm prepared to deal with you. Yes, alone.”

Dima's lips quirked. "You've got fire in you." He winked. "But Mateo wouldn't be with someone who didn't." He sighed. "Listen, it's not my intention—"

"I don't care what your intention is. Doesn't matter." Tommy shrugged. "Fact is, my husband has already been caught, bagged and tagged." He smiled. "Irks, doesn't it? That he chose me and not you?"

Dima's lips tightened. "You don't want to dig up what's already been buried. Trust me."

"Don't I?" Tommy stepped into his space. He wasn't about to have this fucker talk down to him, or intimidate him. He might be courting violence, but right now? He welcomed it. "Why did you stop me, Dima? I'm only blocks away from my destination. But you decided to stop me to what, ask where my husband is? I can come and go as I please."

Except he'd left, so there was no coming and going. Only going. His eyes flooded and his lips trembled. He bit his lip, but of course the sharp-eyed Russian caught it.

"Come." Dima held out a hand.

Tommy glared at it. "What, so you can kill me and bury the body somewhere round here?" He waved a hand.

Dima laughed and Tommy stared at him. The man was blindingly gorgeous. Damn him.

"You look sad and exhausted, and your eyes are puffy like you've been crying." Dima looked away. "I'm offering a cool place and a cold beverage. At my place."

Tommy squinted at him. "I'm not hearing anything about not killing me."

Dima held up a hand. "I won't hurt you. You have my word."

Whatever that was worth. Tommy grunted. His feet hurt, though. He needed to rest. "Lead the way."

Dima flashed that sharp-toothed grin again and Tommy really wondered if he'd lost all of his senses by agreeing to go anywhere with the guy. He followed Dima and two guys, who'd appeared out of nowhere, into a candy store, through a back door and up some stairs into a rather large apartment that looked out onto the Wonder Wheel.

Dima motioned to the sofa positioned near a large window. "Sit, Tommy." He waved his men away and they disappeared as silently as they'd come. Tommy dropped his backpack to the floor next to his feet and threw his head back. A gust of breeze from the open window washed over his nape, rustling his hair and reminding him of when Teo brushed his lips there when they'd made love the night before.

Just like that, the tears poured. Tommy pressed a hand to his mouth and doubled over.

"Whoa. Whoa." Dima was next to him in an instant, sitting beside him, hugging Tommy to his chest. "It's okay."

But it wasn't. "It's not. It's not." He kept repeating the words over and over as he clung to the front of Dima's white t-shirt. He cried into the man's chest and Dima didn't seem to have a problem with it. He just held Tommy close and rocked him.

He cried until he couldn't.

"Hey, it can't be that bad," Dima murmured at his ear. "Let me call Mateo. He'll come get you."

"No." Tommy grabbed Dima's arm. "Don't. I don't want him to know where I am." He sniffled and wiped his face.

Dima looked around then pulled off his soaked t-shirt with a crooked smile. "Here. You may as well use it."

Tommy stared at the Russian's naked chest. Holy damn. Dima was as tatted as Teo. His body was sick, too. And he was pierced in both nipples. Of course.

"Teo hurt you?" Dima asked.

Tommy blew his nose. "I don't want to talk about that. Let's talk about you. You still want him, yeah?" Dima didn't answer, but Tommy saw the truth in his eyes. "Well, you can have him now. He's free."

Dima tensed beside him. Something flashed in his eyes then he smiled slowly. "What makes you think Teo is who I want?"

Tommy scoffed. "I've got eyes. And I know you two had that whole Dom/Sub thing happening."

Dima's eyes were brilliant and intense when he gazed at Tommy. "Maybe Teo isn't who I want anymore. Maybe I want you."

Tommy gaped. And Dima swooped in, sliding his tongue into Tommy's mouth.

Chapter Eleven

Teo hunched his shoulders and stared at the regret on Reggie's face. "He can't have disappeared, Reggie. His car is still here. His..." He shook his head. "I don't—" The panic was crippling him.

Tommy was gone, vanishing in an instant, and Teo didn't know where else to look. He'd called everyone he could think of. Tommy was just gone. Night bled into morning with no news. Normally they'd use someone's phone or car GPS to find them, but Timmy did that. Tommy was the genius who fucked with that electronic shit and Tommy...

Teo stared down at the ring in his hand. He hadn't released the grip he had on it from the moment Tommy placed it in his palm. Tommy was gone. He'd meant business then. The icy grip of fear held Teo captive; he had no idea what to do. What step to take. He'd done this. He'd caused the explosion that blew their world apart and he was left to clean up the bloody aftermath.

His phone rang and he snatched it up. "T?"

"Fraid not." Syren Rua's voice only made Teo tense more. "You wanna explain to me why Tommy is missing and why you're in a panic?"

He didn't want to, no. "Not now. I—" Teo scrubbed a hand over his face. "I can't do this now."

"Let's do it anyway," Syren insisted. "What did you do?"

Teo barked a rusty laugh. Where did he start? "I fucked up." He dropped into a nearby chair. "I fucked up bad." His voice shook. "I might—" Teo forced himself to swallow then admitted the words he'd been trying to avoid. "There may be no coming back from this one."

"I don't believe that," Syren said softly. "Tommy loves you, and I know how you feel about him." He cleared his throat. "Find him. Fix it. Let me know when that's done." He ended the call and Teo tipped his head back, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I've got everybody driving around, looking for him." Reggie's voice was cautious, as if he knew Teo was on the verge of losing his shit. "We'll find him."

Teo shook his head. It was useless, all of it. "If he doesn't want me to find him, I won't." This was torture of the worst kind. The worst and he'd brought it on himself.

His phone rang again. He glared at it when he saw it was Jessa calling. "Yeah."

"I just finished going through all the papers you gave me yesterday," she said. "I have some concerns about —"

Teo's control snapped. "Sign the fucking papers, Jessa. I want fifty-fifty custody of our son. If you fight me I'll make sure you end with nothing. Got me?" He gritted his teeth. "I've been trying to keep myself in check for a lot of reasons, but they no longer matter, so let me make sure this motherfucker is crystal, sign those papers. You owe me, for keeping my son from me." He pounded his chest. "You owe me, for denying our son his father. You owe me, and you're gonna make it right. By signing those papers."

"I have one condition," she said after a while. "I'll sign it under one condition."

Teo rolled his eyes. "I don't know what makes you think you have any room to negotiate, but whatever, speak your piece."

“The reason I decided not to tell you about Noah.” She sighed. “That hasn’t changed, Mateo. I don’t care who you’re married to, it was just a shock. I don’t give a damn you’re gay. That’s not the issue.”

“Then what the fuck is the problem?”

“You’re the problem. The life you lead. The violence.” She sounded teary. “I heard about the shooting at Israel’s party. That’s your life. Our son—Noah—can’t be anywhere near that. I won’t budge on this.”

Fuck. “Let’s discuss this later. I’m busy right now.” And he needed to think, about what was best for him, for Tommy, for Noah. Because he had a son whose well-being he had to consider too.

“I’m sorry,” Jessa whispered. “That I kept him from you. I was afraid of what being in your life could mean for Noah. I’m sorry that I dropped this on you and your husband. Will you apologize to him for me?”

Teo barked a laugh. “Too late for apologies from either of us, Jessa. He found out about you and Noah and left me.”

“Oh, my God.” She actually sounded shocked. “I’m so sorry.”

She probably meant it, too, but Teo wasn’t in the mood. “Yeah, listen, I gotta go. We’ll talk later.” He hung up before she could say anything else. He didn’t know how to deal with Jessa when she was all apologetic like that. It wasn’t as if he knew her. One night was all they had. Now a broken condom kept them tethered to each other for life because of Noah.

He was beyond angry that she played God and decided he shouldn’t know about his son. He hated the time he’d lost with Noah. She had no right to make that kind of decision. They made Noah together, they should both get a say in—

“Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch.” He vaulted upright and spun in a circle. Reggie stepped back, out of his way, as Teo paced and muttered to himself. “I’m a fucking idiot.” He smacked his forehead. “I did to Tommy what Jessa did to me.”

Reggie just nodded as if he understood, but clearly he didn’t. Teo cursed again. He could make it right. He had to. Now all he had to do was find Tommy. Bring him home. He would make it right.

“Let’s go out.” He grabbed his keys and phone. “I’m going to find my husband.”

But he didn’t find Tommy. Instead he spent the day fielding phone calls from his family and friends wanting to know what was going and what had he done? He didn’t tell anyone about Noah. The Captain knew, only because Teo had gone to his father to ask for his advice when he’d first found out about his son. But aside from that, no one else knew and Teo wanted it that way. He owed it to Tommy to fix what he’d broken before letting anyone else in on what was happening.

His phone rang again as he and Reggie pulled back into their driveway. It was night once more and the ache of missing Tommy was getting harder and harder to bear. He sighed at the sound of his phone and didn’t even bother checking the caller ID.

“Yeah.”

“I had the pleasure of sharing a bed with your husband. I can see why you married him.”

Teo froze in the process of unbuckling his seatbelt. “Who is this?”

“So soon you forget the sound of my voice, *sladjij.*”

What the— “Dima?”

“Yes. It is me.”

Teo waved at a frowning Reggie to restart the car. “Why are you calling me? And what do you mean about having Tommy in your bed?”

Reggie made a sound. Teo ignored him. He focused on what Dima had to say, not wanting to miss anything.

“Just what I said, *sladjij*. Your Tommy was in my arms all night last night and today...” He let his words trail off. “He is quite tasty.”

Rage was a living thing, boiling hot inside Teo’s body. He gripped the phone tight enough to crush it. “If you touched him, I’ll touch you back.”

“Yes, I know. I’m counting on it.”

Teo blinked at the dial tone.

“What the fuck was that?” Reggie asked in an incredulous whisper.

“He says T was in his bed.”

“He wants—”

Teo smiled. “I know what he wants.”

He let his breath even out as Reggie drove them to Coney Island. Teo knew what Dima wanted all right. Dima wanted him out of his mind with rage and jealousy. But Dima didn’t know him as well as he thought he did.

The candy store was closed for the night, the shutters down and padlocked. But the apartment upstairs where Dima lived was well lit, sheer curtains rustling in the gentle breeze coming in from the ocean nearby. Two Russians sat in white lawn chairs at a matching table near the side door leading up to Dima’s place, listening to a radio and arguing.

Teo hopped out the SUV. “Stay here,” he instructed Reggie.

Reggie cast a skeptical glance toward Dima’s door. “You sure about this?”

Teo nodded. He knew how to handle Dima. The men didn’t try to stop him when he passed by, but they did look up. He met their gazes and kept it moving. The door was unlocked and he ran up the narrow staircase, taking the steps two at a time.

Dima’s front door was open so Teo walked right in. Dima sat at a sofa near the window, facing him with that cocky half smile on his face.

“*Sladjij*.”

Russian for sweet. There’d been a time when Teo had loved when those words passed Dima’s lips.

“Where’s he?” He looked around. “Where’s Tommy?”

“Not here.” Dima winked. “But if you took a deep breath you might still smell him.” He shuddered and slid a palm down his chest. “He smelled of you, his skin. His hair.” He looked down to the floor then lifted his piercing gaze to Teo’s. “I tried to taste you on his tongue, but I couldn’t.”

Teo gripped the door handle. He needed to breathe and think, before the very idea of Dima touching Tommy sent him on a murderous rampage.

“You touched him?” Breath was a whistle through his nose. “You put your hands on him?”

Dima got up. Teo pulled his gun as the other man walked toward him.

“I did.” Dima nodded. “I held him while he cried. Over you, I’m guessing. He didn’t want to talk about it.” He shrugged. “So we didn’t.”

“I know what you want,” Teo said as Dima stood in front of him, that dark hunger in his eyes making his features even more striking. “You’re not gonna get it.”

