Summary

Hell on earth is found at La Penitenciaría Federal de Sona, and Michael Scofield and Alexander Mahone are trapped.

Notes

Warning for babelfish!Spanish.
Chapter 1

If God were merciful, He would have struck Alex dead the moment he hung up the phone. His life was, after all, over. From that point on, there was nothing worth living for. Not child, not wife, not hope of anything. Dead. He was dead.

But God, as ever, was not the merciful being some gentler religions made him out to be. No. God was the biggest bastard in the universe. Just look at what he'd done to Job on a dare. Now, Alex assumed, God's new plaything was Alex himself.

If only he was that significant.

If la polica were merciful, they would have shot him in the head. In the back, it didn't matter. Just shot him instead of taking him to this hell hole.

Penitenciaría Federal de Sona.

Fantastic.

He'd yet to find a niche. Men were everywhere. Men, boys, kids. Everywhere. Standing against slime covered walls. Fighting in the hallway. Fucking in the corner. No guards. No cells. So far, no food. Not even a blanket, although Alex had no doubt it'd be stolen should he have been issued one.

He wandered the halls. Long, dark, labyrinth-like. He was sized up. Examined. Glowered at and he glowered right back.

He rounded a corner. Took three steps and was punched. Reacted on instinct. Flew at his attacker. Bone crunched beneath his fist. Blood, hot on his face. Pain against his stomach. Roaring in his ears. He fought, desperate. Angry. Wild without mercy until his attacker was crumpled at his feet. Another kick, to make sure.

Then Alex crouched by his fallen foe. Took his jacket, his shiv, his belt. A pack of cigarettes, a bag of coke. Half a wrapped sandwich. His shoelaces.

Then he rose. Slipped the jacket on, shoved his supplies in his pockets. Walked away.

No one so much as looked at him as he continued down the hall. His nose gushed blood, and he pressed his hand to it for now.

The sound and smell of rain hit him as he rounded the next corner. He moved toward it. The air was fresher, somewhat. The smell of shit and decay was all around him. It couldn't always be raining, and if there weren't cells, he'd need somewhere to stay that wouldn't make him sick.

The corner adjacent from the door was occupied by some fey kid dressed in a purple tube top and torn jeans.

Alex walked up to him. Kicked his leg. "Move."

The kid opened his eyes. Blinked up at him. "You lookin' for company, pelao?"

"This yours?" Alex asked. He bent down, tugged on the blanket.

"Si."
Alex raised an eyebrow. Cocked his head.

The kid groaned. "Chucha. Come on, man."

"Move."

He groaned again, but crawled out of the corner and off the blanket. "What you want? Aspire su pene? Ustedes desea las drogas?"

"No hablo espanol," Alex said, making himself comfortable.

"I suck your dick? Get you drugs?"

"Food."

The kid got to his knees. Pushed his hand underneath the blanket and pulled out a wrinkled bag. He gave it to Alex.

Alex opened it. Inside was a rotted banana, an apple, and half a pastry of some kind.

"When do they feed us?" Alex asked, closing the bag. He set it aside.

"Morning. Around noon. Sunset."

"There guards?"

"Somewhere. They come around sometimes. Not much."

"So it's self rule." He glanced at the kid. "Who do I need to look out for?"

The kid pointed down the hall. "Carlos. He the top drug dealer." He pointed the other way. "They no let no one white near them." He then indicated to a huge, hulk of a man standing just a few feet away. "Ben. He fuck you up."

"No. He won't." Alex glanced out the doorway, into the rain. "What's your name?"

"Tony." Then, he made a face. "Gatito. Mostly, they call me Gatito."

"That mean pussy or something?"

"Si."

"I'm not going to protect you." He checked his nose. It's stopped bleeding. His bruises, though, were beginning to ache. Throb.

The kid shrugged. Laid his head back against the wall. Closed his eyes.

The rain was easing up. Lights shone outside, illuminating the muddy walk. Like the inside, there were people, huddling under awnings, under trees. The bottom of the barrel. Those who had given up hope of even a partially dry place to sleep for the night.

Of course he would be there. Standing against a wall, light caressing his face, his body, pooling around him. Sweatshirt wet-black. Sopping, clinging to him. Jeans so heavy they hung low on his hips, inching further. Shoes covered in mud.

Fucking ass.

Alex forced himself to look away. He stood and rearranged the blanket, making it more comfortable. Sat back down. Glanced up.

Someone else was edging towards Michael. Inch by inch. Furtive. He sidled up next to Michael. Said something Alex couldn't make out.

Michael didn't react.

The figure shoved Michael.

He stumbled. Straightened. Still didn't react.

Another figure came up. And another until they surrounded him. Shoved. Pushed.

And Michael didn't react.

They all fell on him. Tearing, kicking. Michael's sweatshirt was torn from him. Two men fought over it, turning on each other. One man got a shoe and was immediately pounded by the holder of the other. Someone screamed. Alex saw a flash in the moonlight.

He was up and in the rain before he thought about it. The shiv was in his hand. He grabbed the first man he could. The man had Michael's belt in his hand.

Alex elbowed him in the throat. Grabbed the belt. Whipped it back down in the man's face. Swung it back, catching another.

Someone screamed. Lunged for Alex.

He buried the shiv in his attacker's stomach. Kicked him away.

The vultures fled. Alex was able to catch the one with Michael's sweatshirt. Pulled him back. "Give it!"

The sweatshirt was dropped. Alex kicked the man away. He stumbled, splashed in the mud. Fell, but kept crawling, moving.

Alex crouched next to Michael. "Get up."

Michael didn't even blink.

He smacked the other man across the face. "Get the fuck up." He hit Michael again.

Michael started, like coming out of sleep. Coughed and blinked rapidly, rain hitting his face. His eyes caught Alex's. Frowned. "Alex?"

Alex tucked his shiv into the waistband of his pants. Picked up Michael's sweatshirt in one hand, Michael in the other. Hauled him to his feet. "Come."

* * *

Alex half dragged, half led Michael back into the building. A small crowd had gathered in the entrance, but the made room for Alex to pass. He could feel the heated gazes on his back, sizing him up. Taking his measure.

For now, though, there was no one who wanted to test him. One--maybe two, he wasn't sure--kills in one night was enough. At least for now.
He shoved Michael into the corner. "Sit."

Michael hit the wall. Turned and slid to the floor slowly. His back slid wetly down the wall, leaving blood. Legs splayed out on the damp concrete ground. His head lolled as he looked up at Alex through swollen eyes, blood flowing thickly from his nose, his mouth.

Tony was lying against the wall. He propped his head on his fist, looking at Alex and Michael curiously.

"Water?" Alex asked.

"¿Cuál está en él para mí?"

"What?"

"He wants to know what's in it for him," Michael said, voice flat and colorless.

"I don't kick your ass."

Tony shrugged. Lay back.

"Fine. You can stay here for the night. On the blanket. And if anyone hassles you, I'll drive them off."

"Okay." Tony climbed to his feet and walked off.

With a groan, Alex crouched in front of Michael. Pulled his eyelids up, ignoring the hiss of pain, to check his pupils. They were the same size, clear, focused on his face, if wet and watery.

He let Michael's eyelids fall. Gingerly touched his nose, feeling the bones.

Michael bit his lip. Grimaced, eyes shut. Jerked away when Alex hit a sensitive spot.

Alex probed it a couple more times. "I don't think it's broken. Just bruised." He touched it again.

"Stop it."

"What, you don't like that? Does it hurt?" Alex pressed his finger against the sore spot again.

Michael smacked his hand away.

"What, so now you fight?" He shoved Michael against the wall. "Now you start hitting back?" Shoved again, so hard Michael's head snapped against the wall.

Pain flashed across his face. He grabbed Alex's hands. Twisted them away, fighting Alex as he pushed back. "You are the one who wants to kill me, aren't you? Shouldn't I defend myself from you?"

He worked one hand free. Grabbed Michael by the neck and forced him down. Onto his back, Alex on top, his knee between Michael's legs, pressing against his crotch, threatening. "Just because I'm a threat, doesn't mean I'm the only threat, Michael. They would have killed you out there, is that what you wanted?"

"I didn't ask you to save me." He forced Alex's arm behind his back. Pushed it up, sending a wrenching pain through Alex's back. "You would have been rid of me. Considering how much you've been whining about me ruining your life, I'd've thought you'd be dying for that to happen."
"If anyone's going to kill you, it's going to be me." He squeezed his hand.


"I should. All my worries would be over." He tightened his hand.

Michael laughed soundlessly. His chest heaved. Both hands were hanging on to Alex's arm, tugging futilely, trying to free himself enough to breath. "All your worries," he whispered. "Stuck... in a prison that law forgot. In Panama." He coughed, face bright red as he struggled to get air. "No one knows you're here. You're a dead man. Buried alive."

"I'm not staying."

The words shocked him. Shocked him so much, he released Michael's throat. Cold, damp concrete bit into his hands as he held himself over Michael, looking down at him.

I'm not staying.

He was planning on living. On surviving this. On getting out.

He *wanted* to live.

"Shit," he said. He wanted to live. And the only man who could possibly get him out was perfectly willing to let vultures pick him over and leave him for dead.

"What?"

He wanted to live. It wasn't even about Pam or Cameron anymore. He wanted to live because he wasn't ready to give up on life. The past year and some had been hell. Made him forget why he loved... anything, really. But now...

He wanted his wife and son. But, if he couldn't have them, he just wanted *something*. Another chance.

And this man was the only person here who could help him get that chance. Together, they could get out. It wasn't impossible.

Michael just had to want it.

Alex had to give him a reason.

He climbed off of Michael. Sat next to him, at his head.

Tony was standing uncertainly a few feet away. He had two bottles of water in his hands.

Alex reached out for them. Took them and looked at the contents disdainfully. The bottles were sealed, but he still didn't trust the water. No doubt he and Michael would spend some time being ill over the next few days, adjusting.

"Here." He handed a bottle to Michael, who hadn't moved.

Michael took it silently. Opened the water and sat up, taking a few sips before laying back down.

He checked his watch. "You sleep first," he said. "We'll sleep in shifts. Three hours each."
"What do you mean?"

"I don't know about you, but I don't quite trust those around us. I'd sleep better with someone watching my back. So. I watch yours, you watch mine." He glanced at Tony, who was making himself comfortable next to Michael. "You need more sleep than I do."

He raised an eyebrow. "How do you figure that? Because you haven't been strangled in the last few minutes?" He sat up. Stretched. Then shifted so he laying stretched on the blanket, Tony behind him, against the wall. He lay his head back down, almost pressed against Alex's leg.

"Something like that." He watched as Michael closed his eyes, long lashes casting shadows on his cheeks. Cheeks molted purple with bruises, splashed dark burgundy with blood. Blood on his lips, bitten and swollen, painful to look at. Long, skinny marks darkening on his neck, around his throat.

He didn't feel guilty. He didn't feel anything. Just a burning in the pit of his stomach. Resolve. Need. Alex needed to get out of here. This was not how he was going to die. Not the end of him.

Need. For the man at his side. The one man who might be able to get them both out.

His enemy. A man he hated. Had grown to hate, reluctantly. Hated because Alex wasn't a good enough man. Wasn't...

He had to put it aside. Not just because he had to work with Michael, but because he had to convince Michael to do this. Remind him of what he'd fought for. What had brought him here and what still waited for him outside. Because, right now, it was all too obvious that Michael was willing to disappear and be buried alive here.

That wasn't going to happen. And Alex had to find some way to convince Michael life was worth fighting for. Even still.

Michael shivered. Coughed. His eyes opened.

"Sleep," Alex said.

"Can't." He rolled onto his stomach. Crossed his arms under his head. "This is hell. And you want me to sleep?"


"What's the point?"

Gently, he squeezed Michael's neck. "I'll tell you when you wake up."

Michael laughed, but didn't say anything further. He lay, docile, as Alex rubbed his upper back, stomach twisting, frustration tightening his jaw as he did. He wanted nothing more than to snap the smug bastard's neck. To break each of his fingers, making him suffer the way Alex had suffered.

But he couldn't. He needed Michael. And he would play nice until they were out of this shithole. And then...

Then he'd see.

* * *

"Michael."
Michael turned around. Looked into the darkness, trying to find her. "Sara?"

"Michael." She was hurt. Pained. Crying.

He ran. Body heavy. Head spinning. The floor sloped. He couldn't breathe. It was too hot. "Sara! Sara!" He burst through a door, into the light.

Sara was standing on the porch of the house where they'd been caught. She held her hands out to him, palms up. Blood poured from them. Crimson tears flowed down her face. "Michael. I killed a man."