“No?” Dima lifted an eyebrow and held up a t-shirt. The one Tommy’s was wearing when he left. “He looked at my body the way you used to. Like he wanted it. Didn’t know what to do with it.” He chuckled. “I showed him.”

Teo’s stomach threatened to explode through his throat. He swallowed the bile Dima’s words brought and with a lurch forward, grabbed the Russian by the throat and flung him into the nearest wall. Before Dima could move, Teo was on him, an arm at his windpipe, cutting off his ear.

Dima’s eyes went wide, pupils dilated, because this was his thing. He got off on this. He was hard, his body and his cock where he strained against Teo.

“You want me to hurt you.” Teo angled his body away, so that the only part of him that was touching Dima was his hands and the gun he had at Dima’s temple. “You want to play those dangerous games you love so much, yeah?”

Dima bucked, nostrils flaring. His lips were parted and his huffed-out breaths hit Teo in the face. He smelled like toffee. Caramel toffee. One of Dima’s many vices.

“You don’t want this, D.” Teo pressed harder on his windpipe, watching as Dima’s face grew redder and his eyes flared wider. “You don’t want my hands on you, not now. Not ever. I *will* kill you. That’s the only way I’ll get any pleasure from having my hands on you.”

Dima made a choked sound.

“You can’t fuck with me and Tommy. I know my husband,” he murmured against Dima’s jaw. “If you touched him, it wasn’t with his consent, and that means you’ll have to die.” He cocked the gun.

“Do it,” Dima sputtered. “Hurt me. I kissed him. I—”

Teo slammed Dima’s head into the wall. The other man groaned and licked his lips.

“Don’t. My relationship is off limits, my husband is off limits. Don’t use Tommy to get to me, it only makes me want to kill you more.” He eased up his grip and Dima gazed at him with wet eyes.

“*Ty nuzhen mnye.*” I need you.

Teo shook his head with a sigh. “You don’t need me. You need the pain. Anyone can deliver that.” He tucked his gun back into his waistband.

“No.” Dima pushed away from the wall. “I wanted this,” he waved a hand between them. “The commitment, the relationship. You said you weren’t that type. But you are.” He bit his lip. “You are.”

“I wasn’t then.” Teo sighed and wiped at the sweat beading on his forehead. “Tommy is my life. It doesn’t matter what we had before, Dima. Tommy is it for me.”

“But you hurt him. He cried all night while I held him.” Dima crossed his arms. “He wasn’t wearing his ring and he told me you were free now.”

Teo smiled. “You know me. You think I’m gonna let him get away?” Like hell. “I’ll find my husband and make things right. Never doubt that. Your transparent attempts to get me to hurt you isn’t gonna work.”

Dima pursed his lips and stood there in ripped jeans, a black wife beater and bare feet. He only showed a very few people this side of him, Teo knew that. Dima looked vulnerable, on the edge.

“You need it,” he said softly. “How long has it been?”

“Too long.” Dima glanced away then back at Teo. “If I’d asked you straight up, would you have said yes?”

“No.” Dima looked defeated suddenly and Teo actually felt sorry for him. “Any kind of play like that would be cheating on my marriage. That is something I’ll never do.” He pulled a pen from his pocket. “Tell me where Tommy is and I’ll give you a name. Somewhere you can go and be safe.”

Safe here was all-encompassing. Dima’s secret needed to remain that way. Though he liked both sexes, Dima could only submit for a man.

Dima didn’t speak, he just looked at Teo as if finally realizing he had no chance.

“Dima.”

“Why did you marry him?” Dima asked. “He’s nowhere near the toys you usually played with.”

“Because I’m not playing.” Teo stood and went to him. “I married him because there was no way I was gonna go through life without him.” He touched Dima’s cheek. “I married him because he’s mine, from his shaved head to his painted toes. Dima,” Teo pulled Dima into a half hug, pressing their cheeks together. “I married him because I’d kill for him. Be thankful that I get you. That I understand you.”

Dima nodded, but he didn’t meet Teo’s eyes when he said, “One of my guys took him to the airport a few hours ago.”

Goddamn it. Teo frowned. “What’s a few hours and where was he headed?”

“About five and he didn’t say.”

Fuck. He spun away. *Jesus, T. Where are you?* “I gotta—” He shook his head to clear it. “I gotta go.”

Dima didn’t speak as Teo walked to the door. He grasped the doorknob then turned to Dima. “Brownstone at the corner of Crown and Nostrand in Crown Heights. Use my name to get in,” he said. “You’ll be safe, your body and your identity.”

“Don’t you want to know if we had sex, your Tommy and I?”

Teo shrugged. “I don’t need to know, but I’ll get whatever answers I need from Tommy.” He held Dima’s gaze, make sure he understood. “Not from you.”

Dima nodded. “I owe you one.”

Teo’s phone went off as he said, “You owe me way more. I *will* collect.” He walked out the apartment and answered the phone. “Hello?”

“It’s Shane. Get your ass to Atlanta. Now.”

Chapter Twelve

“What the fuck did you do?”

Teo didn't fight the chokehold Pablo had on him, but he wanted to. He wanted to break away from the censure and judgment in Pablo's eyes and dash up the stairs. Because Tommy had to be up those stairs.

“I trusted you with him.” Pablo glanced behind him then back to Teo. “That fucking kid is devastated, do you get it? I barely stopped him from taking a blade to his wrist.”

Teo's knees buckled. Pablo's death grip was the only thing keeping him upright. He'd achieved what he'd been trying to avoid. And the realization crippled him. He sagged into Pablo, blinking rapidly.

“J.P.” Shane came down the stairs and touched Pablo on the shoulder. “Let him go.”

“No.” Pablo's voice rose as he shook his head. “I don't want you near Tommy, you hear me? I don't even know why the fuck Shane called you.”

“I want to see him.” Teo grabbed Pablo's forearm. “Please. Let me see him.”

“Fuck no. Teo, what did you do to him? He's not talking. He's not eating.” Pablo advanced on him, closing the space between them. “I've half a mind to kick your ass.”

He'd deserve it, but Teo didn't care about that. All he wanted— “I want Tommy.” He looked over Pablo's shoulder and met Shane's grave expression. “Please. I have to see him. To make it right.”

“J.P. Let him go.”

Pablo's grip tightened then he stepped back. Fury darkened his features as he narrowed his eyes at Teo.

“You'd better fix it. Because if you don't, I really will hurt you.” He rubbed the top of his head. “Fuck.” He stormed away and after a glance at Teo, loaded with questions, Shane went after him.

Teo gulped breath into his lungs then walked cautiously to the staircase. Tommy was up there, in the bedroom down the hall. Teo didn't have to guess, that was the room they stayed in when they visited Pablo and Shane. His every step was heavy, laden with guilt.

The white bedroom door was closed, but not all the way and he pushed it in. The room was in darkness. He brushed a hand along the right inside wall until he found the light switch and turned it on.

Tommy sat on the bed with his back against the headboard, his knees pulled up to his chest. His hair was a tangled hive around his head and his face was pale, his eyes and nose red. Only a day they'd been apart, but Tommy looked as if he'd dropped major weight.

Teo crept inside when Tommy didn't stir. He moved to the left side of the room and sat in the burgundy lounge chair, watching Tommy watch him. Teo had to say something, but he didn't know what to say. They sat in a loud silence, staring at each other, Tommy's parting words playing over and over in Teo's head.

“You must be so happy,” Tommy rasped. His voice was scratchy as if he'd been smoking. “You were right.”

Teo frowned. “What?”

“I couldn’t handle it, so I grabbed the first blade.” His mouth twisted. “You were right after all. I can’t be trusted to deal with tough issues.”

“God, T. I was wrong. I was so wrong.” Teo got up and went to the bed. He sat on the edge when Tommy flinched from his nearness. It stung, but he dealt with it. “I was a fool. Please. Forgive me.”

“What should I forgive? The lies, the deceit?” Despite the rough quality of his voice, Tommy sounded calm. Very calm. “I haven’t dealt with the idea of you having a child out there.” His lashes were clumped together when he blinked up Teo. “Because it’s gonna kill me.”

“No.”

He looked down, chin trembling. “I will resent him. Your son.” Tommy picked at the sheets. “It’s supposed to be me. Us. We were supposed to do it together and while we were talking about it, you knew, *you knew*, you had a child out there.”

“You won’t resent him,” Teo said softly. “You’re not the type. You’ll love him, T.”

Tommy jerked his chin up. “We gonna talk about the type of man I am? Do you know the type of man I am?”

“I do.” Teo gave in to the need to touch and pressed the pad of a finger to Tommy’s lips. “I know who you are, T and I love you. Every part of you.”

Tommy scoffed.

“I didn’t see it then, maybe I didn’t want to,” Teo said, “But I know you. You’re strong and brave and you love me with your whole heart. Just like I love you.” He cupped Tommy’s chin. “Forgive me. Forgive me. I’ll spend the rest of our lives righting every wrong I’ve ever done. Just say it.” A tremor ran through him and made the fingers he touched Tommy with spasm. “Say you forgive me.”

Tommy smiled. It didn’t reach his eyes. “But will you forgive me?”

“Tommy?” A knock came on the bedroom door then Shane poked his head in. “You okay?”

As Teo tried to make sense of why Tommy would need forgiving, Tommy nodded at Shane.

“I’m fine.” He licked his lips, but didn’t look at Teo. “Please close the door behind you,” and as Shane started to do just that Tommy spoke again. “Also, no matter what sounds you hear coming from here, don’t come in. No interruptions.”

“Uh. Okay.” Shane retreated quickly, closing the door softly behind him.

“T, why do I need to forgive you? You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Oh?” Tommy cocked his head and just watched Teo.

I had the pleasure of sharing a bed with your husband... Teo fisted the mattress as he tried to silence Dima’s voice in his head. “I was with Dima when Shane called me.” He searched Tommy’s gaze, looking for any indication of what his words might mean. He saw nothing.

“Did you?” Tommy stretched his legs out in front of him. “Did you and your ex have a lovely visit?”

Teo gritted his teeth until his jaw ached. “I know you,” he said huskily. “I know my husband.”

“Hm, I think both of us can now say that that’s no longer true.”

“T—”

Tommy lunged at him, twisting the front of Teo's t-shirt around his fist as he levered himself closer. "Did he tell you that he kissed me?" Tommy's nostrils were flared wide, his eyes shining as he smirked at Teo. "Yeah? Bet you wanna know if I kissed him back." He leaned in, brushing their noses together. "I bet you wanna know if let him do what I thought only you could do."

No. Teo was paralyzed. He couldn't move. For Goddamn sure he couldn't speak and Tommy took advantage, climbing onto his lap and letting go of his t-shirt to settle a tight hold on Teo's hair.

"Shall I tell you what your ex tastes like?" Tommy whispered at his temple. "Oh, I know you've been there before me, but it's been so long. Maybe you forgot. Let me remind you." His breath rushed over Teo's ear when he said, "Sweet. Like caramel. And the piercing..."

Teo panted and shook his head. "No."

"Yes." Tommy grabbed his jaw, forcing Teo to look at him, to stare into his blazing eyes. "Fucking yes. Unlike you, husband, I keep no secrets. Shall I describe his body, the nipple piercings, and the scars?"

Teo jerked away. "Don't. Fuck. T, don't say it." He couldn't...He wanted...The contents of his stomach rushed to his throat and he gagged. It wasn't true. Never. Not Tommy.

"He has a tattoo," Tommy kept on whispering those insidious words at Teo's temple. "Russian word for sweet. Right below his belly button." He yanked on Teo's hair. "Did I fuck him? Did he fuck me? Which one hurts more, Teo?"

Tears clouded Teo's eyes. "I don't believe you."

Tommy nodded. "When you close your eyes and see it, me with Dima, what causes you the most pain? Tell me," he shouted. "Tell me how bad it hurts and I'll let you know if it even remotely comes close to the pain you caused me."