"It's okay. I'll take care of this."

"There is no way to take care of it. No way out, Michael. Not any more."

"I'll find a way."

T-Bag appeared beside her, knife in hand. And in arm, where Michael had planted it. Blood welled around knife, down his hand. The other held a knife at Sara's throat. "You gotta plan for this, Pretty? Had time to tattoo it to you ass when we weren't looking?"

The prison flashed over Michael's vision. The half he'd seen. The hallway.

"Michael, please," Sara cried.

The police appeared, surrounding her.

"No." He struggled forward, but was held back. Something held him back, pressed him. Wouldn't let him move. "No, don't. No."

They fired.

"No!" He jerked, eyes flying open.

Arms tightened around his waist as his vision adjusted to the darkness around him. He blinked. Pushed himself up. His entire body was one throbbing bruise, and he had to bite back a groan.

"You okay?"

He looked at Alex, who was sitting in the corner, playing with a shiv. His eyes were on Michael, mild, curious.

"Yeah." He sat up, wincing as his body protested. The arms fell from around his waist. His back went cold. He turned to find the kid who'd brought the water behind him. He was lying between Michael and the wall, fast asleep.

Apparently, they'd been snuggling.

"I think he likes you," Alex said. He handed Michael a bottle of water.

"I've been told I make a good pillow." He took a sip. The water was dull, flat, and vaguely metallic. But it was wet. "Who is he?"

"Some whore. Name's Tony. I took the blanket from him. Don't particularly want him around, but he does know the place. And we need information." He cocked his head. "He's been snuggling against you all night."
Michael nodded. "Ah." He crawled off the blanket over to Alex. Sat against the wall. Rubbed his head. "Any problems?"

"No. Everyone's pretty much asleep. I actually saw a couple guards wander through. We're not completely outside of civilization."


"Why? You kill him?"

He shook his head. "I drove a knife through his arm. Pinned him to the floor. I guess it's possible that that killed him, but... I just sort of left him to be found by the police."

"You should have killed him."

"Yeah, well..." He sighed. "I guess it's your turn to sleep?"

Alex passed him the shiv. "Like I said, there hasn't been any problems. I dozed off a couple times, so don't panic if you do." He moved to the blanket and stretched out. Closed his eyes. "I wish your sweatshirt wasn't soaked; it'd make a good pillow."

"I thought about that. We could shove it under."

"That'd just get the blanket wet. We can wait until it dries." He rolled onto his back.

Michael rubbed his thumb lightly over the blade of the shiv. It wasn't very sharp, just jagged. Deadly, if used right. Painful no matter what. Dark, tacky blood coated the edges. "Where'd you get this?"

"Someone attacked me. I won." He glanced at Michael. "You have to fight to win here. And when you win, take what you need. Everything. Even things you don't see the use for, take it. Keep it."

He glanced at the kid curled on the blanket. "Like you did him?"

Alex rolled his eyes. "He came with the blanket. And he's proved useful so far. So, yes. Like him."

"And me."

"Perhaps."

"Ruthless."

Alex scowled at him. He pushed himself up, tensed and ready to retort, but Michael cut him off.

"It was an observation, not a condemnation," he said. "Of course you have to be ruthless. It's how to survive." He sighed. Closed his eyes and banged his head lightly against the wall. "I'll have problems."

"Like you're not ruthless when you need to be."

"I'm manipulative. It's different." He sighed again. "I wasn't trying to let them kill me, you know. I mean, I didn't even realize they were there. I was sort of, uh, lost in the rain."

"How romantic."

He smiled. "No, I mean... I was thinking. Hard. Trying to figure a way out of this. I was looking at
everything. Trying to put it together. I just got lost in that and didn't realize..."

"You didn't realize you were getting the shit beat out of you." Alex raised an eyebrow and looked at Michael disbelievingly.

His cheeks burned, face went hot.

"Defense mechanism?"

"Yeah."

"Were you abused as a kid?"

"Some." He shrugged. "Probably more than I remember. I started blocking it out when I was about ten." This was not what he wanted to talk about. Not what he wanted to remember. He tightened his hand around the shiv, just enough so the blades bit into his skin. "Why did you stop them?"

"I'm not going to let someone else kill you."

"Because you're planning to do it yourself."

A beat of silence. Then, "Maybe. I don't know." A frowned creased his forehead. "Killing you was their idea. Not mine."

"This was yours. Prison." He rubbed his forehead. "I guess we both deserve this."

"Fuck you." He rolled onto his stomach. "No one deserves this. Our crimes... not this."

Michael smiled bitterly. "T-Bag deserves it. He deserves to be electrocuted, brought back to live, then fed, piece by piece, to wild, rabid dogs."

Alex laughed. "Why, Michael Scofield, I do believe your dark side is showing."

"I'm dark. Believe me."

"I never had a doubt." He closed his eyes again. "You'll need that darkness to survive this."

Michael sighed. He looked over the darkened hallway. The air was thick and heavy. It smelled of stale urine and sweat and unwashed bodies. Men snored. Groaned. A sense of despair permeated the building. Anger. Rage. It was a tinder box, a volcano. Waiting to explode. Destroy. Just waiting for something, for someone to set it off.

"This isn't what I wanted," he said.

"If all you're going to do is bitch, I've no problem gagging you," Alex said without opening his eyes.

"No, I mean..."

"Shut up. I'm trying to sleep."

Michael obeyed. Dragged his thumb over the blade yet again. Thought about how easy it would be to start a riot in a place like this. To take the anger and despair. To be the match and watch everyone explode around him. And, once chaos ensued, to slip out. Disappear.

He sighed and shook his head. Clenched his fingers on his thigh. "To get us out," he said into the silence. "I won't do something that hurts everyone. There's got to be another way."
"So find one. But get us out."

"I can't do it by myself. Not from the inside. Not like this."

Alex opened his eyes. Pushed himself up and looked at Michael. "You won't have to. I'm not bad at this kind of thing myself. And I'm able to be ruthless when needed. We work together and we get out."

Michael raised his eyebrow. "And then you kill me."

He shrugged. "We'll see."

He studied Alex for a long moment, conscious of those silvery-blue eyes looking right back. A thousand things flew through his head all at once. Finally, he just shook his head and said, "I don't think you're a scorpion, Alex. A bear, maybe. A dog. Dangerous when provoked. Deadly, even. But not out of spite."

Alex's face was a mask. "Don't presume that you know anything about me, Michael." He rolled onto his side, facing the wall. That brought him nose to nose with Tony. He shoved the kid. "Get up, Gatito," he spat. Shoved again.

Michael rolled his eyes, watching as Alex pushed and prodded the kid of the blanket. Onto the dirty-damp floor.


Michael kept his eyes on Alex. he knew he was supposed to be watching for threats, but, well. This was more interesting. Not definitely a threat, but most definitely a puzzle. A man defeated, like himself. A genius. A romantic. A good man. Before.

Oscar Shales. Rapist. Murderer. Better off where he was, in an unmarked grave. The manner of his death, his murder, was more fitting than any public execution. Denied the fame, the glory for deeds best left unglorified. Noticed only for their horror.

He'd deserved a secret execution leaving only a mystery of where he'd gone.

Abruzzi... had gone the way he deserved. Fully glory, a hail of bullets. A fighter to the very last.

David's death had mirrored his life: a waste. For all involved. David, Alex. Nothing more to be said.

Sucre had gotten away, escaped Alex and the Company's noose only to be stabbed by T-Bag. A man whom Michael had still failed to kill, even after all he'd done.

Manipulative. Not ruthless. Not able to do what needed to be done no matter what the cost.

Weak. Useless. At least here.

He let out a deep breath. Rubbed his eyes.

"¿Es usted despierto?" Tony asked from his lap in a whisper.

"Yeah, I'm awake. I'm on watch."

Tony sat up and glanced at Alex. "Su nombre es Michael. ¿Si?"
"Yeah. ¿Y usted es Tony?"

"Yes." He looked at Alex again. "What he want from you?"

Michael shrugged. "Nothing. We knew each other on the outside. Nos conocíamos en el exterior," he translated at Tony's puzzled expression. He couldn't help adding, "…l era representante de la ley."

"El policía?"

"No. FBI. But still." He rubbed his forehead. "I was a fugitive," he continued in Spanish. "He was chasing me."

"What did you do?"

"Robbed a bank. And then broke my brother out of prison."

"You broke out of prison? How?"

"It's a long story." He looked Tony over. At the bruises on his face and neck. The discolored, dirty tube top and torn jeans. "What are you here for?"


"I'm in no position to judge. How long have you been here?"

"Six months. It's hard, but it's easier since I learned to play the game."

"The game?"

He shrugged. "I get food, blankets, drugs as long as I put out. Haven't been hungry a day here since I figured that out." He yawned suddenly, a wide, jaw cracking yawn. Then, he fixed Michael with a bright, penetrating looked. "You're lucky. Señor Shithead here's already established himself as a top dog. Or at least someone you don't want to fuck with. People will try, but he knows what he's doing. Might survive."

"How does that make me lucky?"

"You're his. As long as he's alive, no one will touch you. Not without his permission."

Michael nodded. So, things worked the same way here as they did back at Fox River. Once you were established as someone's property, the only way to take it away was to kill the owner. Or for the owner to toss you aside. As long as Alex didn't make him hold his pocket, Michael didn't think he'd mind playing along. For now. At least until he figured out how to get them out of there.

Soft, wet lips on his startled Michael out of his thoughts. He jerked back, heart pounding.

"What are you doing?" he asked Tony.


"No. Tony, no." As gently as he could, he pushed the kid from his lap. Back to the floor. His face
was bright red, hot with mortification. "No."

"Come on," the kid cajoled.

Michael shook his head. Pushed harder into the corner and drew his legs to his chest. "You can stay. I'll make sure he lets you stay. But... no."


"I understand. But, right now, just... just sleep."

Tony looked at Michael a moment. He obviously didn't quite believe what Michael was saying. But, he did lay back down, head next to Michael's body, and close his eyes once again. Within a few minutes, his breathing had evened out and he was asleep.

Michael sighed. Stretched his legs out once more. His heart was pounding, adrenaline coursing through him. That had been unexpected. Unwelcome. And, unfortunate, not completely unpleasant. Not entirely.

He glanced down at Alex. Found the other man looking up at him, curiosity bright in his eyes.

"You should have let him keep going," Alex said softly. "I could use some entertainment."

"Fuck you, Alex."

Alex laughed. Rolled back over, away from Michael.

Michael spent the rest of the night staring into the darkness, trying not to think.
Chapter 2

Alex woke with his face pressed against something soft. Soft, comfortable. Stale-smelling, but not altogether unpleasant. Moving under his cheek. His fingers against something warm. Warmth on his neck, something moving, clenching rhythmically into his muscles.

That was the first thing he was aware of. The second was pain. His back. Stomach. Arms, legs. Bruised. Aching. As Alex stretched, blood rushing to his limbs, waking, tingling, he became more and more aware of pain. Head pounded. Heart throbbed in his ears. A kind of painful awareness all over his body, pins and needles. A sort of... ache he hadn't experienced in a long time.

His body and mind were waking up. The midazolam was leaving his system. Might already be gone.

He sighed. Rolled onto his back and gazed sightlessly up at the ceiling. They'd taken his remaining pills when he'd been remanded into custody. Given the state of the prison, he highly doubted there was an infirmary. Even if there was, they wouldn't stock what he needed.

Stuck in a primitive prison and detoxing. He'd be lucky to survive the day.

A long, loud pulse echoed suddenly through the hall. The body under Alex's started, nearly knocking him off. At the last moment, though, Michael--at least, he hoped it was Michael--caught Alex around the shoulders and sat up slowly.

"What was that?" Michael asked, voice thick with sleep. He let Alex go and moved away.

Tony said something in Spanish as he climbed to his feet. He adjusted his tube top, which had slipped in the night to reveal a skinny, underfed chest clearly belonging to an adolescent.

"He says it's the morning wake-up call," Michael translated. "And we're already late. If we want to get anything good to eat, we better move fast."

"Should we take the blanket, you think?"

Michael asked.

"Si." Tony said, before continuing with a torrent of words Alex didn't understand.

Michael bent over and grabbed the blanket. "We've staked this corner out, so if we come back later, we'll get it back. Even if we have to fight over it." He folded the blanket and tucked it under his arm.

Alex was leaning against the wall. He felt weak. Drained. The cocaine in his pocket was burning a hole, and even though it wasn't what he was used to--a stimulant where he was used to a depressant--but it was something. And he needed *something*.