Anguish swallowed Teo whole and his entire body shook with it. He refused to believe what Tommy was saying, he refused to accept that Tommy would cross that line, but hearing it...hearing the words seared him with red-hot pain.

"He touched me and I thought, why the fuck not?" Tommy's voice didn't even break. "Why not, Teo? Should I feel guilty, should I worry about deceiving someone who didn't give a fuck about deceiving me?" He pulled back, lips curved when he asked, "How much does it burn, the idea of me and Dima? Maybe I gave him entry to someplace only you had access to, or maybe I gave him what you though you had a monopoly on."

"No!" Teo thrust Tommy away and climbed on top of him, grabbing him by the throat. "It's not true. You wouldn't. You wouldn't—"A sharp, piercing pain in his abdomen made him stop, made him look down between their bodies.

Tommy held a knife, and that knife—its blade was in Teo's side as his blood dripped down onto Tommy's fingers.

Chapter Thirteen

“I want you to bleed,” Tommy whispered as he stared up into Teo’s shocked face. “For me. Like you made me bleed for you.”

Teo’s throat worked and he glanced down again, at the place where Tommy had cut him. “I love you. T,” his voice shook, “I love you.”

“Fuck your love.” Tommy pushed him off and when Teo fell backward on the bed, Tommy sliced through the front of Teo’s t-shirt. Before the two halves could fall apart he slashed Teo on his left pec. “I don’t want your love. I want you to hurt.” His hands were numb, but he maintained his grip on the slippery knife. “I want you to feel,” his vision blurred. “Feel what you did to me, feel what you did to me.” He slashed out again, but Teo grabbed his wrist.

Tommy bared his teeth. He needed to hurt Teo, he wanted that fucking pain to lay him flat. He wanted to see it in his husband’s eyes, the anguish.

“I know what I did,” Teo said. “I’m sorry. Tommy, let’s talk about this.” He peered down at the thin slash on his chest. “This isn’t—”

“Isn’t me?” Tommy asked. “Isn’t us? Isn’t right?” He managed to wrench his wrist free from Teo’s grip and sat back. “I’ll tell you what it is, it’s a flesh wound.” He grinned, but the last thing he felt was humor. “I know how to make it bleed. I want to make you bleed.”

“That’s not gonna change anything.”

“But it will make me feel better. I want to feel better.” He embraced the anger, let it rule him as he cut Teo again, the other pec. “I’m angry. I’m angry. I’m angry.” He sobbed as he watched the cut swell up with blood. “I’m hurt. You hurt me.”

“Then do it,” Teo rasped. He lifted both hands and grasped the headboard. “Show me. Hurt me.”

Tommy attacked him, sinking the knife into Teo’s side. The other man gasped and winced, his throat worked, but he didn’t shy away from it. Tommy went at him again, small cuts then deeper ones all over Teo’s chest and stomach and through it all Teo kept gasping, body writing on the bed as his blood dripped. The cuts weren’t deep, but they bled, exactly what Tommy wanted.

His shoulder ached, but he kept going, kept delivering those tiny cuts. A million of them, to hurt, to make Teo feel an ounce of what Tommy felt. They would. They would burn. He knew all about cuts. With each slice of the knife, the tight ball in his throat and gut got bigger. When he cut his own palm, he paused and unbuckled Teo’s belt, pulling off his jeans and briefs.

Then Tommy sank to his knees between Teo’s thighs.

“T.” Sweat made Teo’s skin shine. Fear made his body tense.

Tommy eyes his flaccid shaft nestled in tight curls then traced the inside of Teo’s right thigh with the dull side of knife. Teo grunted. Tommy smiled and did the same to the other thigh.

“I trust you,” Teo murmured above him. “With my body, with my heart, with everything, T. I trust you.”

Tommy bit him, right there on the inside of his thigh. Sunk his teeth in deep and bit down. He made it hurt and didn’t let up until he tasted blood. Then he lifted his head and glared at a gasping Teo.

“I don’t trust you. I don’t trust you.” He cut him again, sharp blade against sharp hipbone. “You have a child.” The words choked him, blind him and he clawed at Teo, his thigh, his stomach. “You have a child. And I hate you, I hate that you sent me here, to this place. Where I want to hurt you and mark you and maim you. Just like you hurt me.”

Tears ran down Teo’s face. Tommy glanced away, glanced down. Anywhere. He didn’t want to see them.

“I hate that I couldn’t fuck you over the way you did me, that I couldn’t accept the invitation from your ex to fuck him.” He dropped his entire body onto Teo’s, gripping his jaw with bloody fingers. “I wanted to do it. I would’ve done it. If I didn’t love you. If I didn’t take those vows I made seriously.”

“I’ll make it right,” Teo’s entire body shuddered. “Let me make it right. Anything. Tommy, please. Anything.”

Tommy shook his head. “You can’t.” He got off Teo, his t-shirt now stained with Teo’s blood. “No going back. Teo’s, there’s no going back.”

“Don’t say that.” Teo released the headboard and Tommy jumped off the bed. Teo’s jaw ticked. He watched Tommy, gaze searching then resumed holding on.

Tommy walked away, into the bathroom.

“Tommy. T, come back.”

Tommy stripped down to the buff and washed the blood of his hands and the knife, never once looking into the mirror. He knew what he’d find and none of it was pretty. When his hands were clean he went back into the bedroom. Teo remained there. Tommy hadn’t restrained him, but there he lay, like a willing sacrifice, ready to take his punishment.

Tommy grabbed the lube from the drawer and got back on the bed. Settling between Teo’s raised knees, he squeezed lube onto two fingers and pressed them into Teo without a word.

Teo cried out, ass rippling in welcome. “Shit. T, not like this. Please.”

“Exactly like this.” Tommy smiled up at him, a lock of hair covering his right eye. “Like this. You think I give a fuck what you want? What you need? This is for me and I’m taking it. It’s time I was the selfish one.”

He fucked Teo with the two fingers, getting hard as he watched the tight hole suck him, as he felt the hot inner muscles cling to him. He didn’t linger, didn’t try to make it good for Teo, because this wasn’t about Teo. It wasn’t about giving him pleasure, still Teo’s cock was already hard where it lay atop his stomach.

Tommy ignored it. He squeezed more lube, added another finger, twisting the three digits. Teo’s thighs trembled against the mattress, pre-cum glistening on the tip of his dick. His hips lifted, a tiny gesture that Tommy ignored. He tore open the condom he’d grabbed along with the lube and used it to cover the knife handle as he gazed up at Teo.

“Fuck. Fuck, T—”

Tommy pushed the covered knife handle into him. Teo yelled out. Tommy held his gaze as he fucked him. Like that. Just like that. A knife.

“Oh God. Oh—”

“This is what I want.” Tommy spoke in a conversational tone as he thrust the knife in and out. Teo’s hips rode it. His face was shocked by Tommy’s actions, but his body didn’t appear to mind being penetrated by a dangerous object. “To fuck you like

this. Watch me shatter whatever you think you know about me.” He twisted his wrist and Teo’s hips lifted and he panted.

“This—T, this isn’t— Fuck!” Teo used the headboard as leverage to life himself off and on the knife. His wet cock slapped onto his stomach with every roll of his hips. The sight jacked up Tommy’s arousal, despite everything, seeing Teo like this...it went to Tommy’s head.

He sank the knife deeper and Teo yelped then cried out, cum shooting onto his chest and belly. Tommy retreated, pulling out the knife and flinging it aside. Teo’s body vibrated as he gazed down at Tommy with pleading eyes.

Tommy ignored him. He dragged his knuckles through the cum on Teo’s body and squirted a fuck-load of lube onto his fingers then he went back, shoving them into Teo’s stretched hole.

“Nngh.” Teo threw his head back. His hole was hot, claustrophobic tight. Tommy worked him with three fingers, then added more lube and gave him four. Teo started to babble.

“T. Whatever you wanted. Whatever you want, baby. Tell me.” His muscles contracted around Tommy, made him bite his lip, made his eyes roll back in his head.

“I want this.” Tommy tucked his thumb into his palm and squeezed more lube onto Teo’s hole as he went in, easing his hand in bit by bit. “I want to hold you like this, my fist inside you.” He slid in and in and Teo’s face reddened, his eyes bulged with each slide. “My fist in you, Teo.”

“Yes.” Teo didn’t look away, but Tommy had to break eye contact to watch his progress. One last tug and he was in to the narrow of his wrist.

Teo jerked. Tommy groaned.

“Fuck. Fuck.” Teo kept chanting the words as Tommy went in all the way and Teo’s channel closed around his hand.

“So fucking tight,” Tommy murmured. “And so typical you, to trust me with your body.” He swallowed. “If only you could trust me everywhere else.”

“I do. Oh God.” Teo reached down, limp fingers attempting to grab Tommy’s forearm. His pupils were dilated. “T, I do.”

Except he didn’t.

Tommy ignored him, making a fist inside Teo who made a gurgling sound and grabbed fistfuls of the sheets. He moved, using his knuckles to scrape Teo’s walls. His husband’s moans and whispers grew louder with every stroke, every caress.

“I want this,” Tommy said softly. “Want you to trust me like this always. Not just when I fuck you with a knife or my fist. Always.”

“Yes.” Teo shook. His parted lips were swollen when he said, “I’ll make it right. Tommy. I will— Just...” His ass clamped down on Tommy’s wrist.

Tommy groaned.

“Move. God, T. Take me. Love me. I’m yours.” The veins in his aroused cock bulged while pre-cum flowed freely from the tip.

So Tommy did, he moved. He thrust, slowly, softly, then with a bit more force. He fucked Teo while the other man cried out and rolled his lips, his heels digging into the mattress as he lifted his ass for it. Tommy’s arm ached, his balls and dick throbbed, but he stayed right there, fucking Teo with his fist until sweat dripped into his eyes, burning him.

He stilled.

Teo cried out. “God. God. I need—”

Tommy twisted his fist, hit his prostate and Teo screamed.

Screamed. He came again, not as much as before. Tommy licked his lips, and when Teo’s body stopped spasming around him, he eased his way out. Teo arched off the bed then flopped back down. Tommy crawled up his body, swimming through the blood and cum, and held Teo steady with one hand in his hair and the other one stroking his own shaft.

He knelt, knees on either side of Teo’s head, ass on Teo’s chin, cock head inches from Teo’s mouth and stroked his dick to orgasm. It didn’t take long, two rough tugs and he came, ass clenching, gasping, pouring his cream into Teo’s mouth and dripping onto his face and chin.

Chapter Fourteen

This silence...

Teo didn't even know how he made it to the bathroom, but he did. He stood on weak knees and looked at himself in the mirror. Thin trails of blood decorated his chest and abdomen. The cut on his hip hurt. Not too much, but he definitely knew it was there. The first cut, the one in his side, that one was superficial.

He grabbed onto the sink, clutched the porcelain and just stared into the mirror. He looked worse than he felt. *Fuck.*

A knife. Goddamn it. It was the handle, but still... That look in Tommy's eyes, it scared Teo more than the blade. He'd watched Tommy, really looked at him, and he'd seen the damage he'd done. He'd seen the darkness he was responsible for. He could have stopped Tommy, God knew he could. But Tommy had needed to vent, to lash out, to barrel through the anger, and Teo had to let him. 'Course he didn't expect Tommy's aggression to manifest in Teo getting fucked with a knife, or having a fist up his ass.

Thing was, Teo didn't care. He didn't care. If Tommy needed it then Teo was fine. His ass hurt, but he was fine. He'd liked it in the end there, liked it. Tommy's demeanor hadn't been receptive as he'd gone after Teo with that knife handle, he hadn't wanted Teo to feel the pleasure, Teo knew that. But this was Tommy and it didn't matter how he touched Teo, it didn't matter with what, as long as Tommy's hands were on him, Teo would be loving it.