Michael frowned at him. "You okay, Alex?"

"Fine." He watched as the hall emptied out, men streaming further inside. Going after food. Food he really didn't want. Wouldn't be able to eat.

"Come on, then." He took Alex by the arm and tugged.

Alex allowed himself to be pulled away. To join the throng. They pushed and shoved and weaved their way through hot, pulsing bodies. Skin brushed against him. He was shoved a few times. Stumbled, but Michael was behind him to steady him. Hands unreal on his body. Muggy air pressed
against him, hazing his vision. Everything so far away. Dreamlike.

Tony disappeared. Small and lithe, he darted ahead, weaving in and out of larger men, escaping those who would grab him, keep him back. Alex and Michael were left to follow in his wake, trudging the endless hall that led deeper and deeper into the labyrinth.

They'd just reached what looked to be the mess hall when Tony reappeared. His face was shiny-slick with sweat. There was a bright smile on his face. "Here." He pushed something into their hands.

"What's this?" Alex asked. He brought the fried, greasy something to his nose and sniffed.

"Empanada," Tony said. He bit into it. Orange-yellow cheese dripped from the opening.

"Eggs, meat, cheese. Yum," said Michael dubiously. He ate his in something like four bites. Licked his fingers when he was done. "Not terrible."

Alex stomach roiled at the sight, but he needed food. "Anything to drink?" he asked before finally biting into his breakfast. It didn't taste bad, but that didn't stop his stomach from protesting when the food hit it.


Stuffing the rest of his breakfast into his mouth, Alex followed Tony and Michael. His temples pounded with each step. His skin crawled. His stomach writhed and twisted and churned.

The mess hall was chaos. The air was one, loud, thundering roar. Shouts and stamps of feet. Slaps of trays on concrete tables from those who managed to get both. A jostle of unwashed bodies. The stench mixing with the smell of pungent, burnt food, dirt, and the ever present smell of urine and crap.

Alex reeled. Stumbled back. The world tilted and he started to fall.

Michael grabbed him. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head. Pulled away and rushed outside, pushing through the seemingly endless stream of men pushing their way in.

By the time Michael found him, Alex was in a corner, puking up everything he'd eaten in the last twenty-four hours. And when he ran out of food, he just kept heaving. Retching and heaving, bringing up stomach acid and air.

There was a hand on his neck. Water pressed to it. Arms stopping him from falling into the puddle underneath him, hauling him away. Pressing him against the wall.

"Here." Michael put his hand behind Alex's head. Tipped the water bottle against his lips, helping him drink.

He drank gratefully. Gulpèd half the water down, parched and empty.

His stomach rumbled again. Bitter acid tanged his mouth.

"I take drugs," Alex said after a moment, when the urge to expel the water passed.

"Oh."
"Midazolam. Sedatives. Usually used for surgery. To calm people down." He swallowed. "No one will have them here."

Michael's face was set. Serious. He nodded. "So we have to find a place for you to detox." He looked around. "Place like this, there's got to be somewhere out of the way. A corner. A closet. A nook. Something."

"Anything like that is already taken."

He shrugged. "We'll figure it out."

Tony appeared at Michael's side. "Here." He pressed some thick, round somethings into Alex's hand. "Tortillas," he said.

"Thanks." Alex ripped into one, the corn flavor sopping up some of the acid still in his mouth.

While he ate, Michael and Tony conversed in Spanish. Tony spoke so fast, he could see that even Michael was having problems keeping up. They still managed, though, and, after a few minutes, Michael nodded.

"Tony said that he thinks there might be a good place in or near the cells. The only problem is, the closer to the cells you get, the more dangerous the men. And you're in no shape to take anyone on."

"I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the fact this place has cells."

That got a hint of a smile from Michael. "I guess so."

He nodded, then shivered. His stomach twisted, but his managed to keep his breakfast down. "Is there a bathroom anywhere?"

"El baño? Si. Ducha, también."

"No shower right now, I think," Michael said, helping Alex to his feet. "Later."

"Okay. Come on."

Alex stumbled after Tony. His hand was clenched around one of the tortillas, crumbling and sticking to the sweat on his hands. His feet felt very far away and completely out of control. If it weren't for Michael's hand on his back, pushing him, holding him, supporting him, Alex would have fallen flat on his face and stayed.


A stench worse than the one in the mess hall hit Alex. Still; he needed a toilet, so he went inside. Michael followed, always one step behind, always keeping the pretense that he was Alex's property. That Alex wasn't relying on Michael right now. At his mercy.

He found a toilet that wasn't completely disgusting. Used it, then quickly got up and threw up into it.

There was as sink. Water. He and Michael washed up best they could, then stumbled back outside.

"I see why people prefer to piss on the walls," Alex said, his voice no more than a croak.

"We're going to die in here," Michael replied.

He nodded. "Probably." Then he shrugged. "Tony?"
Tony had been lounging against the wall, nibbling on a tortilla. At Michael's words, he pulled away. "This way."

They pushed further into the prison. The air seemed to grow thicker as they went. More oppressive. Hazier. Or maybe that was just the increasing disconnect Alex was feeling. The feeling that the only real thing in the world was himself, and possibly the hand on his back.

The men around him were more active now than they had been last night. Talking. Playing card games, dice games. Sparring. A lot seemed to be streaming past them, in the opposite direction. Going outside, trading one hell hole for another. At least that one had sunshine.

Alex wouldn't mind sun. Air that didn't smell.

But survival was always, always the first order of business. They had to find a better place than a corner across from the door. Michael had to see the entire prison, get familiar with the layout. Alex needed...

"Stop." He turned against the wall. Doubled over, heaving.

Only water came up. Water, sour and stinging. His eyes burned. Nose ran. Stomach ached from the convulsions. Sweat dripped from every pore, soaking his shirt, wetting his hair.

"Shh," Michael soothed, rubbing up and down Alex's back. "Shhh."

"Fuck. Off," he panted, bracing himself when he was done.

"Tony. Water." A moment later, a bottle was pressed back into his hand.


Alex pressed his head against the wall. Pushed himself to his feet.

"What's going on?" he asked wearily.

There were four of them. Big. Tattooed, bearded, scarred. Fists clenched, belligerence on their face. Spoiling for a fight.

"You threw up on Jose's spot," Michael said.

"Jose can go fuck himself. Does he need that to be translated?"

"No," one of the men--Jose, he presumed--said darkly. "I don't." He stepped forward, pushing Michael aside. "You better clean it up, gringo."

Alex smiled. "Do it yourself. Boy."

Jose stepped closer. Nose to nose, his foul breath washing over Alex's face. "You loco or something?"

"Yeah. I am." He whipped his head forward. Smashed it into Jose's.

The man reared back. Growled in pain. Launched himself at Alex.

The disconnect Alex was experiencing didn't disappear in the fight. It made it easier, in fact. Like it was happening to someone else. He punched. Kicked. Bit at one point, almost tearing off his ear.
The fight lasted longer than he would have liked. The man outweighed him, but that was no excuse. Lincoln Burrows had a few pounds on hi, and that mostly in muscle, and yet Alex had gotten him down quiet easily.

His mind was scattered, though. Palms slick with sweat. Stomach threatening to expel whatever contents left inside on his adversary.

It took too long. Jose got too many hits to him. But finally, finally, Alex had him down, kneecap crushed, arm twisted behind his back.

"I will throw up when and where I want," Alex said. He drove his knee into Jose's back. "I will throw up in your fucking face if I so choose, got it?"

"Tu es poli de mierda," someone swore.

He looked up at the three other men. Bared his teeth. "Anyone else?"

Michael stepped next to him. Held the shiv out. Squinted his eyes and clenched his jaw. With is bruised face and the deep circles under his eyes, he looked dangerous.

"...l no es poli," Michael growled. "But he will fuck you up. I suggest you vamanos or lose your cajones."

Just so they wouldn't think Michael was kidding, Alex rolled Jose onto his back. Ground his knee into his crotch, drawing a long, pained scream from him.

The others exchanged looks. Then one stepped back, hands up. The others followed suite.

Alex cleared his throat. Leaned over Jose and spit next to him. Then he pushed himself shakily to his feet. "Let's go."

Tony moved to Alex's side. Wrapped his arm around Alex's waist in support and helped him lip away. His eyes were fastened on Alex's face, dark eyes shining in admiration. Michael followed them, backwards, shiv still out, one hand on Alex's back.

"You amazing, señor," Tony said softly.

He snorted. "You know how to fight?"

"I no fight. I give sex."

"You should learn. Keep yourself safer. From disease or..."

"Alex," Michael said suddenly. He tugged on Alex's belt loop for him to stop.

"What?"

Michael nodded at an offshoot of the hall. "There's a closet or something down there. We should check it out."

"Like no one else has found it." But he turned down the hall, still leaning heavily on Tony.

The hall was sparsely populated. Still bigger guys, but nothing like Alex suspected they would find if they ever reached the actual cells.

Michael jogged ahead to the door. He opened it and stuck his head inside. "Out," he said to whoever
A man about Michael's height and weight came to the door. "Gringo bonito, tu que busca una lucha?"

In a move almost too fast for Alex to see, Michael hooked his ankle around the other man's knee and yanked is leg out from under him. The man stumbled, then went down when Michael drove the heel of his palm into his throat.

Michael dropped to the man's chest. Pressed the shiv into his neck. "No, I'm not looking for a fight. But I will give you one if you don't get the fuck out now."

The man tried to retaliate, but Tony was on him too quickly. The kid smashed his foot against his knee. Kicked him in the crotch. Stepped on his elbow.

"Okay, okay." The man's voice was a thin, whispy rasp. "You get it."

Michael sat back. Rose. "Get out."

The man stood. Coughed and rubbed his throat. "You better watch yourself, gringo," he said. "I'm not giving this up so easy."

Michael just stared at the man. And kept staring until he vacated the closet. Walked down the hall. Turned the corner and disappeared out of sight.

"My baby boy's all grown up," Alex croaked. Then, the world rushed on him in a cacophony of sound, color, and pain. And everything went black.

"Shit," Michael swore. He caught Alex before the other man hit the ground, stumbling under his weight. "Tony, help me."

The boy immediately scrambled over and wrapped his arms around Alex's waist. Together, they dragged Alex the two steps over to the thin mattress on the floor.

"Gently," said Michael.

"Si."

The mattress was actually a set of two, pushed together. Dusty-grey, but at least they were something. They got Alex on to the mattress and covered with one of the blankets.

"Okay." Michael knelt next to him. Checked for a pulse. It was incredibly fast. He was also sweating profusely, but shivering like he was cold. "We need water," he said. "And a bucket, just in case he throws up again. And something to keep him cool. Wipe his face off."

"¿Qué?" Tony asked. He sounded panicked.

Michael glanced back to find him twisting is hands together and shifting his weight from foot to foot.

He sighed in exasperation and translated as quickly as he could. As he did, he glanced around the small space. In the corner were a few bottles of water and two bags. He stood and went over. Inside one bag was a stash of food; the other hand clothes.

"Tony?"

"I go," he said in English. He opened the door and darted out.
He grabbed one of the water bottles and went back to Alex's side. Carefully, he lifted Alex's head. Placed the open end against his lips and tilted back.

Water ran down his face at first, but he finally swallowed. His eyes tightened, then opened. Found Michael's before he winced. "The light," he rasped.

Michael glanced at the single light bulb that hang from the ceiling. It gave off a harsh glare, yellow and bright on the edge of painful. "I know. I'll find something to cover it with."

Alex nodded. Closed his eyes and rolled on to his side.

Michael went back to the bag and dug through it. There were a few shirts, some pants, what looked like nearly clean underwear, and a plethora of socks. Grabbing one, he rose and rolled it over the bulb.

The light dimmed to manageable levels. Michael went back to the bag and pulled out a shirt. Then he crossed back to Alex. "Here. You should change your shirt."

Alex nodded. Pushed himself into a sitting position. Wavered and started falling back.

Michael caught him. "Easy," he soothed. "Just, uh... Just let me." He grasped the edges of Alex's shirt and tugged.

It took a few tries, but Michael got Alex's shirt off. Pulled off his undershirt, which was soaked through with sweat. Then he helped him into the new shirt, then back into bed.

"You need more water," Michael said. "Here."

"I need drugs." His hands were shaking too badly. Michael had to help him again. "Michael. Tony said he could get me drugs. I need something. Anything. Some kind of depressant. Something to push me back down, help me... help me cope."

"No. You don't need any drugs. You need to get this out of your system so you can think. We need to be sharp in here. Keep our heads in the game."

"I almost caught you while on those things. I'll be fine."

"I think there's a difference between pills you get from the pharmacy and drugs you buy in a prison in Panama."

Alex bared his teeth at Michael. "Who says I got them from a pharmacy?"

"Even buying off the street in Chicago has got to be better than here."

There was a split second of absolute stillness. Then Alex launched himself at Michael. Caught him off guard, slamming him into the second mattress. He pressed his forearm against Michael's neck.

He pushed. Writhed, trying to buck him off. Tore at Alex's arms, his shirt, his neck. "Alex," he said. Tried to say, but he didn't have any air. Black spots flew at is eyes. His head spun.

"I will die if I don't get something. Anything, I don't *care*. I just need..." He broke off. Eyes sparked. Then he pushed off Michael.

A bag with white powder emerged from his pocket.

"No!" Light headed, dizzy, breathless, Michael lunged for Alex. Ripped the bag from his hand.
"Give it back!"

Alex's heavy weight hit Michael from behind. Slammed him to the ground, head smacking into the dirty concrete. He shook it off the best he could. Pulled himself to the door.

Sharp nails claw into his neck. Rake down his skin, leaving a trail of fire. Michael threw his elbow back. It connected with Alex's eye.

Alex cried out in pain. Lost his grip.

Michael threw him off. Jumped to his feet and made it to the door.

"Michael. Michael!"

He was out. Running down the hall for the bathroom again. It was every bit as disgusting as before, but this time, he was there to dump the drugs. He couldn't risk Alex or Tony digging it up again. He'd watched Linc go through this stuff too many times; he wasn't going through it again. Not here.

Rising from the toilet, Michael brushed his hands off on his jeans. They were still damp from the night before. Totally uncomfortable. He needed to change before his legs chafed too badly.

The halls were still mostly empty when he got back out. A few men catcalled him as he walked by. Hands reached out, brushed over him. One wrapped around his wrist.

He yanked it away, brandishing the shiv. He molded his face as a copy of Alex's, teeth bared, fierce. Aggressive.

"Come on, baby," the man said in Spanish. He leered lasciviously at Michael, dragging his eyes over Michael's body. "I can take real good care of you. Keep you in food. Clothes, drugs." He stepped closer and licked his lips. "Drive you out of your mind."

"I'm spoken for." Michael poked him with his shiv. "Back off."

He cocked his head. Considered.

Michael's heart pounded in his ears.

"You really ready to use that on me, boy?"

"Yes." Michael nodded, wishing he felt half as certain as he sounded. "I am."

The man grinned. Stayed still.

Michael adjusted his grip on the shiv. Suppressed the shudders trying to explode in his body, adrenaline running too hotly.

He almost missed it. Blinked, just as the man stepped. Lunged at him.

Michael leapt back. He swung the shiv out blindly. Caught skin.

A hot liquid sprayed over his face. Obscured his vision. The other man fell into him, roaring. Gurgling, his hands scratching at Michael. Tearing at him, his clothes. Louder, shrieking. And blood, hot, poured from him, onto Michael's face. Neck, and through his clothes, and he kept hold of Michael and Michael couldn't move and...

The man's hands lost their grip. He fell to the ground.
Michael fled. Ran back to the closet. He could hardly get the door open. His hands were too slick with sweat and blood. Shaking too hard. Vision too blurry, impossible to see.

The door opened. He stumbled inside. Fell.

"Well, pious little church boy is back."

Michael pushed himself up to his hands and knees. Looked up at Alex, who was sitting on the bed, bottle of water in his hand.

"Fuck," Alex swore. He put the bottle aside and pulled Michael to the bed. "Sit." Sweating and pale, Alex went to the bag and pulled out a sock. Coming back, he wet it with some water. Began cleaning Michael's face. "What happened?"

Michael trembled. Tears flooded from his eyes. His mouth tasted sour as his stomach thought about throwing up.

"Michael, tell me."


Alex tried to take it from him. Michael couldn't get his hand to open. It was locked tight around the shiv.

"Give it. Come on, Michael. Just open your hand. Come on." Alex's voice was soft. Soothing So unlike anything Michael had heard from him, ever. Much closer to the amused purr he'd used during their phone conversation a lifetime ago.

He tried. He really did. "Can't."

Alex sighed. Wiped Michael's face, his mouth. Nose. Over his eyes, clearing them of blood. Off his neck and cheeks. All the while looking at him, serious. Straight faced. Intent, even as he sweat and shook. So pale and hollow-eyed.

Finally, he set the blood soaked rag aside. Took Michael's hand in both of his. Carefully worked each finger opened until the shiv fell, clattered to the floor.

"I killed him." The words were painful. Torn from him. Hurt.

"Then you needed to." Alex stroked just over Michael's ear. Over the hair at his temple. "You wouldn't have done it otherwise."

"I could have let him rape me."

"That is not an option. No doubt he would have killed you even so. Either with the act, after the act, or through disease. You needed to kill him."

He sniffed. "I'm not a killer."

"No. You're not. But you are a survivor." His hand tightened suddenly on Michael's arm as a tremor racked him. "God. I need to find something. Where the fuck is that kid."

Michael did his best to focus his thoughts. "You're not taking anything else. You're just going to have to suffer through this."

A spasm crossed over Alex's face. "Too bad you girlfriend's not here. She'd probably be able to find
all the best drugs around here."

"Too bad your wife isn't here. She'd probably be enough to buy a lifetime supply of whatever you need."

This time, he was ready for Alex's retaliation. It didn't hurt any less, but at least he was braced for it. Able to move with the blow.

"You, stay over there." Alex pointed across the tiny room. "Don't come near me."

Michael grabbed the second mattress. Tugged it to the opposite side. There was barely an inch between the two mattress, but it apparently satisfied Señor Shithead. The other man stretched out on his back. Closed his eyes.

The mention of Sara was like pouring salt on a raw, open wound. It festered, bled. The best Michael could do was push it aside. Push her aside, fold her into a small, tight box in the back of his mind. Him, Lincoln, LJ. Everyone and everything. He had to get out of here, but he couldn't do it thinking of them. He couldn't do it for them. All he had now was himself. Himself to live for, to survive for. To be responsible for.

Well. And Tony. He guessed. The kid was... a kid. No matter what he may have done, he didn't deserve this. If Michael could get out, Tony would come too.

And Alex. Who would no kill him after, no matter what he thought and threatened. Because, despite everything, Michael still clung to the belief that, deep down, Alex was a good man. A good agent. Despite killing Oscar Shales, who deserved it. And as for David and Abruzzi, well. Michael knew what the Company could do to a man. If he'd been desperate... if the Company had played the right card...

*I just want my life back.*

Of course they'd played the right card. First, his career. Then, his wife. And, finally, his son. Progress threats to drive a good man, struggling against what he knew was wrong, progressively to the edge. Driven to do stupider and more dangerous things. Until he tried to take it all. Escape. To *win*.

And, because of Michael, he'd lost. Utterly.

Well. It was only fair. He'd done the same to Michael, or tried to. It only made sense their fates now be tied together. That they'd be force to rely on one another to survive.

Michael's stomach turned suddenly. He'd killed a man. With his own hands. Killed him, and still had his blood...

He stood suddenly. Tore at his clothes. Ripped his shirt from his body. Shimmed out of his twice damp jeans. Looked down at the sodden, red mass, shaking. Seeing his face again, coming near him. The smirk. The threat. Seeing T-Bag in that shack. Hearing his voice.

*You can be slumped over that chair with your pants pooled around your ankles because Pretty, it's been a looong time.*

Not just then, either. Every other time. And he'd sat there, taken it, because he knew he was protected. Safe. By the others. By his plan.

There was no protection here. Alex, a little. Not right now.
He was alone.

* * *

Alex watched as Michael tore off his clothes. Strip out of the blood soaked shirt and pants. Bare skin, decorated with ink and bruises and cuts and the faintest traces of blood left over from his kill.

He pushed himself up. Looked at the other man, at the tattoo that had haunted him for so long. That he'd memorized. That appeared in his dreams and waking imaginings.

The door opened. "I back. I bring naranjas y plátanos for you." Tony set a bucket down on the ground. His face immediately twisted into concern. "Michael?"

Michael didn't react.


He shook his head, inhaling sharply. "Tony. I..."

"Sit." He pulled Michael to the mattress across from Alex's. Pushed him down. He put his hand over the raising bruise on the side of Michael's face. "Who did this?"

Michael shook his head again. "It's fine, Tony. I'm okay."

"Tu está desnudo." He went to the bucket. Started pulling out fruit. Rising, he threw an orange at Alex's head.

He barely managed to dodge it. "Hey. Watch it!"

"You do this?" He pointed at Michael.

"It's none of your business, Gatito. He's mine, remember?"


"I can take care of myself."

"Maybe." He turned back to Michael. Crouched at his side. "Put these on. Is clean."

Michael took the shirt and tugged it on. "Where did you get this stuff?"

"The guard. Angel Gonzales. He give to me."

"For what?"

Tony shrugged. "I give him sex."

Michael grabbed Tony. "Don't. No more. You don't have to do that. Okay? No more trading sex for anything. Not for us."

"I help." He framed Michael's face between his hands. "Es no problema. I used to it. Okay?"

"Not okay."

Tony shook his head. Alex watched as he leaned in and kissed Michael. Really kissed him, even as
Michael tried to pull away. "I do for you. Because he not enough to get what you need."

"I will be."

The kid snorted.

Alex sat up and grabbed the bucket. There were more bottles of water inside, food, a couple cans of soda. Fresh blankets, clothes. "I need drugs."

"No," Michael protested.

Tony climbed off Michael and turned to Alex. "He right. You can no do drugs here. Not if you keep him safe."

"I'll be fine. I've been doing drugs for years."

He shook his head. "You, uh, need, uh..." He trailed off. Sighed and started again in Spanish.

"He says you need to be able to keep your mind focused if you don't want to end up as someone else's property," Michael translated as he pulled the pants on. "That people are going to want to control you. But I'm more valuable. I'm prettier. They'll take you so they can have me, and then they'll treat me better. If you want to beat them and keep me safe, you have to keep your mind sharp."

"What if I don't want to keep you safe?"

Michael shrugged. "That's up to you. Tony and I can leave you to your own devices. But what do you have that is valuable enough to trade for drugs except your ass?"

He had a point.

"Besides," Michael said. "I thought you wanted me to help you get out of here."

And match.

Alex sighed. Rubbed his eyes. God, he felt like shit. At least it'd calmed down a bit. For now. "What do we do?" he asked.

"We've got to stop fighting each other," Michael answered. "I know you don't like me. And you're not my favorite person, either, but if we're going to have a chance at surviving, we need to call a truce. And you need to just relax. Let whatever your body is going through go through it. If you fight it, if you get yourself worked up, it's going to make it worse."

"Like you know."

"First hand, no. But Lincoln did this a couple times. After he turned eighteen, the state let him take over care for me. And he did different stuff to unwind. Got addicted. His girlfriend convinced him to get off them, but he didn't want to go to a clinic or anything. And then Vee was too busy to stick around, so I was the one taking care of him." He licked his lips. "You feel like you're going to die without the drugs. But you're not. It's just your brain used to how it feels on it. But you're not going to die. I'm not going to let you. You're not going to let yourself. But you've gotta stop fighting me."

"Fine. I will do my best to stop fighting you, you annoying asshole."

Michael let out a barking laugh. "Okay. That's a start." He crawled over to the bucket and pulled out an orange. When he went back to his spot, Tony snuggled next to him and rested his head against
"We stay here all day?" Tony asked, gazing up at Michael with a look of adoration on his face.

"You can go out if you want," Michael said. He peeled the skin off the orange, placing the pieces in a neat pile next to him. "You don't have to stay here. But Alex needs time to rest, and I'm not leaving him alone."

"I'm right here."

"I'm aware of that. I'm just telling him the plans."

Alex snorted. Stretched out on the mattress again. The shaking was coming back, and he didn't feel as if he could support himself. "Some plan."

"I'm going to need a pen. Marker of some kind. And paper, I guess. To start sketching the, um, the uh prison." Michael yawned hugely. Yawning again, he broke off a section of the orange and passed it to Tony. "¿Puede usted conseguirme una pluma? ¿Sin usar el sexo?"

Tony nodded. "Si." He rose. Stretched his back. Then he went to the bucket and pulled out another shirt.

Alex winced as again he was treated to a view of the skinny chest. He was so young. Yes, his face was young, but so was Michael's. When the body was young, it was different.

"How old are you?" he asked once Tony had pulled his new shirt on.

Tony frowned at him. "Um. Sixteen."

"Sixteen?"