He didn't know where they stood after this, though. Tommy had dropped back onto the mattress and curled away from him. Teo was exhausted. Physically he felt as if he'd been to fucking war. Mentally wasn't any better. They needed to talk, he needed to fully explain why he'd done what he'd done. That Dima situation, that needed to be handled once and for all. Tommy's taunts, mother of God, they'd hurt. He'd implied that he'd slept with Dima. And he'd gloried in Teo's torment.

This is who we are now.

He hung his head and just stood there, hands at his sides, in front of the mirror. This was who they were now. Hurting each other. It needed to stop. Who would make the first move? He had to, he couldn't wait for Tommy to soften toward him. Teo had to do it himself. With a heavy sigh, he turned away and slid the glass shower doors back before stepping inside the enclosed space.

When he went back in the bedroom he'd get Tommy to talk to him. To listen. It was damn time. He couldn't live like this. He couldn't. He wanted his husband back, wanted their life back. That ring he'd put in his jacket pocket needed to be back on Tommy's finger.

Ducking under the spray of the water, he washed his body and watched as the pink water swirled around the drain. He turned to wash his back and froze.

Tommy stood there. Naked. Hair hiding one side of his face. He stood in the shower with Teo, just watching him, expression lost, eyes sad. Teo didn't want to move or say something to spook him so he took his cue from Tommy, remained quiet as they eyed each other.

Then Tommy moved. Slowly, but he moved. Teo tensed.

One step.

Teo fisted his hands.

Two, and Tommy was there. Pressed against him, face buried in Teo's chest. Arms around him.

Jesus. Teo lifted his hands and hugged him. Fucking tight. Because Tommy was in his arms, so he had to lock him up, lock him down. No escape. He held him tighter and Tommy just stood there. So Teo stood there. Water spraying his back, wetting them both. Tommy held him as Teo held him.

Clutched him.

Nobody better tell him to let go. Fuck. He'd never let go. Never. He wasn't moving either, not from this. Not from this.

But Tommy moved, at least his head did. He turned his face away and brushed his lips over Teo's pec. The left one, over the cut he'd put there. Teo tilted his head upward and started shaking. He was shaking. Adrenaline. Relief. Fuck. Call it whatever. He couldn't stop shaking. He held Tommy while his husband kissed him, dipping lower to kiss the cuts.

All those cuts.

He kissed them. Tommy kissed them. Tender. So soft. Kissing every one. He spent the longest time on the one on Teo's hip. And Teo unraveled with each press of Tommy's lips against him.

Was this forgiveness? Was it acceptance? He wanted to believe it, wanted to believe they'd made it past the tumultuous storm. Tommy moved back up his body and kissed his throat. Teo buried his fingers in Tommy's hair and tugged his head back, wanting, needing to see Tommy's face. Needing to see his eyes.

There they were, staring at Teo, shining at him. For him. He choked, shook his head. He wanted to know, had Tommy forgiven him? He didn't want to bank on the shifting softness in Tommy's eyes, but he hoped. God, he hoped like he hadn't since this mess began.

Tommy jerked away from Teo's hold and soaped up the washrag then began washing Teo. Gently, his husband washed his front then signaled with a finger for Teo to turn around so Tommy could do his back. Teo did, knees knocking together.

They existed in that space, in the shower as Tommy scrubbed Teo's back, washed him with reverence then dropped to his knees and did his legs and foot. And even though their gazes met and their bodies touched, they didn't speak. No sounds but for the running water.

When Tommy finished scrubbing him, Teo rinsed then reciprocated. Washing Tommy, cleaning him. Head to toe. They held each other and Teo tried to convey his thoughts with every touch. He waited until Tommy was soap free then pulled him back into his arms. With both hands around Tommy's shoulders, fingers back in his thick, wet locks, Teo stared at him again. There was no getting too much of this, watching Tommy, staring into his eyes. Teo wanted to tell him. There was no getting tired of this.

He parted his lips, but Tommy kissed him. A hard press of lips then he pulled back. Teo searched his gaze, looking for consent. He found need, recognized it, and acted on it. He kissed Tommy this time, short and hard, then eased up until their lips were barely touching.

Savor. He wanted to savor this. This kiss. The huff of Tommy's breath on his face, the pinch of Tommy's nails on his wet skin. He wanted to savor it. Tommy didn't let him. He pushed inside, tongue barreling in, delving deep. So Teo put savoring on the

back burner and got with the program. Their tongues twisted and fought, teeth clinking against each other. Tommy was with him all the way, a willing and eager participant.

So eager. Teo wanted to weep at that sweet feeling. His husband was back where he belonged and Teo was where he'd longed to be, in Tommy's arms. They kissed as if it were their first time learning each other. Tasting each other. Tommy sang into his mouth, all those whimpers and moans, as if he loved what he was learning, tasting.,

Between them their erections rubbed together, wet friction. Teo didn't need anything else, so he just let it be, let it play out.

The water turned cold, making him wince. Tommy pulled away, stepped back. Teo refrained, barely, from grabbing him by the forearm, yanking him back. He didn't want to lose sight of him. Ever again. Tommy didn't leave, he just stood and waited for Teo to turn off the water and open the shower door then he stepped out.

Teo followed him, quickly grabbing a towel as Tommy did the same. Tommy rubbed his head a couple times to dry his hair then flung the towel aside. Teo straightened from wiping his legs as Tommy approached him again. This time faster than before. He was in Teo's arms before he was fully ready and he stumbled back, plopping down onto the toilet. Thank God the seat was down.

Tommy kissed him, open-mouthed and wet, panting hungrily, his cock sliding up and down on Teo's stomach as Tommy straddled him. Teo grasped his ass in both hands, helping him hump up and down as Tommy reached blindly past Teo to the cabinet positioned behind the toilet.

Teo let him do what he wanted, let him run the show. For a little bit anyway. He wasn't going to say no. Not to Tommy. Never.

Tommy broke the kiss sharply, holding up a container of Vaseline. Teo grabbed it, scooped up a glob with two fingers and tossed the Vaseline aside. It skidded across the bathroom floor, but he ignored that, lifting Tommy up and pressing the greased fingers into him. Tommy's mouth opened and his eyelids dropped shut. Teo watched him, watched his face get red and his lips get wet, watched his nostrils flare and his eyeballs roll under his eyelids. He fucked him, panting in anticipation, cock throbbing in feverish agreement for him to *hurry the fuck up*. Tommy clutched his shoulders with both hands, ass working around his fingers, squeezing and releasing.

Teo mouthed Tommy's nipple nearest him, teased it with his tongue while screwing the two fingers into him. Tommy fucked himself on those digits, slamming down as if he needed it hard, needed it rough. Teo retreated, pulled his fingers up, and Tommy didn't wait for him. He sank down on Teo's cock, taking him deep with one fucking plunge.

Teo gasped around Tommy's nipple, biting him, rolling the hard bud between his teeth. Tommy worked him, riding up and down, holding on to the cabinets at Teo's back as he rose and fell on Teo's dick. Pleasure and pain collided, crashing over Teo, strangling him. He slammed up as Tommy bent and took his mouth.

They tongue-fucked, slowly as Tommy eased up on his ride, slow and steady. Their tongues and Teo's cock, in sync. Moving as one. Teo squeezed Tommy's ass, sank his fingers into the supple flesh there then smacked him. Hard enough that he'd see his hand print later.

Tommy's breath hitched and he jerked. Shit from the rattling cabinet rained down on Teo before tumbling to the floor. Tommy grinned, causing their teeth to knock.

Teo palmed an ass cheek in each hand and levered himself to his feet. Tommy's legs wrapped around him, ankles hooking just above his crack as Teo stumbled forward. He shuffled the few feet to the sink and placed Tommy there, his ass on the edge, his back to the mirror.

Tommy tightened around him, ass hot and quivering. Tommy went to work again, one hand at Tommy's hip, the other at his nape as he fucked him, plunging in and out as Tommy threw his head back and rode each thrust. He rocked forward then back, keeping their mouth connected. Teo loved that, loved that Tommy didn't want to stop kissing. He slammed in harder at that and Tommy reached behind with one hand, placing his palm on the mirror to steady himself.

Teo let him have it, fucked him deep and hard, as his knees grew weaker and weaker and his balls hurt like a motherfucker. He didn't want to stop, wanted to prolong the orgasm. Being inside Tommy, that was Teo's fucking religious experience. That was his joy, his happiness, his highest highs. That was his. The agonized ecstasy on Tommy's face, the spasming clasp of his fingers on Teo's shoulder, the rippling clasp of his ass. That was Teo's and he'd almost lost it.

He'd almost lost it. That rang around and around in Teo's head. He bit Tommy's bottom lip, just bit him, kept him there between his teeth as he pistoned in and out. Tommy tried to spread wider, removing his right leg from around Teo's waist and propping his heel on the nearby doorknob. The door rattled with every thrust, every slam. And Tommy took him in with wide-open eyes, fingers clawing at Teo's spine as his ass pulled him in and in.

Teo shuddered, orgasm bum-rushing its way through his veins. He reached between them and grasped Tommy's dick, swiping his thumb through all that pre-cum. Fuck, he wanted to taste it, but the orgasm wasn't waiting. He settled on stroking Tommy, twisting his wrist as he pushed his finger into his slit.

Tommy gurgled and came just like that, hot jizz boiling over onto Teo's knuckles. He shoved himself in, one last time as his body bowed and he came, shooting deep inside Tommy. He just kept thrusting, didn't want to stop, didn't want the sweet feeling to go away. Didn't want to release Tommy's lips, his ass, didn't want to remove Tommy's legs from around his waist.

When Tommy's ass stopped spasming around him, when his body stopped vibrating, Teo lifted his head. His gaze clashed with Tommy's and Teo realized, he had his husband's forgiveness, he had his love, and they hadn't spoken one word.

Chapter Fifteen

“His name is Noah.”

Tommy tensed.

Teo needed to start somewhere and this was as good a place as any to break the silence that continued from the bathroom. He and Tommy lay atop the bare mattress after stripping the bed of its soiled contents.

“I’ve known about him for three months. I’ve lied to you every day for three months.” Lies of omission. Was that what they were called? “When you left, when you ran away to Cali...” He took a deep breath and turned on his side, facing Tommy. The younger man’s face was expressionless, but every so often Teo would catch a slight quiver in Tommy’s chin. “I don’t think anyone knew how much you leaving me back then meant. How hard it hit. I went off the fucking rails.”

Most of the things he’d done he still couldn’t remember.

“Anything went. Anything. I met Jessa at a party a day or so before I came to you in Chico. Is threw a party at the Arch nightclub. He was the one who introduced us.” He let his mind drift, allowed himself to remember. “Getting her to drop them panties and get on her back didn’t require any long talking from me, but I wasn’t a complete fool. I never dipped without proper equipment. I used protection.”

Tommy cleared his throat. “Obviously that didn’t work.”

“I didn’t know. Didn’t pay attention, maybe I was still drunk.” Teo shrugged. “Once I got my nut I was out.” Harsh, but that was the real. “Didn’t even remember her name. That was that.”

“Until three months ago.”

“Until three month ago.” Teo nodded. “She called me up, said she got my number from Is. He didn’t know I was married,” he hastened to add when Tommy opened his mouth as if to speak. “He knew we’d gotten together before, guess he thought I’d want to revisit that. Anyway.” He scrubbed a hand over his face. His eyes burned from exhaustion, but this needed to be dealt with. “She calls me up and tells me she I have a son. That we made a son.” His voice grew hoarse as he recalled that earth-shattering conversation. “She wanted us to meet, for me to meet my son.”

It still hurt, that knowledge that he’d had a son out there who didn’t know him, who he didn’t know.

“I was beyond shocked, T. Beyond angry. I thought she was fucking with me. I told her we’d meet, but only me and her. Not the kid.” They’d met in the city, sat in the back of some empty pizza place while she tried to explain. “She told me when she realized she was pregnant she decided that the life I lived wasn’t good for a baby.”

Tommy made choked sound.

“Yeah. She figured if I’m friends with Is, I can’t be any kind of qualified to care for my child, to love my child, to protect my child. So she ran before she started showing. Went to Florida and stayed there.” He blinked, looked up at Tommy who was staring at him with wet eyes shining with pity. “T, she would have stayed there if her mother hadn’t died and left her a house out there in Queens. She would have stayed in Florida.”

Tommy grabbed Teo’s hand and brought it to his lips, kissed his knuckles. Teo shook his head.

“Swear to God, I wanted to shoot that chick. Just fucking shoot her right there in public. But I couldn’t,” he whispered, “because she pulled out her wallet, showed me his pictures, and I just...”

“You knew,” Tommy murmured against Teo’s fingers.

“I knew.” It had been a gut punch, seeing his face reflected back at him in Noah’s photos. His eyes. His nose. “I still insisted on a DNA test. I came home that night, T, I came home to tell you that I had a son. That I had a child. I swear.”

Tommy’s throat worked and he released Teo’s hand. “Why didn’t you?”

“First I thought maybe I should wait until I had tangible proof, the DNA results. But it was really me being afraid.”

“Why?” Tommy asked. “Why?”

“It was evidence that I’d lost my mind when you left. That I’d been out of control. And it was evidence that I shared something with someone else, a lifetime bond, that I didn’t share with you. I couldn’t do it to you. I couldn’t thrust that on you.”

“I wouldn’t have cared,” Tommy cried. “If you’d done this, sat me down the instant this issue came up, if you’d explained the situation to me, I’d have been right there with you. I’d have supported you.” His mouth twisted. “Now, instead of welcoming your son into our lives, he’ll be a constant reminder of your lies. The deceit. I might resent him, Teo, and I—” He looked away. “He’s your son. I’m supposed to love him, not look at him and remember my fucking heartache.”

“You’re not supposed to do anything except be you.” Teo rolled over onto his stomach then knelt next to Tommy. “But I know, you’re gonna love him.” His voice cracked. “You’re gonna love him because I love him, T. I love him. I didn’t know how I’d feel when I saw him for the first time, but,” he paused to put that flood of intense emotion into words, “it was the best thing. My favorite memory aside from the day we got married. And it hurt, too, because I wasn’t sharing it with you.” He cupped Tommy’s jaw. “I’m so sorry. I was trying to eliminate your pain and I tripled it. I’m sorry.”

“I didn’t know we kept secrets.” Tommy bit his lip. “I didn’t know *not* trusting you implicitly was even an option.”

“We didn’t keep secrets,” Teo reminded him. “I did that. I fucked up and I’ll fix it.”

Tommy chewed on his bottom lip then asked, “This Jessa, what’s her deal? She want money or you or both?”

“I drew up papers so she could sing them,” Teo said. “She doesn’t get my money. Noah gets a trust when he turns twenty-one and in the meantime she gets a very generous monthly allowance to take care of his needs.” He’d made sure to be very fair, but firm. “I’m not about to take care of her. But she works and makes enough on her own as well.” He took a breath then let it out. “Her issue is my lifestyle.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “She doesn’t like that you’re married to a man? To me?”

Teo barked a laugh. “She’s Jamaican, but surprisingly that’s not her problem. Nope, she doesn’t want Noah anywhere near the violence she thinks I’m into.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow, but didn’t say anything.

“She heard about the shooting at Is’s party.”

“That is a legitimate concern, isn’t it?” Tommy asked. “You might say you’re no longer in the gang, but that’s not really true if you’re being recruited by Israel to kill Dima.”

Teo frowned at the mention of his ex’s name. “There’s a major war about to erupt,” he murmured. “That worries me. Is wants me to pick a side.”

“Maybe we should think about moving to someplace more...less prone to gang wars?” Tommy asked.

“We just bought the condo—”

“We can flip that, resell it.”

Teo laced his fingers in his lap and gazed at Tommy. “Do you forgive me, T?”

Bright spots of red appeared on Tommy’s cheeks. His lips trembled and he tore his gaze away. Teo didn’t allow him the opportunity to hide. He caught Tommy’s chin and made him turn back, made him look Teo in the eyes.

“Those words, T.” He dropped his voice an octave or three. “I find myself wanting to hear them more than I want to hear you tell me you love me or you need me.”

“I—” Tommy licked his lips.

“Tell me you forgive me,” Teo begged. “I see it in your eyes. I felt it when I sank into you, when you grabbed me, when you touched me, but I’d prefer your words.”

Stubborn fire sparked in the depths of Tommy’s eyes. “Do you know the consequences for lying to me? For making me doubt you, us?”

“Yes.” He’d never forget it.

“I forgive you.” He touched Teo, sliding gentle fingers up the column of his throat before cupping his jaw. “I forgive you. You’re everything to me to. All I’ll ever want.” His gaze darted away then came back to Teo. “Do you forgive me for—”

Teo kissed away that absurd question. “You require no forgiveness,” he said harshly once he pulled back. “You, T,” he shook Tommy once. “You need nothing but love and honesty, and it’s yours. All yours.” He kissed him again then got off the bed. He picked up his jacket from the floor and searched through his pockets until he found what he was looking for.

“There’s a word I want stricken from our vocabulary,” he said as he got back on the bed and crawled to a red-faced, speechless Tommy. “There’s a word that has no place in our lives, in our world, and I want it gone. Banished.” He took Tommy’s left hand. “*Divorce* doesn’t exist. It’s not an option. Never has been, never will be.”

Tommy pursed his lips. His hand trembled in Teo’s hold.

“I *will* be yours when I’m ninety-five,” Teo said hoarsely. “I’ll want you even then. I’ll love you even then. I’m never leaving your side. Swear to God, T.” He pushed the gold band onto Tommy’s finger as Tommy grinned.

His wedding vows. Teo kept repeating the words he’d spoken on their wedding day.

“There’s nothing quite like calling you mine, calling you my husband. Without the ring, without the papers, you’d still be that. My safe place, my greatest accomplishment, my happiness.” His vision got blurry there for a second so he blinked a few times. Tommy stared at him with parted lips, wet cheeks and love in his eyes. Not unlike their wedding day. Teo leaned in, brushing his lips against Tommy’s. He stayed there, their lips touching as he said, “I live for you. I’d die for you.”

Tommy sniffed and hugged him, an arm around Teo's neck, pulling him close. Teo buried his face in Tommy's neck, inhaling the scent that lingered there, a combination of both of them. He pushed his nose deeper with a low hum. Smelling himself on Tommy was a whole different brand of ownership that Teo fucking loved.

"Teo." Tommy tunneled his fingers through Teo's hair then gripped and tugged his head back.

Teo went willingly, peering into Tommy's eyes. So soft and open. The pain he'd caused had been chased away, the shadows no longer lingered. That made Teo sniff, made him dip his head to hide the moisture in his eyes.

"I love you," Tommy said softly. "Never been so empty without you next to me. Never felt so alone."

Teo kissed him, his nose, his eyelids. Tommy let him.

"Never let me go," Tommy whispered fiercely. He caught Teo's face with both hand, stopped his movements and when Teo looked at him, looked deeply into his eyes, Tommy whispered it again. "There's no one I want more. No one I need more than you. Never let me go."

He won't. He won't. "Never." Teo took Tommy's mouth, sharing his promise with that kiss, sharing everything. Tommy's hold was tight. Teo's was tighter. He nudged Tommy until they were once again stretched out on the bed, this time in each other's arms. They kissed, Tommy nibbling Teo's lip and nipping at his throat while Teo threw his head back and growled.

"You let Dima kiss you," he managed when he could speak.

Tommy grunted against his shoulder. "Man, fuck that guy. He came at me thinking just because I was mad at you I'd take him up on his offer." He curled up against Teo with a snort. "He has no concept of boundaries."

"Nevertheless, I'll need to punish you for that." He grinned when Tommy inhaled sharply.

"When?" Tommy sounded eager as hell.

"Soon." Teo rolled onto his stomach and threw a hand over Tommy's chest. He stifled a yawn. "Fucking tired."

"Let's sleep."

Teo let the silence settle for a while then murmured. "Want you to know I liked it. Your fist inside me. Loved it, actually. I'm gonna want it again someday real soon...and you're gonna give it to me."

Chapter Sixteen

“Why are you here?”

Tommy came awake as Teo’s question rumbling in the room. He lay on his stomach, the blanket pulled up over his head, and blinked. Despite his covered head he knew it was morning.

“What do you mean why am I here? Where else would I be?”

Syren, was that Syren?

Tommy remained still and listened.

“I was in the neighborhood,” Syren said easily, “Thought I’d drop by, see what you did to my boy.” The mattress dipped next to Tommy and Teo cursed.

“You live in fucking Connecticut, this is Georgia. How the hell are you in the neighborhood? Get off the bed, you’re gonna wake him.”

Tommy tugged the covers off his head. “I’m up.” He glanced at Teo then to Syren.

“You heard him, he’s up.” Syren got onto the bed, suit and all, and crowded Tommy. “How are you?” He tipped Tommy’s chin, forcing their gazes to meet. “What did that bastard do to you?”

“The bastard is lying right here.”

Syren huffed, but didn’t take his eyes off Tommy. He was serious, Tommy saw. Syren really wanted to know if Tommy was okay.

“I’m fine.” Tommy smiled at him. “Really.”

One of Syren’s eyebrows shot up. “That why you took off your ring and why you ran away from that one over there?”

Tommy grinned when Teo cursed.

“Shane and Pablo talk way too damn much,” Teo grumbled.

“Right?” Syren agreed with wide eyes. “They’re like two old women, but that doesn’t change the fact that you fucked up.” His eyes turned hard as he regarded Teo. “I warned you about hurting him.”

“And I warned you about minding your own business.”

“Well,” Kane appeared in the bedroom doorway, arms crossed. “Two men in bed with my husband. Dunno if I should be angry or turned on.”

“Um...angrily turned on?” Syren volunteered.

Tommy had had enough. “Everybody out, please. We’ll talk when we get downstairs,” he told Syren.

“Better hurry,” Kane said. “Càtia wants to see you guys. I had to have Pablo distract her by asking her to help him make pancakes.” He stepped back and held a hand out for Syren. “Come on, you.”

Syren pouted, but he got off the bed and straightened his white suit. He looked amazing, as always. “You have five minutes.”

“I’m gonna kick your ass.” Teo threw a pillow at him.

Syren dodged it with a two-step and a wink. “Aw. And I bet you really think you can, too. Poor fella.” He stuck his tongue out then disappeared, leaving Kane to go after him with a shake of his head.

“Shit.” Tommy flopped back onto the bed and blew out a breath.

“You okay?” Teo asked.

Tommy laughed. "Fine. Just...dealing with Syren first thing in the morning isn't a good idea. Not without coffee."

"He means well," Teo said softly. "He heard you were hurt and he came to check on you." He stroked Tommy's arm.

"I know and I love him for it." Tommy sighed and met Teo's gaze. "It's nice knowing we have all these men who care about us and root for us. Can be a pain in the ass, too."

"I know." Teo kissed his brow then rested there, his forehead against Tommy's. "How do you feel? Are we okay?"

"I feel fine." Tommy touched Teo's jaw. "We're okay, you know. Lots to work through, but we'll do it together. Me and you. Us. So we're fine."

"Good."

"I want to meet them," Tommy said then. "Noah and his mother. They're gonna be our family. They are family," he correct himself, "so we need to meet. Be together, all of us."

"I'd like that." Teo sounded hoarse. He lifted his head, peered into Tommy's eyes. "I'd love that."

"Make it happen and in the meantime, we have company waiting on us downstairs."

"Do you trust this woman?" Syren asked.

They all sat around Pablo and Shane's dining table, eating the breakfast Pablo and C tia had prepared; blueberry pancakes, eggs and bacon, with coffee, orange juice, and chocolate milk for C tia. Teo had explained the situation to them, the condensed version at last. While the others were happy that Teo had his son, they remained skeptical of Jessa.