His cheeks darkened. "Si."

"Tell the truth," Michael said.

"I sixteen." He turned back to Michael. "Sixteen."

"Tony."

He stomped to the door. "Sixteen soon," he said. Then he ripped open the door and stormed out.

"Fantastic," Alex groaned. "He's fucking fifteen years old."

"At least he's not crawling all over you," Michael said. He stretched out on his side. "He's got a huge crush on me. I'm not quite sure how to discourage him."

"Feeding him orange slices probably isn't the best way to go about it."

"Jealous?"

Alex held out his hand, which were shaking violently. "They looked good. When not being thrown at my head."

Michael snorted. Scooted over to Alex, across the mattress, with the orange in one hand. He pulled a section off. Handed it to Alex.
He took it with a shaking hand. Brought it to his mouth.

The orange flavor burst on Alex's tongue. It washed away the sour in his mouth. Slid down his throat. It even made it easier to breathe.

"Tastes almost like freedom, huh?"

He wanted to agree, but just rolled his eyes at Michael instead. "I just hope I keep it down."

"We have a bucket if you want to puke."

"Maybe you should finish emptying it."

Michael pulled off another section and handed it to Alex. Then he set the orange aside and started pulling things from the bucket. There were clothes, blankets, and tons of packaged food. "Looks like we don't have to leave here for quite some time. We've got tons of provisions."

"The kid must be fantastic in the sack," Alex couldn't help saying.

Michael threw him a look. Then he placed the now empty bucket at the head of Alex's bed. "He's fifteen. He shouldn't have to do any of this. He shouldn't be here." He stretched out on his stomach on his mattress. Pulled another orange section off and popped it in his mouth.

"It's not like fifteen year olds never have sex."

"Having sex at fifteen is one thing. Trading sexual favors to survive in a federal prison is another." He yawned. Then he picked up one of the orange peels and started at it, brooding. "He shouldn't be here. Why don't they have a juvenile penitentiary here?"

"They do, in Panama City. We're not there anymore. We're in Sona. Different province. He was probably picked up here and there's no juvenile prison close enough."

"That's stupid. Why are we here? There are prisons in Panama City, aren't there?"

Alex sighed. "That is a good question. And I have no answer for that." A shudder went through is body. Hard. And he couldn't stop. "Sh.. shit."

"Just breathe." Michael dropped the orange peel and moved closer to Alex. "In through your nose. Out through your mouth. You know how."

"Hurts." Pain shot through his stomach. Cramped it in tight knots. He curled into a ball, groaning. Michael put his hand on Alex's arm. "What can I do?" he asked anxiously.

Alex tried to laugh, but it just came out as another groan. "You could get me drugs."

"Besides that."

"I don't know. What did you do for Lincoln?"

Michael shook his head helplessly. "Read. Sometimes I'd sing. Or just talk. I don't know. There isn't much to do."

Alex squeezed his eyes shut as another wave of pain washed over him. "You sing?" he asked, throat tight."
"A little. Not very well."

"Well. Sing."

Michael laughed. "What?" he asked breathlessly.

"Distract me. Sing."

Michael's cheeks colored bright red. He dropped his hand away from Alex's arm and rubbed his forehead. "I don't know what to sing. I mean... I can't."

If he could only stop shaking, he might be able to manage the pain. But the tremors wouldn't stop. He felt as if his body were trying to shake itself apart. And the pain... his stomach, his head. Even his heart, pounding much too fast. It was too much for him.

"What d-did L-Lincoln mean. I k-killed your father?" he finally asked, needing the distraction.

Michael sighed. "There was a man with us the day you caught us at Bolshoi Booze. You shot him. It was our father."

Alex grabbed a blanket and pulled it over him. He wasn't cold, but maybe if he wrapped himself the shaking would be easier to deal with. "I didn't know."

"That wouldn't have stopped you. If you did know, I mean."

"No. Probably not."

Michael looked at him. "Why didn't you just shoot us back in the elevator? We had guns on you. It would have been over then."

He licked his lips and answered, "The Company hadn't contacted m-me yet. It wasn't until later. When you faked your death. Very soon before that they called me. Said they knew about Shales. Then they told me what they wanted from me." He sighed. "And it was so much fun before they got involved."

"It was, wasn't it?" Michael gave him a thousand-watt grin.

He couldn't help but return it. There was something infectious about that smile. And he was so tired. Hatred, anger... it took up too much energy. "I wish..." But regret took too much energy, too.

Michael sighed. Lay his head in the pillow of his arms. "Yeah. Me, too." He closed his eyes, his long lashes making shadows on his cheeks.

Alex closed his eyes, too. He was too keyed up to sleep--his heart was pounding and he couldn't sleep for the shaking anyway--but he could try. Or at least just try to relax.

Except the very air was oppressive and his joints screamed.

He heard Michael take a deep breath. Alex braced himself for another question or comment. Something he would have to pay attention to and answer.

"Yesterday," Michael said, hardly more than a whisper, barely the hint of a tune. "All my troubles seemed so far away. Now it seems as though they're here to stay. Oh I believe. In yesterday."

He had a nice voice. Soothing. In tune. And deep with something... clear. Poignant.
"Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be. There's a shadow hanging over me. Oh yesterday came suddenly. Why she had to..." His voice caught. Clogged.

"Michael..."

"It's okay. Just, you know. Wrong song." He licked his lips. "Hello darkness my old friend."

"Not better."

Blue eyes opened and rested on his face. "No?"

"It's kind of depressing, don't you think?"

"Fits the mood. And it's pretty."

"I guess."

"Just close your eyes, Alex. And remember to breathe."

He did as Michael said. As he did, Michael began singing again, softly. The words seemed to dance over Alex's skin, the tune reach in and soothe his frazzled nerves. It wasn't perfect. It wasn't painless. But, for a moment, it was peace.
Alex continued to shake as if he were going to fly apart for the rest of the day. He stopped complaining. Stopped talking. Stopped making any sounds except for the occasional bit off moan. He would squeezed his eyes shut, but not sleep. Couldn't sleep, Michael figured, because of the shaking and the rapid pace of his heart.

Michael was afraid to leave him. Even barring the fact that he was all but terrified to go outside, he was afraid of what would happen to Alex if he left. What if he stopped breathing? What if he threw up on himself? What if he needed to go to the bathroom and couldn't get there? What if...

So Michael stayed. He stayed in the room through lunch. He paced the small space. Stretched his back, his legs and arms the best he could. He counted to four thousand thirteen in primes and would have gone on if Alex hadn't gone through an particularly harsh bought of tremors. Once Alex had calmed back down, Michael had settled back and began squaring two as far as he could.

He was bored. Anxious. And, worst of all, he was completely and utterly helpless.

Hours past. Tony returned from his wandering with a pen. Then he settled next to Michael, entertaining himself by tossing an orange like a ball.

Michael wondered what he did around here, besides trade sex for things he needed. He wondered if there was anything to do around here except sit around and hope no one killed you.

A loud tone sounded out in the hall.

Tony picked his head up. Tugged on Michael's sleeve. "Come. Is dinner. We eat."

Michael shook his head. "I'd rather not. I'm safer here."

"No, is okay." He switched into Spanish as he said, "You fought Alejandro and won. You're still property, but they won't go after you like that anymore. Not now."

"I'd rather it not be ever."

Tony shrugged. "You're too pretty. Too new. Maybe in a few years you'll get high enough not to have to worry, but right now, you're fresh meat. Pretty fresh meat. You'll be courted."

"I hate prison."

"Who doesn't?"

Michael rubbed his head. "I'm fine here. You get dinner. I'll stay."

Tony sighed and shook his head. His dark eyes rolled. He pushed himself to his feet and went over to Alex. "Senor. Tell him is no good stay here. Should go. Get food." He put his hand on Alex's shoulder. Shook. "Tell him."

Alex moaned. Rolled over. When he sat up, he clutched his blanket around him tightly.

He looked awful. Gaunt, pale. Hollow eyed. Every bit of him was drawn tight with pain. Sweat rolled down his face, plastered his hair to his head.

"He's right," Alex croaked hoarsely. "You'll go crazy in here. Go out."
Michael shook his head. "No. I don't want to."
"You'll be fine. Trust me."

He snorted.

That drew and actual smile from Alex. Well. Something of a smile. "You haven't gotten me out yet. I still need you alive."

"True." He rubbed his forehead. "I'm scared."

"I know. But you can't stay in here forever. And if you stay today, it'll be easier to stay tomorrow. And even easier the next day. And then, it'll be a snap to wait here until I'm well enough to go out. And then you will be dependent on me. Is that what you want?"

"Isn't that what you want?"

"You know it isn't. I want you to get me the fuck out of here. And if you're too afraid to walk around this place without me, that's not going to happen and you know it. So get your ass out of this closet and get your goddamn dinner."

Michael's lips quirked. "I love it when you sweet talk me."

"Bring me back something."

"Yes, master." He rose. Tugged his shirt down. Ran a hand over his head. Pulled his sleeves over his hands. "Okay."

"The shiv." Alex picked it up from the floor and passed it to Michael. "Just in case."

"Right." He shoved it in his back pocket. "Okay. Don't, uh. Don't, like, die. Or anything."

Alex nodded. Shuddered. "I'll try not to. Go."

Michael nodded again. Tugged his sleeves. Turned and followed Tony out the door.

It was like breakfast all over again, just that morning, a lifetime ago. Men streaming through the hall, heading towards one place. The sharp smell of something fried in the air, mingling with unpleasant smells that clung to the walls. Everything was slower now. Movement. Feet shuffled. Not as frantic. The day had beaten them all down.

Men looked at him as he and Tony moved towards the mess hall. No one said anything to him, though, although the looks were appraising. Not just a pretty face anymore, he guessed. He'd killed. He'd killed a man.


Reeling, he reached out. Clamped onto Tony.

"What's wrong?" Tony turned. Put his hands on Michael's hips. "You okay?"

He swallowed. Tightened his hands on Tony's shoulders. "I'm okay. Just... I'm okay."

"You sure?"
"Yeah. I'm good. Thanks." He took a deep breath and stepped away. "Let's get food."

"You need food. You're sick because you were inside all day. We'll get food and go outside, okay?"

Michael nodded, grateful that Tony wasn't speaking either too fast nor using words that were too complicated. His Spanish was okay, but he was exhausted and hungry; words were beginning to go past him.

Tony led him into the mess hall. Together, they pressed through the throng to the food. There was meat, rice, and something that looked like potatoes. Lots of fruit. Things passing for vegetables. Dessert, but it was all being grabbed by huge guys who looked dangerous; Tony didn't even try to approach.

They got enough for the three of them, and then Tony, as promised, led Michael out into the open air. Together, they walked over the dusty, flattened grass to the wall, where they sat down, side by side.

Tony piled his shredded meat on a thick, flakey piece of bread. "You know, Señor isn't so bad when he's sick." He talked with his mouth open, like any teenager without much guidance. After he swallowed, he wiped his mouth on his shirt.

"He's really not so bad anyway." Michael gingerly bit into his own meal; it didn't taste bad, but it wasn't the taste he was worried about. So far, he hadn't gotten sick from eating what could be undercooked or contaminated food, but he was still wary.

Tony snorted. "I think maybe we should keep him drugged. Better for both of us."

"No."

"He's mean to you."

"I'm the reason he's here. He has cause to be angry with me."

The kid frowned at him. "What'd you do?"

Michael took another bite of his dinner. Scooped the rice into his mouth with his fingers, wishing there'd been utensils to go with the plate. "Back in the states, I broke my brother and me out of prison. Alex was assigned to bring me back. But everything got so... messed up." He sighed. "He's a good man. But there's a..." Michael fumbled around for the words in Spanish. Couldn't find them. Settled on, "People say my brother killed a man. But he didn't. They made it look like he did. The people, uh. Threatened Alex. His family. They told him to kill me. I don't think he really wanted to."

He stopped, head aching. His tongue felt stupidly heavy.

"You made it all the way down here from the States?" Tony asked, sounding awed.

"Yes."

"California?"

"No. Illinois."

His eyes practically popped out of their sockets. "Wow. You must be a genius."

Michael shrugged and said, "I guess."

Tony nodded and settled back against the wall. He also moved closer to Michael, so their bodies
He wiped his forehead. The weather was hot and muggy. The sun shone weakly through a thick layer of clouds and the air smelled of rain. It was a day to sit far apart and drink nothing but ice water. A day for swimming. Just, for people not in prison.

"Senor said you're getting him out. You escaping here too?"

"That's the idea. I don't know if it's possible, though." He knocked his head against the wall behind him. "The last time, it took a year of planning. And I had the blueprints. And money. This time?" He shook his head.