As was Tommy.

"I trust that she wants what's best for Noah," Teo said slowly. "I've watched her with him, she's a great mom. Not gonna take that away from her. I'm not angry enough to *not* see that. She loves him. She says she doesn't care about me and T being together, and unless she says or does something to the contrary I'm choosing to believe it."

"You sure all this wasn't intentional?" Shane asked. He chewed then said, "Some people do that."

"She hasn't asked for money," Teo pointed out. "In fact, her only issue seems to be about the violence."

"So get away from the violence," Pablo said.

"Uncle Tommy." C tia touched Tommy's elbow and he glanced down at her. "Can I come visit you and Uncle Teo in your new home?"

Tommy smiled. "You can, soon as we find a new one."

"You're definitely moving then?" Kane asked.

"We talked about," Tommy said, "We still have much to consider, but I'll say yeah, we are." He looked at Teo who nodded.

"Yep."

"You should come to Connecticut," Syren sad quickly. "We don't get to see nearly enough of you guys."

"Hey." Shane grinned. "We're all alone over here, too, you know."

“Yeah, but Gabe and Angel are only two states over. You guys are practically neighbors.”

Tommy helped cut up Càtia’s pancakes as he listened to the others banter back and forth. He didn’t care where they lived, honestly. It would be nice to be near the others, that’s for damn sure, but he liked the life they had in Brooklyn. Their privacy. He wanted that. Being close to Syren would be nice, if Tommy could get his friend to curb his meddling habits.

“How are Angel and Gabe?” He looked up at Kane. “Any news?”

“Spoke to them last night,” Kane said. “They’re still running tests on Nina to make sure she’s able to carry their baby. We’re waiting for news on them before we move ahead with our plans.” Meaning he wanted to wait until his brother could have his baby before he and Syren went about the process of having Syren’s sister, Isa, be their surrogate.

“Fingers crossed,” Syren said and everyone at the table echoed it.

Gabe and Angel had been trying for what seemed like forever to have a baby, with no luck. Hopefully Nina, Syren’s friend who’d offered to make their baby dreams a reality, would be the one to give them what they’d wanted for so long.

“And Heather?” Tommy asked Shane. “How is she—and you guys—holding up?”

Shane’s sister-in-law was pregnant with Shane and Pablo’s baby.

“Hanging in there.” Pablo caressed Shane’s knuckles. “Still a few months to go.”

“Still don’t know the sex?” Kane asked.

“No, we want it to be a surprise.” Shane looked scared, but happy.

Tommy was happy for them. He’d thought he and Teo would wait a while before having their own. Didn’t work out quite that way. He was no longer angry, but nervous yes. Scared, yes. Lots of other things, too.

“Papa? Daddy?” Càtia looked up from her plate, chocolate milk framing her top lip. “What’s a sex?”

The entire table erupted in laughter.

“Nervous?”

“Shitless.” Tommy fidgeted on the couch, not that it wasn’t comfortable. It was just...the atmosphere lent itself to a major case of jitters.

Teo touched his knee, squeezed him gently. Tommy took deep breaths. Deep fucking breaths. He was in Jessa’s house. It was still early evening. They’d bummed a plane ride off of Syren’s private jet and came straight here after landing.

The small two story house was filled with things, but not cluttered. Homey. Lots of hanging photographs, knick-knacks, and toys on the floor. She’d answered the door with a smile. Tommy wanted to be open, to not judge her, but he did. How could he not? She’d smiled at him, greeted him with a *hi* and a hug then waved them to the couch before going to get him.

Noah. Teo’s son. Tommy gripped Teo’s fingers and hung on for dear life.

Soft footsteps sounded then they were there, hand in hand. Jessa wore a simple white dress and Noah was dressed in a blue plaid shirt with jeans hems rolled up to show his white socks.

God. Tommy covered his mouth as he watched Teo's son get closer and closer. Teo moved then, going to his knees on the carpeted floor, both hands out.

"Noah. Hey, come to daddy."

Jessa released him and he went. Scratch that, Noah ran to Teo, his tiny arms lifted, face creased with smiles, he went to his dad and Tommy sat there and tried not to bawl like a Goddamn baby. Teo's face. The blinding happiness and love as he held his son. Tommy had never seen anything like it. And Noah, he recognized his father and loved him, too.

"There's someone I want you to meet," Teo murmured to Noah. He faced Tommy with Noah in his arms. "This is Tommy," Teo whispered. "Say hello to Tommy."

Tommy reached out and brushed a hand over Noah's dark hair. "Hello, Noah." He swallowed as he stared at the tiny replica of his husband. "You're gorgeous, you know that? Even more than your daddy."

Noah reached out to him with both hands. "Tommy. Heh'yo." He leaned toward him and Tommy grasped him by his underarms, taking him from Teo.

"Hi." Tommy hugged him close, burying his face in Noah's hair. "Hi." The tears ran down his face and he looked up, into Teo's own red-rimmed eyes.

"No cry." Noah touched Tommy's wet cheek with a tiny fist. "Tommy." He shook his head vigorously. "No cry."

He couldn't help but laugh through the tears. "Okay, I won't." He squeezed the little boy in his arms. "I'm happy," Tommy murmured against Noah's cheek. "So I cry, because meeting you made me happy."

He didn't think Noah understood that, but he had to say it, put it out there. Teo drew closer and wiped at Tommy's cheek before dropping a kiss to Noah's head. Tommy turned his head, looked at Jessa, she was crying too. A hand over her mouth, one over her heart, she was crying, too.

Their family. Not the one they'd planned, definitely not. Not one acquired through any easy or traditional means, but this was family.

Tommy's family.

Chapter Seventeen

“I’m sorry.”

Tommy stared at his hands. He heard Jessa’s apology, but he needed to formulate his thoughts. He wanted to say the right things, except, he couldn’t. “I’m angry.” He went with the truth. “Not for me,” he said as he lifted his head and nailed her gaze with his. “For them.” He waved at the stairs leading upstairs. Teo had taken Noah for his nap. “I’m prepared to hate you for what you did to them.”

She nodded, expression contrite as she chewed her bottom lip. “I know. I wanted Noah safe. I’m so sorry.”

“Teo would die for him,” Tommy said sharply. “With him watching out for Noah, he’d never be safer than that. With his father.”

“He’s all I have.” She sniffed. “My brother was killed in a drive-by, and my dad is doing life. He’s all I have.” She wiped her eyes. “I couldn’t take the chance of having him fall into that life.”

“I get that.” He did. “But you should have given us a choice.” He shook his head. “You’re his mother. Not heir-apparent. Let’s make sure this shit is crystal.” Glancing up the stairs, he said, “I already told this to Teo, now I’m gonna tell you. Being the mother of his son grants you certain rights, but you get no say in our lives or how we live.”

“Tommy, I don’t care about that.” She sighed and squared her shoulders. “I took care of us just fine before this. I’ll continue to do so. This isn’t about money, it’s about making sure my child is happy and healthy and safe. I’ve had enough of drama and complications.”

Tommy stared at her.

“I don’t care about anything else.”

“You don’t care that he’s with me?” He watched her carefully, but she just shrugged.

“I don’t get it, but that’s not my business.” She took a breath. “If you treat my son like he deserves to be treated then I’m fine. Truly.”

They sat there in the heavy silence. There was a lot of stuff Tommy wanted to say, but they weren’t as important as he’d thought. Not now.

“I thought I would resent him,” he said softly. “Noah. I thought I’d look at him and see all the things Teo kept from me.”

“Do you?” Jessa asked hesitantly.

“I just see the most adorable little boy who looks so much like my husband, it takes my breath away.” He paused to calm the rush of warm emotion that threatened to overwhelm him. “I love his father so how can I not love his son?” He cleared his throat. “He’s the most precious thing. And so bright.” He laughed.

“He’s yours too, you know.”

He looked at her and she smiled, a tentative gesture.

“You two are married so Noah is your son, too.” Doubt darkened her eyes. “Unless you don’t think so. It doesn’t—”

“He’ll have two daddies and a mom,” Tommy pointed out.

She nodded. “Lots of love all around. That’s what I want most. For him to be loved. Cherished.”

“Lots of love.” Tommy lost his ability to speak after that. Jessa touched him, his hand where it rested on his knee. He stared at it, her brown skin against his paleness.

“You have a son,” she whispered as she linked their fingers.

He pursed his lips. “I have a son.”

Teo came back downstairs to find Tommy and Jessa crying on each other’s shoulder.

“When was the last time you came here?”

Teo shrugged as he sipped his water. “Not for a long time. Definitely before you and me.”

“But you own it.” Tommy sounded way too surprised.

They were in a brownstone at the corner of Crown and Nostrand, in a pale yellow room outfitted as someone’s living room complete with a cream-colored loveseat and a large screen TV. Smaller TV screens were placed at different corners of the room so they’d be able to see the happenings in the other areas of the deceptively large house. This after all, wasn’t your ordinary brownstone. People with similar tastes came here to satisfy their cravings.

“I don’t own all of it,” Teo corrected Tommy. “Only ten percent. I’m a very silent partner.”

He’d gotten together with a few other heavy hitters and came up with this place. A place where men like them could get their kinks without judgment, where no one cared about their names or who they fucked. This club, they’d given it no name, but made sure it was available to men like Teo, who ran the streets, lived the gang life, but also were into men and anything that came with that. They also welcomed the vanilla set, although they had their separate entrance and floor.

The house was soundproof, every inch of it.

“Why did you bring me here?”

At Tommy’s breathless query, Teo looked over. His husband was staring at the feed from one of the security screens, the basement level, if Teo wasn’t mistaken. A woman was secured to a large cross and being whipped with a crop. The cameras didn’t transmit sound, but her face said it all. Tommy’s did as well.

“You like that?”

“I didn’t know women were allowed in.” Tommy dodged his question and Teo allowed it with a small smile.

“Some of the members are bi. They vouch for any female they bring and the women are extensively vetted.”

Tommy nodded slowly. His eyes weren’t on the woman, but the man who was whipping her. He was bald and dark-skinned with a trim beard and goatee. His bulk and swagger always reminded Teo of the rapper Common.

“That’s X,” he told Tommy. “One of the other silent partners.”

“He’s...” Tommy bit his lip and slouched deeper into the couch with a sigh. “He’s gorgeous.”

Teo threw back his head with a laugh. “Better not let him hear you say that.” X was the epitome of cool and unruffled, which was why Teo referred to him as the Iceman. Which X hated of course. He hadn’t seen that bastard in ages. He leaned over Tommy and pressed a button.

“Sal?”

Sal Vecchio was in charge of the day to day running of the club.

“Yes, Mr. Oliveros?” Sal’s competent voice came over the intercom.

Teo rolled his eyes. He hated when Sal called him that. “Tell Mr. Storm I’m in the Yellow Room whenever he’s done showing off.”

“Of course, sir.”

“How is he showing off?” Tommy asked.

“The basement level is the open area, you can’t see then because they’re out of camera range, but there’s a crowd gathered watching him do his thing.” There was always a crowd when X got into his zone. The man was perfection in his element. To Teo’s knowledge that was the only time X allowed himself to be out there like that, in public, to be watched, to be seen. X didn’t like eyes on him, admiring or not.

He drew closer to Tommy and together they watched as X did his thing, wrist flicking as he whipped the chick. Her long black hair was coiled and secured on the top of her head and her pale skin was completely nude. Nice ass on her. Her back was beautifully red and she arched every time X let loose.

Teo watched X, too. Tommy was right, X was a good looking guy. Not Teo’s taste, but he could still cop to that. The muscles in X’s back and shoulders jumped and flexed with every stroke he landed, but his face was expressionless. Dude might as well have been in a meeting with all the emotion he showed. His eyes were dark and focused, his jaw clenched but other than that...nothing. As if X had left the building.