Tony nodded. He looked serious. "Here, though, I bet you can bribe the guard."

"I don't have anything to bribe one with."

Tony's look was eloquent.

"No." He rubbed his hand on the dead grass. "I'm not trading my body. There's got to be another way out. A better way out." He frowned. "I just need to see the layout. What everything looks like. And then, hope for a miracle."

Tony shifted. Lay his head on Michael's shoulder. Moved even closer. "Can I come with you? I promise I can make it worth it. Make it really good for you."

He caught Tony's hand before it landed on his crotch. "No. I mean, yes, you can come with us. No, you don't have to... you know."

"But I want to."

His cheeks warmed. "I'm flattered, Tony, really. But no."

"What? You got a girlfriend out there?"

"I did. Sort of," Michael replied, his lips numb.

"You love her?"

"Yes." He swallowed painfully. Tears of pure frustration pressed behind his eyes. "But I need to forget her. If I'm going to get through this, it's better to..."

He broke off. Shook his head.


Michael pushed him away. "Tony, you're the same age as my nephew. A kid."

He snorted. "I haven't been a kid for a long time."

"Yeah." He put his arm around Tony and hugged him. "I know. But, age-wise, you still are. And I wouldn't feel right taking advantage."

"I don't mind."

"I do."
"Hey, gringo!" a hugely muscular man barked. He strode out of the mess hall, carrying what looked to be some kind of pastry. Behind him, beaten, swollen, and limping, was Bellick.

Michael stood and took a half-step forward. He pushed Tony behind him, at least part way. "Yeah?" he said warily, wrapping his hand around the shiv.

The man shoved the pastry at Michael. "This for you. You join me."

He shook his head. "No thank you," he said Spanish.

Relief flashed over the man's face. "I'm Raoul. I want you. Three white boys were brought in yesterday. I've got one." He jerked his head back at Bellick. "I'll take you. The other, too."

"No."

He stepped closer, backing Michael against the wall. "I'll treat you good." He tore a piece off the pastry and pressed it to Michael's lips. "A gringo like you deserves respect."

Sugar glaze brushed onto Michael's lips. He licked them unconsciously. When he opened his mouth to say no again, Raoul pushed the piece into his mouth.

Startled, Michael pulled away, knocking his head against the wall. "I already, uh, I already belong to..."

"Si, I know. The other gringo took you. I'll take care of him, too. You both are good fighters. Not like this whore." He kicked Bellick.

Michael winced. "He was shot the other day."


"I..."

"Think about it. Ask the other. Things can be good for you, or very, very bad. Just think." He pushed the pastry against Michael's chest. Then he grabbed Bellick by the shirt and dragged him away.

The former guard threw a look at Michael as he went. In his eyes was something like hatred and something a lot like desperation.

"I'm sick of this," Michael said. He broke off a chunk of the pastry and handed it to Tony.

"Least he didn't hurt you."

"This time." He shook his head. "I think it's time to go back."

"No, stay. Just for a little bit longer. It's good for you to be in the fresh air, you know that. Stay."

Michael sighed. Closed his eyes. He did feel a little bit better out here, even if all he was doing was sitting down. Being in the closet was... hard. If he closed his eyes and let his mind drift, he got confused. Went back *there*, to the closet his foster father had locked him in all those many years ago. Although, to be honest, he didn't know which was worse: that hell or this.

"What's there to do around here? Besides fighting and sex?"
"Um. Drugs."

"Anything else?"


He heaved another sigh. "I'm going to go crazy." He scratched his arm. "As soon as Alex is better, we need to work on getting out of here. You'll be a big help, Tony. You know where everything is. The weak spots. Maybe when the guards come around. Unguarded places. Something."

"I'll help. Yeah." Tony moved up swiftly and placed a kiss on the corner of Michael's mouth. "But you can't go crazy, okay?"

"I'll do my best." A raindrop plopped on the top of Michael's head. "Ah, shit." He tilted his face back. "Does it ever not rain here?"

"Some days, yes." Tony stood up and held his arms out. "Sometimes, when it rains, I just strip down and let it go all over me. It's better than using the showers sometimes."

"What's wrong with the showers? Rape?"

"Sometimes. But also rats and bugs. You don't always get soap. And sometimes, the toilets back up through the drains. It's disgusting. Rain is better. Sort of."

"It just never ends here, does it?"

"No."

Michael nodded. "We better get in. Keep the food dry. Alex might get hungry."

"Do you think he'd feel better if I sucked him off?" Tony asked.

"No," Michael said heatedly. "Don't touch him."

Tony gave him a wide eyed look.

"It's just... he's sick. All focused on being in pain and stuff. He'd probably just hit you. Or get sick all over you. You don't want that. And it'd just be bad. You know?"


"Tony, I just don't think he'd want it. He's married. Or was. And sick."


Michael looked at Tony. Then he tilted his head up to the sky, letting the rain splatter on his face. "Yeah," he said. "It is."

* * *

Michael was afraid of the dark.

No. Scratch that.

He was afraid of the dark in the closet.
It wasn't nothing he said. When Alex had suggested they try to get some sleep and turned off the light, Michael hadn't said a word. He didn't complain as he lay on his mattress scant inches from Alex, stiff and breathing quickly. He said nothing as he drifted to an uneasy sleep, tossed from side to side and muttering under his breath. And he didn't complain when he cried out and began struggling against an unknown opponent some time later.

Alex, who couldn't sleep anyway, reached out and put his hand on Michael's shoulder. Pushed. "Michael."

He cringed, pulling away. He exhaled hard, eyes flying open. When his eyes caught Alex, he calmed. Moved back to his original position. Lay silent, gazing sightlessly upward.

"You okay?"

Michael nodded. Then he shook his head. His breathing sped up. Became loud. Labored. Frantic. Alex pushed himself up. "What's wrong?"

"It's...it's...it's...it's too dark," Michael gasped. He sat up, hyperventilating. "I c-can't b-breathe."

"Put your head between your legs," Alex said. He pushed Michael's head down and stood. Reaching up, he pulled the cord on the light.

Even with the sock over it, it was too bright. Wincing, he pulled another sock from the bag and rolled it over. The room dimmed to a soft glow.

Michael was still struggling to breathe. Alex crouched besides him and put his hand on Michael's back.

"Just concentrate on breathing. In and out. You're okay. Safe."

"No."

"Yes, you are. Anyone comes for you, I've got your back. You know that," he said, trying to ignore the steady trembling all over his body. The twisting of his stomach. The splitting headache and the way his legs could barely support him. "Just relax." He rubbed Michael's back.

Gradually, his breathing slowed. The tight muscles in Michael's back and neck relaxed.

"I'm sorry," Michael said when he was calm. "I didn't mean to wake you."

Alex lay back down, pulling the blanket around him. "You didn't."

He nodded. Closed his eyes and stretched on the mattress next to the dead-to-the-world Tony. Heaved a deep sigh.

Alex rolled onto his side. Faced Michael. The dim light was kind to the other man. It muted the bruises and cuts that decorated his face. The dark circles underneath his eyes. The light lightly kissed his face. Brought back the glow he'd had when he and Tony had stumbled in after dinner, soaked through, covered in mud, and grinning like fools.

"We, uh, got in a mud fight," Michael had confessed at Alex's raised eyebrow.

"Ah." Because he didn't know what else to say. There really was nothing. The two boys had gone out into the fresh air, had fun, while Alex was stuck in a closet dealing with the consequences of his addiction.
Now the happiness was gone. Every part of Michael was drawn tight. His face was creased with worry. Terror.

Alex wanted to make the terror and tension go away. Get him to relax. Even laugh.

Funny. Just twenty-four hours ago he wouldn't have cared. Had wanted to make Michael suffer for all he'd done. And Michael had seemed willing to return the favor.

And then...

Michael didn't have to care for Alex the way he did. Needn't have hidden him away. Made him comfortable. He could have let Alex stay in his sweat and vomit soaked clothes. Forced him to feed himself. To get his own food from the mess hall. Fend for his own life.

But he hadn't. Michael had shown kindness. Concern. Helped Alex, much more than he deserved. He'd done it because the fucking asshole was a good man. Damn him.

"I saw Bellick," Michael said suddenly.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. That man who gave me the pastry? He had him. All beaten and limping. I saw him when I got here, too. Barely recognizable." He licked his lips. "Raped."

Alex nodded. "He was weak."

"That's not fair." Michael opened his eyes.

"You want to whine about fair?" Alex sneered. Are we somehow receiving special treatment around here that makes Bellick's treatment unfair?"

He shook his head, wordless.

"We have fought for every damn thing we have. The space. The clothes. The food. The fact we haven't been raped. We have fought tooth and nail and won. He didn't. End of story. That's life. Fair? I don't give a fuck about fair. I want to survive."

Michael blew a puff of air out. "Yeah. I guess."

"Put him out of your mind, Michael. He never did you any favors anyway."

Michael still looked troubled. "Raoul said he wanted all three of us. Like we were a collection or something." He bit his thumb.

"So you said before. We'll just have to find a way to say no without making an enemy."

"I don't know if we can take him. He's big. Strong."

"We're going to have to. I refuse to become someone's property. And your ass is min, so..."

He was pleased when it drew a laugh from Michael. "Right. How could I forget. You are my lord and master."

"I should make you kiss my feet."
Michael propped himself on his elbows. Looked down at Alex's feet. Wrinkled his nose. "No thank you. They look filthy."

Alex put his foot on Michael's leg. Shoved. "Bad puppy."

That got another laugh. "You're weird."

"It's the drugs. They make me weird. I'm completely normal otherwise."

"Intense. Brilliant. Driven. Romantic," Michael said. "You're right. In all my research on you, I never came across anyone saying you were weird."

"Who told you I was all that?"

Michael shrugged. "I read some of it in your performance reviews. Pam said the last." His cheeks colored. "Sorry. You're wife. Ex."

Alex's mood soured. "Pam is off limits for discussion."

"Okay." Michael rolled onto his stomach. Pillowed his head on his arms. "Tony asked me if you'd feel better if he gave you a blow job."

"Oh?"

"I hope you don't mind that I answered for you." He lifted his head and looked at Alex. "I said no."

"Well, you do continually fend off his advances. You probably don't know how to say anything else to him."

"You think I should say yes?"

"You're very tense. It might help."

He rolled his eyes. "He's fifteen years old. The same age as L.J. It's just wrong."

"I notice you're not protesting because of his gender."

"The F.B.I.'s great mind at work."

Alex snorted. "I didn't get the job for my looks, you know."

"I guess not."

"So," Alex said, rolling onto his back. "Are we talking college experimentation, prison wolf blues, passing interest, or utter flexibility?"

Michael shrugged and replied, "I guess the last. I've never really cared one way or the other. Sex is just a means to an end anyway."

That caught his interest full force. Alex rolled back onto his side and propped himself up. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"People mistake sex for intimacy. They think knowing someone's body means you know them. Give them that, and they stop pressing to know you better. They think you already do."

Alex frowned. "You use sex to keep people at a distance?"
"It works," Michael said carelessly.

"But why?"

"Asks the man drugging himself into a stupor to keep the world at bay."

"Because I couldn't handle what I did," Alex said, still trying to wrap his mind around what Michael was saying. "I couldn't handle what it said about me. Because the guilt made me lose control and I didn't want to hurt those I love. Because I've spent the last year in utter fear of... everything. That's why I drugged myself. But, before that, all my life. I love. I had Pam. I was open to her. She knew me, all the way in."

Michael arched an eyebrow. "Except the darkness in you."

"Well. We all keep our dark parts hidden, even from those we love."

Michael nodded. "I'm all darkness."

Dumbstruck, Alex could only look at Michael's eerily serene face. Bits and pieces of what he knew of the man flashed through his mind. His psychological profile. The thoughts of the psychologist who'd treated him.

Low self-worth.

High empathy.

Little sense of self.

Low Latent Inhibition.

So much darkness all around him, and Michael just absorbed it all. Bled from his soul for the pain. Mistook the outer for the inner. Thought himself evil when, in so many ways, he was the most noble man in Alex's acquaintance.

"No one is all darkness."

"T-Bag."

"Forget him," Alex said sharply. "He can't hurt you here."

Michael rolled to his side. Faced Alex. "He'll show up. Why wouldn't he? You, me, and Bellick all are."

"If he does, I won't let him near you."

"You're going to protect me."

"I am your lord and master. And your ass does belong to me, so..."

Michael smiled sleepily. "That's right. It is."

"If you need, I'm sure we can arrange to have that fact tattooed somewhere. You've got to have some space somewhere."