Tommy curled up into Teo, kissing his neck. “I hope you don’t plan on us doing anything here.”

“Nah.” Teo hugged him, kissing Tommy’s temple. “I’ve never been into exhibitionism, and I’m damn sure not about to have anybody see you naked.” He tipped Tommy’s chin and winked at him. “Your sounds, your face when you come, that shit is not for public consumption.”

Tommy blushed. Teo chuckled.

“You’re so fucking adorable when you do that, when you blush, almost makes me forget you had your fist up my ass only a few days ago.”

Tommy made an embarrassed sound and buried his face in Teo’s chest. Teo couldn’t stop laughing.

“Stop it.”

“Okay. How about this?” He put some pressure on Tommy’s nape until the younger man tipped his head back and looked up at him. “How about if I say this: “I love when I slide up in you and you close your eyes, and your head fall back.”

Tommy blinked, spots of red appearing on his cheeks. His lips parted.

“It’s all in slow motion,” Teo murmured. He pressed his thumb to Tommy’s bottom lip. “Inch by inch. With every inch of my cock, your head falls back a little more.”

Tommy’s pupils were already dilated. He made a sound and shifted so that he was fully in Teo’s lap, his erection rubbing against Teo’s hip.

Teo’s hard-on jerked in response. “Your face.” Tommy bit down on Teo’s thumb, making his groan. His eyelid grew heavy but he kept watching Tommy, watching his eyes when he said, “Fuck, T. When I’m inside you, your face is the most alive, animated. Red and flushed.”

Tommy bit his thumb harder. Pre-cum leaked from Teo's tip.

"And you make the most incredible sounds when I'm all in. I love it, being all in, balls deep. Fucking waist deep in you."

Tommy moved then, hips rolling as he took Teo's thumb into his mouth and started sucking on it. Teo reached between them with his free hand and unzipped Tommy's jeans.

"Mmm." Tommy sucked his thumb with wet carnal sounds, bobbing on him as Teo reached inside his jeans and grabbed him. Tommy's cock throbbed in his palm, hot and heavy and wet. Teo pulled on him as Tommy's hips circled and he slurped away on the finger in his mouth.

"When I'm inside you," he whispered hoarsely, "I don't care about anything else. The house could burn down around us. I'm never leaving it." He squeezed Tommy and the aroused flesh in his hand jerked. "It's hot in there, baby. Insanely hot, makes me sweat just thinking about it." He grinded against Tommy, pressing his dick against his ass. "You're so tight. It chokes me, cuts off circulation to everything but my dick. Until all I care about is fucking you." He sped up his hips and the tugs on Tommy's shaft. "Until you cry out for me, until you claw at me, draw blood for me. Leave your fucking marks on me. Until your body hums and vibrates and you squeeze around me."

Tommy's pants grew louder and louder. His pre-cum soaked Teo's palm, but he kept jacking Tommy, kept his thumb in Tommy's mouth, his eyes on his face as he continued tormenting him with his words.

"Feels like your walls are caving in, trapping me in there. They ripple and I lose my mind, forget my name. It's all about you, making you shake and shiver, making you spasm and grab me. Tightest hold." He scraped Tommy's slit with his fingernail. "And you come for me." He twisted his wrist and Tommy tensed.

Liquid heat poured over Teo's hand. He gritted his teeth against his own need to cum. Not yet. He kissed Tommy, even though his thumb was in there, he kissed Tommy, smothering his cries. Then he removed his hand and lifted the other one, covered in Tommy's cum. He licked it off, all that bitter-salt cream. He licked it off while Tommy watched him with hooded eyes.

When he was finished he kissed Tommy again, feeding him his tongue so Tommy could suck on it and taste the remnants of his seed.

"Nice."

Teo tensed at the low rumble. Tommy gasped and jerked his head toward the door.

"X."

Xavier Storm stood at the door with a bored expression and thickly muscled arms crossed over his broad chest.

"Ever heard of knocking?" Teo held Tommy to him while his husband frantically zipped himself up.

"I did," X said coolly. "Twice."

Teo grunted. "Yeah, aight." He tightened his hold on Tommy when he would have gotten off Teo's lap. "Have a seat then." He waved at the chair opposite the love seat.

X did, eyeing Tommy as if he couldn't figure out why he was still there. "If I recall correctly," X said, "your playmates were usually a little less...male."

Teo grinned when Tommy stiffened. “Xavier Storm, I’d like you to meet my husband, Tommy Oliveros. T, this is X.”

X’s facial expression didn’t even change. “Ah.”

Teo ignored him. X was an acquired taste. “Last I heard, you’d locked yourself up in your tower and refused to come down.”

“You shouldn’t listen to schoolyard tales.” X leaned back in his chair.

“Does that mean you’ll be coming out of the shadows?”

A muscle in X’s jaw ticked, the only indication that he didn’t like where the discussion was headed. “You know better than that.” He cut a glance to Tommy.

“T and I have no secrets.” Just saying those words brought a lightness to his chest that Teo could’ve never imagined. He kissed Tommy’s head. “This is your only chance to convince me why I should pick your side.”

X shook his head. “If my cousin couldn’t do it, what makes you think I can?”

“Because you’re in charge. Is does his thing and he’s good at it, but you’re the puppet-master. You call the shots and you’re good at it, too. What are your plans?”

“I want the Russian eliminated.” X shrugged. “Beyond that, my plans are fluid.”

Teo doubted that very much. X was a mad genius, he didn’t do a damn thing without planning for all scenarios. “So you’re still intent on that, despite my warnings?”

“I heard your warnings,” X said evenly. “They don’t work for me.”

Teo never thought they would. “You’re going to war then?” Tommy fidgeted in his lap and Teo clamped a hand on his thigh to still his movements. “Do you even know what hell that could rain down on everybody else?” he asked when X didn’t answer.

“I’m a businessman,” X said in that exasperatingly calm tone of his. “I go where the opportunities are.”

“Consequences be damned?”

“The Russians can end it. They just have to give me what I want.”

The streets. The money. The drugs. “That’s never gonna happen,” Teo said.

X got to his feet. “Then we proceed as planned.” He stared at Teo. “You’ve got plenty to lose now, Mateo. I hope you change your mind.”

“You don’t scare me, X. Not even a little bit,” Teo told. “I’m not going to change my mind. But I think you will.”

X walked out the room and closed the door without a backward glance.

“He’s freaking intense, isn’t he?” Tommy got off Teo and flipped his hair over his shoulder.

“Yeah.” Teo stood as well. “X is...best in small doses.” He glanced at the nearest security video screen and smothered a smile. Underneath the Yankee cap pulled low, he still recognized the familiar face in the crowd.

“Come on.” He took Tommy’s hand and linked their fingers. “Let’s go home. I promised you a punishment, right.”

Tommy blinked up at him. “Ri-right.”

“Got a nice leather strap waiting for you.” He pulled Tommy close, kissed his nose then whispered. “Gonna redden your ass. Set it on fire.”

Tommy trembled.

Yeah.

“Hey.” Tommy jerked away from him and pointed at the video screen. “Isn’t that—”

“Uh-huh. It is.”

Tommy’s eyes rounded. “The fuck?”

“I know.” Teo steered Tommy toward the secondary exit. “Let’s go home.” He had plans to fuck his husband, after he beat his ass red, of course. He had a son to introduce to his parents and siblings tomorrow. And he and Tommy had to figure out where they were gonna live. With a war on the horizon and its streets running red with blood, it wouldn’t be Brooklyn.

Teo threw one last look at the security video.

Let the games begin.

The End

Read on for a sneak peek at Dima's Story

Coming Soon!

Book One in the RUN THIS TOWN series

(Watch Me) Break You

Here comes trouble...

Men. Women. Drugs. Dima Zhirkov's favorite things. Add in the element of danger and he should be right as rain. But not today. It's not working, hasn't for a long time. He's grasping at the flimsiest of straws to prove he's indeed strong enough to run his streets. Until he sets eyes on *him*. In the midst of a room full of strangers, Dima is drawn to a man as cold and dangerous as he's beautiful. Captivated, Dima embarks on a ruthless campaign to get his new toy into bed.

Here comes the danger...

Xavier "X" Storm is content to pull the strings while someone else handles the day to day dealings of his gang, The Rude Boys. He's after what Dima holds closest—the Coney Island streets. He contracts out the job of killing the Russian, except Dima isn't that easy to kill. When he suddenly shows up in X's path, tempting him to indulge in the dirtiest play, he finds Dima isn't all that easy to shake, either. His cocky attitude and rough submission tempts X to go where he'd never been, and they plunge head first into a carnal dance fueled by possessive obsession.

Run for cover

Sex and pain Dima can handle, and X delivers the most depraved kind. Their connection is explosive, their games addictive, but Dima can end it whenever he wishes. He doesn't see that X is breaking him down, giving Dima everything he wants and even more than he ever thought to need. By the time he realizes who X is and what he wants, Dima is raw and bullet riddled. It's run or fight. And Dima doesn't back down. Neither does X.

Chapter One

It wasn't working. None of it. Dima huffed out a frustrated breath and nodded at Sylvie when she paused what she was doing to send him an inquiring frown. Her lips curved and she bent, resuming her eager lapping at the wet, swollen pussy spread out before her.

Behind Sylvie, Anton grunted his pleasure, thrusting into Sylvie as she moaned and ate the woman...Elsa or Ella. She was brunette, the El-something woman, skin tanned, body toned. Sylvie was blonde and voluptuous, her body jiggling, shaking with very shove of Anton's hips.

Dima picked up his glass of alcohol from the floor and downed it with a grimace. Damn thing wasn't even burning his throat. Another thing that wasn't working for him. He palmed his unresponsive cock and bared his teeth in a pissed-off grimace. Usually he got off on this—who wouldn't?—but something was happening. With his pleasure. It was gone. He couldn't feel it. No pain. No pleasure.

The El woman grabbed a fistful of Sylvie's hair and held her still as she rammed her pussy into Sylvie's mouth, head thrown back, chest heaving. Dima watched them. Anton watched him. The weed was low, alcohol wasn't working and the scene in front of him that should have him fired up and ready to go wasn't doing what it was supposed to.

He got to his feet and hurriedly buttoned his shirt.

"Boss?" Anton called out to him in Russian.

Dima ignored him. He ignored the aroused cries of the two women and walked out the apartment. His bodyguards, Ben and Aleks stood out in the hallway, on either side of the door waiting with bored expressions. He knew how they felt.

"Let's go." He didn't wait for a response. It wasn't needed.

"Where are we going, boss?" Aleks caught up with him on the stairs. Dima always took the stairs, didn't matter how far up he was going, or how far down either. He didn't ride elevators. The last time he did, he'd gotten a bullet in his back. No elevators.

"Crown Heights."

Aleks stopped walking, mouth hanging open as he stared at Dima. "Crown Heights?"

"I didn't fucking stutter, did I?"

Aleks broke eye contact, his gaze quickly falling to his toes. "No, sir."

Sir. Fuck. He was no sir. But of course, he couldn't say that. He was their boss. His father was gone and Dima was now in charge. Not too many people liked that idea. "Let's go then." He continued descending the stairs. "Night's not getting any younger."

There was an uneasy tightness to his skin that wouldn't relent until he got what he needed. This wasn't the first time he'd felt like this, but it'd been a while, and this time...this time felt different. His needs had been awakened by the sight of his ex. For sure Mateo had been the only man who'd given Dima exactly what he'd needed. He'd done it with utter perfection, with zeal. And because he'd cared for Dima. Not the way Dima had wanted. Nope. But he'd cared, Mateo had.