He yawned. "No. I won't forget again." Another yawn cracked his jaw.
"Sleep. You need it."

"So do you."

He shook his head. "I'm fine. I'll rest. Eventually sleep. Just... you sleep."

Michael nodded and closed his eyes. Alex watched as his face gradually relaxed. His breathing evened. And, finally, sleep claimed him.

Alex sighed. Careful not to wake him, Alex reached out and placed his hand on Michael's stomach. Felt the gentle rise and fall as he breathed. Heaved a sigh of his own.

Damn. He was beginning to like the guy.

* * *

"Mmmmm," someone sighed in Michael's ear. Warm breath puffed against his skin, panting.

Michael swam to consciousness. When he opened his eyes, he couldn't remember where he was. His body was soft, warm. Comfortable. Head muzzy, the last of a dream involving the beach and a boat and someone rubbing his back slipping back to the ether. Leaving him in a drab, tiny room with no air. And...

"Ah. Michael!"

Warm wetness spread out against Michael's hip. He blinked and looked down.

Tony was spooned against him, one leg slung over Michael's. His hips were still moving languidly against Michael, where he was rubbing himself off. Eyes closed tight, fingers dug into Michael's arm. Asleep, or so Michael hoped.

His face burned hotly. He shifted away from Tony, ignoring the way he clutched at Michael. Looked over at Alex to see if he'd seen what happened.

Alex was gone. His blanket was missing too.

Michael sat up.

A quick glance around told him that some of their food was missing, too. All of the bananas and the last orange in addition to half of the protein bars and a bag of trail mix.

"Tony." Michael shook the kid. "Tony, wake up."

Dark brown eyes fluttered open. Blinked at him. "Good morning." He stretched. "I had a good dream."

"Yeah, do you know were Alex is?"

He pushed himself up. "Maybe he's in the bathroom."

"He took his blanket. Food. He's getting drugs. Where would he get drugs?"

"Carlos." He stood. "I'll take you to him. But, why bother? If he wants to do drugs, then who cares? Let him."

"No." Michael shoved his feet back into his shoes. Pushed open the door and pulled Tony with him. "Show me."
Tony sighed and began leading him through the maze of halls.

It was early morning. Before the alarm, but there were still inmates up. Roaming. Talking. They passed the shower. Water, soap smell floated out. Grunting. Sex sounds. And around another corner, two men, one on his hands and knees. Face screwed up as another man pounded into him, nails dug into his back, digging. Blood drawn.

Michael averted his eyes. Tried not to care. Didn't even know if it was rape or sex or what, but it disturbed him. The violence. Brutality of the movements. The utter abandon, escape, release on both their faces, even the bottom. The harsh pants, the bitten moans. No matter what was going on, for a moment, both of them had escaped their prisons. Were finding relief, forgetfulness in the flesh.

He recognized where they were. They were heading back to their original spot. Part of the layout of the prison locked into Michael's head. He still wanted to draw it, to help him out, but he had it. It was part of him now.

Stronger now that he didn't have to rely on Tony, Michael pushed ahead. He rounded a corner just in time to see Alex slipping a bag of coke into his pocket. He was standing in front of another man, about medium height, dark hair, hazel eyes. The blanket and food were in the arms of another man standing next to the drug dealer.

"Next time, I want cigarettes and more fruit. You keep it coming, and I keep the drugs coming."

Michael reached them. "No, thank you," he said. "He won't be needing any more. Come on, Alex."

Alex turned. His eyes were burning brightly, fiery embers in his pale, gaunt face. "Back off," he growled.

"No. Give me the drugs."

"I've got a no return policy. He made the deal. I'm not giving anything back."

"That's fine," Michael assured him. "Enjoy it. But don't deal with him again."

"If he's got the goods..."

"No," Michael shook his head sharply. "You won't deal with him. You deal with me, okay? Whatever he offers you, I'll do you better."

"Michael, don't you..."

Michael turned. Backhanded him so hard that Alex stumbled back, fell against the wall. "Shut up!"

When he turned, the drug dealer and his gang had smiles on their face. The dealer looked very much like he was trying not to laugh.

"You know, beautiful, I see you come in the other day. See him rescue you. Pull you out of the rain, out from under the chichi out there. See you do what he says. Think you're his. Now? I not so sure."

"Things change. Don't deal with him anymore."

The dealer stepped closer to Michael. Their bodies were scant inches apart. "What will you do for me that's more valuable than what he trades?" he asked. Eyes scanned over Michael's face, almost tangible. He lifted his thumb and traced over Michael's lips.

Heart pounding in his temples, Michael flicked his tongue out. Moistened the thumb. Then stepped
back. "He comes to you, you find me. We'll deal."

The morning alarm sounded.

"I'm Carlos," he shook Michael's hand. Pulled away. "Be seeing you, beautiful." He pushed past Michael. The rest of the gang followed, three men, all brushing against Michael as they went, all allowing their hands to brush against his body.

Michael just let them. Stood there, rage, frustration, helplessness seething inside him. His head spun. His skin burned. His vision wavered.

"Michael," Tony said tentatively next to him. "Breakfast."

"Go. Get for all of us. I need to talk to Alex."

"But..."

"Go," he snapped.

Feet pounded away.

"You fucking shithead," Alex said. He shoved Michael.

Michael turned. Grabbed Alex by the shirt and slammed him back against the wall. "Shut up. Shut up!" He slammed Alex back again. "You fucking moron! What the hell are you thinking? Are you trying to kill yourself?" He reached into Alex's pocket and pulled out the coke. Then he shoved it into his own pocket.

"It's none of your business what I do."

"Yes, it is! We are in this together, Alex, whether you like it or not. We have to depend on each other to survive. Just to survive. Not to mention getting out of here. We need each other."

"I don't need anyone."

Michael grunted. Took Alex by the collar and dragged him down the hall.

Alex struggled with each step. Dragged his feet, cursed and ranted. But he was too weak to fight properly. Too exhausted to break away, so he had to follow as Michael dragged him.

They reached the crowded mess hall. Michael scanned quickly, then shoved Alex in the direction of the men he sought.

"There," he said. "Look. Look at Bellick, on the floor at the feet of his master. Is that what you want?"

Alex cleared his throat. Michael could feel his muscles trembling under his hands, vibrating underneath his skin.

"That won't happen to me," he said. Uncertainty tinged his voice.

"You are sick. You are weak. Raoul will take you. He will rape you. Beat you. Look what he's done to Bellick. That will be you."

"No. If I take the coke... get myself back to normal..."
"It won't get you to normal. It'll kill you."

Alex snorted. "Don't be melodramatic."

"I'm not kidding. You're not used it, and God knows what it's being cut with. You'll be soaring. Vulnerable. And the vultures here will swoop in on you. You will never leave."

"I'll never leave anyway."

Michael sighed. Rested his head against the back of Alex's. "I am not going to let you die."

"You might not have a choice."

"I will not let you die."

Tony appeared from the crowd, his arms full of food. "Breakfast. Senor, I get you, uh, tortilla. Not greasy. Not make you throw up. And coffee." He carefully handed Alex a cup. "And they have carimañola. Is Sunday. We have church."

Michael took some of the food from Tony. "Let's go back to the closet."

"I go to church," Tony said again. "You come?"

"Not today, Tony. Can we get the food back and then you can go?"

"Si."

Alex sipped the coffee. Snorted. "This is bad," he said. "They actually have church services here?"

Tony nodded as he chewed on his carimañola. "Every Sunday. You Catholic, Senor?"

"No. I'm... nothing. Damned."

Tony glanced over at Michael, looking like he agreed.

Michael said nothing. He was feeling ill. On shaky ground. Under any other circumstances, he might have gone to church with Tony. He needed the comfort of ritual. Prayer. Faith. Faith, that had kept him focused for so long. That had defined his word. Love for a brother, faith that he'd persevere. Rescue Lincoln. Get him to safety.

And he had. Lincoln was free. Exonerated. It was over.

Except, now Michael was trapped. And he needed to find that faith again.

But he couldn't go. Couldn't leave Alex alone.

They got back to the closet. Alex lay down on his empty mattress. Tony and Michael ate breakfast, and then Tony went off to church.

"You should eat," Michael said when Tony was gone.

"I'm not hungry."

"Eat. Or I will force the food down your throat."

Alex sat up. Grabbed a tortilla and tore off a bite.
"What happened?"

He didn't answer.

"You were fine last night. I thought you got that... You can't do drugs, Alex."

"Save me your speeches. You've made your point, Michael."

"Have I?"

Despairing eyes met his. Alex nodded. "I won't..." He stopped talking. Looked away. There was a dark, ugly bruise on his cheek where Michael had hit him.

Shame suffused Michael. "I'm sorry," he breathed.

"I'm the one that fucked up. You were within your rights. I put us in danger." He pulled his knees to his chest and pressed his head against them. "I'm in so much pain. I want to die. Just to stop it."

"What can I do?"

"Give me the fucking drugs."

"Besides that."

Alex shook his head. Looked back up at Michael. His face was a portrait of despair. "Nothing. There's nothing you can do."

He hesitated. His chest hurt. Breathing was hard.

Michael swallowed. Crawled off his mattress and onto Alex's. Hesitated again, then put his arm around Alex. Held him.

Alex let out a shuddering breath. Collapsed against Michael. He was so tense. Trembling out of his control. Obviously exhausted from the way he lay heavily against Michael's body, letting Michael take the whole of his weight.

"We're going to get through this," Michael whispered. "I promise I will get you through this."

Alex just sighed. "I'm so tired. I haven't slept for over a year."

"Now's as good a time as any."

He snorted. "I got maybe a half an hour last night. Everything hurts so much." He sighed again.

"Lie down." Michael pulled Alex down to the mattress and spooned behind him. Reaching to his mattress, he grabbed the blanket and stuffed it under Alex's head as a pillow. "Just close your eyes. Relax."

"I can't."

"Just breathe." He stroked down Alex's arm. Placed a hand on his stomach and rubbed small circles.

"It hurts even to breathe. Everything hurts."

"Hurts how?"

"Like pain, you fucking moron."
Michael sighed and pushed Alex until he was lying on his stomach. "I really hope the type of pain you're talking about isn't skin sensitivity, or this will make everything worse." He straddled Alex's hips. Pressed the heels of his hands into Alex's back and massaged with small, firm circles.

Alex groaned. Pressed his forehead into the mattress. His muscles were drawn tight, but as Michael kneaded them, they seemed to relax. At least a bit.

His stomach growled, but he ignored it. Ignored ache in his legs from straddling Alex. The way the ground still bit in through his knees, even through the mattress. The strain in his arms as he tried not to press too hard into Alex's rock hard muscles. Tried not to bruise him. To hurt him.

Like he had earlier.

A wave of nausea washed over Michael. He closed his eyes and swallowed hard.

Things were bad enough in here. He didn't need to go attacking his ally. One of the only people he could trust, even as little as he could trust him.

Worse. He didn't need to find it exciting. Didn't need to feel that surge of power when he'd hit Alex in front of Carlos. A thrill when he'd been dragging Alex down the hall. A reversal of the past two days. The past few weeks.

He didn't need that. He wasn't like. He was a good person. Kind. Manipulative, not ruthless. Caring, not callous.

So, why had hurting Alex gotten him so... high?

And now he was crashing. Which was, perhaps, an unfortunate metaphor, considering how Alex was suffering.

Which reminded him. He still had to get rid of the cocaine.

"Distract me?" Alex asked.

"This isn't distraction enough?"

"Not if I want to fall asleep. I'm exhausted. I need something to focus my mind on. It's too... busy."

Michael cleared his throat. "Um. Tony rubbed himself off on me this morning."

Alex snorted. "Really?"

"Yeah. I woke up to him moaning my name. Rubbing himself against my hip. I guess he was asleep, but still. It was embarrassing."

"You should have rolled over and taken him."

"You're really pushing me to take advantage of a kid. I find this disturbing."

"You said that you use sex to keep people at a distance."

"Yeah, but all he wants from me is sex. If I slept with him, it wouldn't end. He'd just keep coming back."

Alex yawned. "You really think all he wants is sex? Because you're giving him everything he wants but."
"I don't know what you mean."

"You're so nice to him. You're probably the one person around here who isn't using him for sex. You're talking with him. Playing with him. Giving him emotional comfort. You're getting emotionally involved."

"It's okay for me to give emotional comfort. It's when they try to get back to me. That's when things get dangerous."

Alex snorted. "I've never heard of anyone being in danger by letting people get too close. You're paranoid."

"You don't know anything about me. My life."