Now, he didn't. Or even if he did, it still wasn't the way Dima wanted him to. Because Mateo was married, to a spitfire of a man who he happened to be madly in love with. Maybe that was the reason Dima couldn't function. He didn't know, but he

intended to end his drought tonight. Ironically it would be to a place Mateo recommended. It would be safe, he'd said. For Dima's body. For his identity. He didn't know, but he'd find out. He could always burn the place to the ground if he didn't find it to be what he wanted. The way he was feeling, he wanted to watch something burn.

He had Ben and Aleks drop him off around the corner then watched them drive off before walked over to the building. His men would never see him submit. They'd never see him on his knees. That part of himself he kept carefully hidden. They didn't care so much that he also fucked men, but he knew his kinks would be seen as a weakness. In this stage of the game, he couldn't afford any of that.

He rang the doorbell and the large red door was opened by a tall, skinny man with salt and pepper hair and gruff expression.

"Yes?"

Dima tried peering over the man's shoulder, but couldn't make out a damn thing. "Mateo said to tell you he sent me." He held the man's gaze, presenting the image of a man in control of himself and his needs. "Mateo Oliveros."

"Of course, sir." The man stepped back and motioned for Dima to enter. "Right this way, please."

Dima didn't even hesitate. He went in.

He spent a few minutes with the man, Sal, he'd introduced himself as, talking about the rules, Dima's likes, and getting a brief tour of the surprisingly large house. The main floor wasn't crowded, but after Sal allowed him the chance to walk about on his own, Dima found the basement level to be filled with people.

He heard the feminine moans and the arousing sound of something connecting with flesh before he spotted them. In the middle of the room. The woman was secured to a cross, getting whipped. She was stunning in her submission, blissful pain on her face. Dima would be all over her, getting high on her pained cries...

If he hadn't seen him. The man doing the whipping.

He wore black dress pants and shiny matching shoes, but his upper half was bare. Gloriously brown and smooth, bulky with muscles that moved when he did, hypnotizing Dima so that he forgot to stick to the outskirts of the crowd. He had to get in closer. Had to see more.

His feet moved and he pushed his way through the crowd until he was right there, at the forefront, smelling leather, sex and pain. His cock throbbed, awakened and aroused. Not for the woman, but for the man who was delivering those precise blows with grave silence. Dima moved to the right of the crowd in order to see him, his face.

It was a beautifully constructed one, dark beard and goatee trimmed to frame his full lips. His eyes were hard, intense, his face blank. Expressionless. Dima didn't see passion in what he was doing. He didn't see displeasure. He just saw a man going through the motions. It hit Dima, like a punch the throat.

The need to see pleasure in those eyes.

The urge to break that fierce concentration, for emotion to crack that smooth veneer.

Not for anyone else, but for him. With him.

The man, the Dom, was with someone else, but that didn't matter. Neither did it factor in that he was topping a woman. Dima had him in his sights. This was who would make him feel again. Who would give him release. He watched them, hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans as the Dom took his sub to the clouds, as she sighed and folded like a cheap suit in his arms.

Everyone around Dima sighed and applauded. The Dom stiffened then looked up and around as if he just realized he had an audience. He cradled the woman to his chest, whispered in her ear as he kissed her temple and smoothed a huge palm over her head. He did all that, but his face never lost its detachment.

That wouldn't do for Dima. He'd demand it of his Dom. No way would he accept being topped by someone who wouldn't or couldn't show their pleasure at his submission. His gift. Because that was what submission was, a gift to be treasured. Appreciated.

He melted into the crowd, watching from the shadows as the woman finally curled up on a bed in the corner of the room. She looked as if she'd fallen asleep. The Dom disappeared into another room without a backward glance. Dima waited, but he didn't see him return so he went back upstairs to the main area. A sub was getting spanked by his Dom. Someone else was being flogged. Dima went from room to room, barely registering the sights and sounds and smells. His full attention remained on that Dom in the basement, he needed to know who he was.

In the bar area, where curiously there was no alcohol being served, he got himself a glass of water and eavesdropped on hushed conversations. None was about the man. His toy. They'd be playing soon enough. He always got his man. Always. He hadn't been looking, but he'd found himself a brand new toy. His body tingled with that thought.

He'd hurt him. Dima had seen the tightly coiled power in those muscles, the way he stood, the way he landed his blows. He could hurt Dima. Exactly what he wanted.

He exited the bar area just in time to see his quarry duck into a room on the top floor. Dima remained where he was. He'd be coming down soon enough. The biting need that had been riding him for days remained, but he tamped it down. Now that he had someone in his sights he'd get what he wanted soon enough. He had selected a new toy so now, no one else would do. He ignored everyone else, pulling his dark cap low on his forehead.

The Dom didn't stay in the room long. He came out a short time later and quickly descended the stairs. He walked like a man on a mission. Dima followed him into a bathroom and stood by the door as his new toy rolled up his shirt sleeves and washed his hands in a nearby sink. When he turned away to wipe his hands with the paper towels mounted to the wall, Dima stepped out from behind his hiding place.

His new toy didn't seem surprised to see him. He gazed at Dima through the mirror. Cool. Unruffled. In control. It made Dima's blood race. Made his palms sweat.

"What's your name?" he asked. The man didn't blink and Dima realized he'd asked his question in Russian. He repeated himself in English.

The man didn't answer. He remained facing the mirror, head cocked at an angle, watching Dima watch him. They looked different. The Dom with his coffee with milk skin, impeccably dressed in a blue shirt and black pants, and Dima with his wrinkled shirt missing buttons, the ragged holes in his faded jeans, black motorcycle boots and the taste of weed, alcohol and Sylvie's pussy on his tongue.

“I watched you,” Dima said. He sounded...rough, words halting with need.
“Downstairs. I want it.”

“No.”

Just one word, but it fired Dima like nothing ever had. He stepped up close, pressing his front to the other man’s back. He was hard, the other man, brick. But so was Dima. Achingly hard.

“I want you.” Fuck. He’d switched to Russian again. “Give me what you gave her.” It was a demand, but Dima heard hollow need all over those words.

The man spun around, lightning fast, and grabbed Dima by the throat. Mother of God. His balls tightened, threatening to explode. By that. Just that. The man’s expression hadn’t changed Dima found when he peered up at him through his eyelids. Dima kept his hands fisted at his sides.

Waiting.

Body pulsing.

“Give it to me,” he whispered in Russian.

“Fuck off. I’m not interested.” He slammed Dima into a stall door. The pain made pre-cum pour, wetting Dima’s boxers. He groaned. The man released him and was gone before Dima could gulp in air.

His heart pounded as he clutched the edge of the sink, breathing fast, a grin on his face.

A chase. He could do that.

He followed his toy at a distance out the building, via a side door, and into a small parking lot. A woman stood near a town car with tinted windows, waiting. Dima narrowed his gaze as his prey went to her, grabbing her and kissing her as he swept a hand under her dress.

His gut clenched and Dima reached down, pulling a small knife from his left boot. He crept closer, head down. At least the place was practically empty and the parking lot dimly lit. That allowed him to get close enough to see that the woman was the same one his toy whipped earlier. And he was fucking her up against the car, an arm around her throat, the other gripping the red panties bunched around her pale thighs.

Dima bit his tongue as he watched. The man fucked her hard, but didn’t make a sound. She made enough for them both, loud whimpers. Dima squeezed the knife in his palm.

Would she make the same sounds if he gutted her with the knife? Would her blood look as pretty against her skin as the bright color of her panties? He catalogued every sound she made to memory, hating her for having what he wanted. That roughness. The pain from earlier. His kisses, because he kissed her, Dima’s toy, he kissed her hungrily, briefly silencing her cries as he plunged into her.

Was he thick, cut? Curved? Dima loved a curved cock, they tended to hit all the right places. He wondered at his toy, the way he smelled. His skin. The more he wondered the more he ached to know, the more he had to, and the more he hated the bitch who clutched his toy's back as she came with a low keening sound.

Dima’s new toy pulled out and away from the woman, giving Dima a quick snapshot of his clenched ass before he pulled up his pants and got into the SUV parked next to the town car. Soon as he pulled off, Dima jumped from his hiding place. He

caught her as she was about to get into the driver's side of the car and grabbed a fistful of her hair.

She gasped and he jerked her head back, knife at her throat pushing into her skin. Her eyes were blue and wide, full of fear and lingering arousal. She smelled like cum and sex. Dima's hand shook with the overwhelming need to drop to his knees and push his face between her spread thighs, to breathe her in, see if she smelled like his toy. If he licked her, would she taste of him?

He dipped his head, pressing his nose to her shoulder as she whimpered. He took a breath then lifted his head to stare down at her. "The man who just fucked you, what's his name?"

She hiccupped, bottom lip trembling. Dima smiled and pressed the knife deeper into her skin. A bead of blood welled up then slid down into her cleavage. He trailed it hungrily with his eyes.

"His name. Tell me."

Her pebbled nipple poke against his arm. Musky arousal swamped him. Shit. Dima gritted his teeth. She was like him, getting high on danger. Turned on by her own fear.

"Tell me and I'll give you what you want." He could give it to her, but what he wanted, only one would suffice. The woman's pupils dilated and she bit her bottom lip, pressing closer against him.

The knife at her throat poked deeper into her skin.

"Mr. Storm" she whispered huskily. Hopefully. "That's all I know."

Shit. "Is he your Dom? You two play together often?"

She moved her head side to side in a "no." "We come here once a month. Every other time we meet at my place."

That was weird, but Dima would puzzle it out later. Lowering the knife, he bent his head and licked her neck, near the area he'd seen his toy bite her. He inhaled again, trying to find the smell of his toy under the woman's own arousal.

"Did he come inside you?" he growled against her skin.

She didn't answer so he looked up. Her head was thrown back, lashes brushing her cheeks as she panted. Dima wanted to snap her neck, but he grabbed her instead, pressing his thumb into the indent at her throat.

Her lashes flew open.

"Did he cum inside you?"

She jerked her head in a nod and he reached down, pushing two fingers into her. She bucked. She was soaked, dripping. He screwed his fingers deeper into her heat as her cunt ripple around him.

"Oh." She clutched at his hand.

"You should tell him this," he whispered as he tunneled his fingers in and out. "That I finger-fucked you to get at his cum." He scraped against the spongy knot at the roof of her channel and she convulsed, coming in hot, tight waves around his fingers.

Her liquid pooled in his palm and Dima pulled out, practically yanking himself away from her. She stared at him with wide eyes and parted lips.

"I—" Her voice shook. "My name—"

He clamped a hand over her mouth. "I don't care what your name is," he snarled in her ear. "This isn't about you. Go." He waved at her car. "Don't forget to tell him what I did."

She stumbled into the car and he watched as she started the car, getting it to work after two tries, before pulling of. Dima made sure to get a good look at her license plate, committing it to memory before he ducked between a red minivan and a dark colored car and pulled his cock from his pants.

"Fuck." He shoved his fingers into his mouth, the same ones that was inside her as he pulled on his cock. He came with barely a touch, sucking the bitter yet salty cream from his fingers with eyes screwed tightly shut. His knees buckled and he fell to the ground under the force of his climax. "Fuck."

His new toy was playing hard to get. Obviously he'd never met anyone like Dima. They'd see each other again. He moaned around the fingers in his mouth. Yes. The hunt was on.

About the Author

A Caribbean transplant, Avril now lives in Stone Mountain, GA., with a tolerant spousal equivalent. Together they raise an eccentric daughter who loves reading and school (not so much school anymore). Avril's earliest memories of reading revolve around discussing the plot points of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys with an equally book-minded mother.

Always in love with the written word, Avril finally decided to do the writing in August of '09 and never looked back. Spicy love scenes, delicious heroes, and wicked women burn up the pages of Avril's stories, but there'll always be a happy ending; Av remains a believer of love in all its forms.

Addicted to cake, the ID Channel and the UFC, Avril writes Erotic and GLBT Romance for **Ellora's Cave**, **Evernight Publishing**, **eXtasy Books**, **Secret Cravings Publishing** and **Total-e-Bound**.

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