"I know it was crap. I know you have a brother who'd do anything for you."

"So you know that everyone's left me."

Alex sighed. "Everyone has issues, Michael. People who leave. My father beat the crap out of me every day when I was growing up. I still found Pam. Still let her in."

Michael sighed. Pressed harder into the rock hard muscles in Alex's lower back. "Then you're lucky."

"No one is all darkness."

He squeezed his eyes shut. "I was turned on. When I hit you. Pulled you around. I was dizzy with it. I..."

Alex moved suddenly, taking him by surprise. He flipped Michael over and pinned him down.

Michael gasped. Air was knocked from his lungs. He moved, trying to throw Alex off, but Alex had him by the arms. Slammed his wrists back to the mattress. Pressed Michael's body down, holding him with his weight.

"Alex, I'm sorry," he panted. "I..."

His words died as Alex bent down. Bit his lip, hard. Pain blossomed. "Do you think," Alex whispered, lowering his mouth next to Michael's ear, "that you're the only one getting off on this fucked up dynamic we've been playing at?"

Michael's mouth went dry. He blinked up at Alex. His heart was pounding. Breath picked up.

Alex bit Michael's ear. His neck. Transferred his grip on Michael's right wrist so he could hold both in one hand. Slipped his free hand underneath Michael's shirt. Drew his nails over Michael's nipple. Down his chest.

A strangled moan was wrenched from Michael's throat.

"You know the thing about sex, Michael, is you're right. It doesn't equate intimacy." He thumbed the button of Michael's pants open. Scratched down his pelvis. Underneath his underwear. Through pubic hair. "Of course, if there is no intimacy, it's crap. Nothing. Can never reach a stage beyond the mildly pleasant. Great sex? You've never had it, boy."

He swallowed. Bucked his hips up, pressing into Alex's hand. Those torturous nails. The answering hardness.
"Michael?"

He wanted an answer. Michael just wanted release. Wanted more.


Tears filled Michael's eyes. Dizzy, lungs tight. And yet, he got harder.

"Answer me."

"No," Michael whispered. "Never."


"Please," he begged mindlessly. He pressed his hips into Alex, moving them, trying to get Alex's hand on him to move. To stroke. To do anything but pinch and hurt and...

Alex rested his forehead against Michael's. Stopped the pinching and took Michael in hand. Stroked, fast. Rough. Tugged and the pain made his head spin, but, God it felt so good. And he'd never felt this good, and never knew pain could make his heart contract and stomach twist and heat to pool in this groin.

And Alex was panting, riding himself into Michael's thigh. His tongue licked Michael's upper lip. Teeth bit into his bottom.

Michael opened his mouth. And Alex pressed his against Michael's, and he was just breathing so hard, and his tongue was in Michael's and hand was stroking and pulling and tugging and...

"Ah, shit!" Michael swore. His back arched and he just exploded in Alex's hand. Just... exploded.

He flew. For how long, he didn't know. Head swam, body buzzed. Every nerve tingled. Alive.

When he came back to himself, he rolled onto his side. His body was heavy. Languid. He blinked at Alex.

Alex had the bag of cocaine.

Dizzy and heavy, Michael pushed himself up. Lunged at him.

Alex jerked away, but he was too slow. Michael jabbed his elbow into Alex's throat. Grabbed the bag when Alex dropped it, gasping and wheezing.

"Was it good for you?" Michael spat at him.

Alex coughed. Curled into a ball.

Disgusted, shamed, Michael pushed himself away and left the room.
Chapter 4

Alex lay on the floor, gasping for air through a bruised windpipe long after Michael left. Even after it became easier to breath, he continued to lie there. He felt sick, but this time, it wasn't because of the withdrawal.

He'd seduced Michael. Fuck. He'd thrown himself on the kid. And Michael had been receptive. More than. He'd been... hot and perfect and needy. Breathing out little moans as Alex had worked him, pushed him through pain into pleasure and, finally, over the edge and...

And then Alex had truly fucked him.

Or, in actuality, fucked himself.

It wasn't that he didn't understand Michael's logic. It wasn't that he didn't agree with it. He was emerging from the drug-induced stupor he'd put himself into and adding different drugs to his system was tantamount to suicide. Especially since, as Michael pointed out, he didn't know what the drugs were cut with.

Alex got it. He did.

But he needed something so badly.

And now he'd screwed things up. He and Michael were finally finding some kind of common ground. And Alex had gotten to scratch that itch... that one he'd never known he had until...

Until he spent last night, watching Michael sleep. Seeing that clever, beautiful face relaxed. Trusting. Thought about all Michael had done for him since getting here. Watched that stupid slip of a street urchin snuggle against Alex's property, *his* convict, *his* criminal mastermind.

Just like Alex hadn't want anyone else to catch Michael, now he didn't want anyone else touching him.

Of course, it was him against the hundreds of other guys in here. And, sooner or later, it was going to happen. To Michael or to him.

Unless they got out.

His stomach cramped. He groaned and curled into a tighter ball. Sweat broke out over his forehead, over his back, arms. In agony, Alex curled into a tight ball. Pressed his back against the wall and tried to breathe.

He hadn't intended to steal the coke. Not when he started out. He'd gone after Michael out of genuine need. Arousal. And a desire to reassert who was really in charge, at least inside this room.

And then, after, Michael had been sort of cresting on his orgasm. And Alex had been soaking it up until he'd noticed the bag of coke hanging out of his pocket. There'd only been one thing for him to do.

Of course, now Michael thought he'd been used. And not in the way he had been used (thoroughly and completely in a way they'd both loved). He thought...

Fuck.
The pain slowly fades, leaving him empty. Hollow. Sweat and semen-sticky, a fine grit of dirt everywhere. Between his teeth, on his skin, under his nails.

He pushed himself into a sitting position. Picked up the remains of breakfast and tore into it. Three tortillas, a piece of fruit, and the thing Tony called a carimañola, which was some kind of thing stuffed with meat. It wasn't bad.

He ate. Drank more of that flat, metallic tasting water. And then, feeling no less human and still sick and weak, left the room. He had nothing to protect him but his fighting skills and the fact it was Sunday. With any luck, it wouldn't just be Tony at church.

And he was lucky. The halls were nearly empty. Those he passed hardly spared him a glance. Which was good, because his vision wasn't so great. Blurred, eyes sore. He was dizzy, too. He made it halfway down the hall before needing to lean against the wall.

Some kid was there, too. Sitting, shuffling cards.

"Hey," Alex said, making his way up to him. "Where's the shower?"

The kid looked up. Raised an eyebrow. "Down the hall. Take a right. There's no soap or anything. Need to bring your own."

"And where do I get soap?"

"Guards. They supposed to give it, but they usually ask for something in return."

"Like what?"

"What you got?"

He snorted. "What does it look like I've got?"

"That's what I thought." He turned his attention back to the cards.

Alex wiped his mouth. Tried to focus his thoughts. "You got soap?"

"Si."

"I have food. Back at my space. I play you. We both draw. I win, I get soap. You win, food."

The kid looked back up at him. "You in that closet, right? Miguel's old space."

"Yeah."

"High card, I move in."

"There's already three of us," Alex said, shaking his head.

The kid smiled. Held out the deck.

Heart in his throat, Alex pulled off the top card. The kid did the same.

He looked at his card. "Ace's high, chico." Alex flashed the card at the kid. Relief made him sag against the wall.

The kid swore. He stood and cocked his head, leading the way down the hall.
Alex followed. When they turned--to the left--he found himself in a dormitory. A huge open room filled with mattresses, blankets and other signs of life. Home life. Food and changes of clothes. People sleeping, reading, playing cards or dice.

The kid led Alex to a mattress somewhere in the middle of the room. There was a bag at the head, which he reached into. Alex caught a look; in addition to soap, he had a couple towels, a razor, and a toothbrush.

"Here." He shoved it at Alex sullenly.

His hand was shaking violently as he took it. "How about I, uh. I'll bring it back if you let me borrow the towel, too?" His stomach cramped. Grunting, he doubled over.

"You going off drugs or something?"

"Yeah."

He swore. "Give me the soap."

"What?"

"Just give it."

Alex handed it back, face still twisted from the pain.

The kid broke it in half. Handed Alex a part, then passed him the towel. "I'm Arturo. You bring it back. And don't take anything here, okay? It kill you."

"So I'm learning."

Arturo gave him a slight smile. "Careful in the shower, Senor. The one down the hall isn't so bad, but sometimes the rapists come here. Is, uh, mostly, uh." He snapped his fingers, searching for the word. "Young? No. Not muy young or weak. Mostly, we unnoticed, but sometimes." He shrugged. "You can't come here with the pretty gringo, though. He'll bring the others here. I mean to stay."

"We're planning to stay in the closet."

"Good luck, senor. Many want it. You have to fight. Hope you get off drugs fast."

"Yeah. Me, too." He smiled and held up the towel. "Gracias."

"De nada."

Alex clutched the towel to his chest. Held the soap tight in his fist and left the dormitory. Again, he needed to brace himself against the wall to walk straight. The dizziness came in bursts. His stomach churned. Anyone who approached him in the shower would probably get what he was coming to. Although, Alex had no doubt there were those who enjoyed being vomited on.

Running water was audible by the time he made it to the place Arturo had directed him too. Alex took a deep breath and entered.

There was a short antechamber that consisted of a bench and a few hooks on the wall. Alex declined to leave his clothes and towel and took them through the opening to the shower.

There was one occupant. Under the faucet, face tilted back, water cascading down his naked skin. The blue ink looked alive in the dim light, twisting over his pale skin, images seeming to move.
Michael wiped his eyes. Turned. Froze when he saw Alex.

Wordless, Alex held out the half bar of soap. Dropped the towel in a dry space next to the wall.

Michael swallowed. Frowned. Lowered his eyebrows, chest moving rapidly with each breath.

"I'm..." The words stuck in Alex's throat.

"Yeah." He moved forward. Wrapped his hand around Alex's wrist. Drew him into the shower, under the spray. "You don't do that unless... you were there." He unbuttoned Alex's shirt. Slid it off his shoulders, onto the wet floor. Then he kicked it away, out of the reach of the spray.


"What the fuck is this?" Alex breathed. His forehead was pressed against Michael's. Michael's hands were at his fly, undoing the zipper, pushing pants and underwear over Alex's hips.

"Survival." His open mouth pressed against Alex's jaw, not a kiss. No movement. Just lips, breath hot on skin. Water washing over them both.

"Survival." Alex's fingers skittered down Michael's spine. He titled his head down. Found Michael's. Lips, wet, tongue against tongue.

Michael's hips canted against his. Pressed himself against Alex, rubbed.

"Madness," Alex whispered. He found Michael's ear. Bit.


"Your voice was so..."

"Yeah." Michael was panting. Body shuddering. "When you caught us."

"Your picture didn't do you justice."

"You just want me for my looks."

He snorted. Backed Michael against the wall. Hands came around Michael's neck. Thumbs pressed into the soft hollow. "Better than wanting to consume you for your brains."

Michael laughed. "Zombie."

"Feel like it." He pressed his lips to Michael's again.

This time, Michael kissed him back. Really kissed him. Tongue in mouth, lips moving, hands sliding up his back. Toes curling, heat pooling. Tongue flicked, pulled back. Teeth sank into Alex's neck. Hard. Head swum and...

He grunted hard as he came, warm semen mixing with cold water, flowing down, circling the drain.

Michael's hips against his grew erratic. Frantic. Breathing was labored, soft groans issuing from his mouth. Head titled back, eyes closed. Moaned loudly. Body stiffened. Sticky warmth against Alex's hips.
Alex tensed. Waiting. If Michael was going to take his revenge on Alex for what happened earlier, now would be the time.

But Michael did nothing. Nipped at Alex's mouth and stayed where he was. "This is fucked up, right?" he asked.

"Yeah. Completely." He kissed Michael, enjoying the way spark of pain that bloomed when his bruised mouth met the other man's. "It's because of the stress."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. High tension area, we're nothing but stress. I'm not helping any with the detox. We need release." He found Michael's earlobe. Sucked.

Michael gasped. "Is that why you keep throwing me at Tony?"

"That, and it's fun to watch you blush and squirm." Trailed his fingers down to Michael's bottom. Probed the sensitive area.

He bucked against Alex. "I assumed if I went for Tony, you'd have him gutted before we were through. What with the power dynamic and all."


"I'm not getting it tattooed. Not in here."

"We've got a pen. That'll do for now."

There was a rush of voices outside the shower. Reluctantly, they pulled away from each other. Averted their eyes.

"Where'd you get the soap?" Michael asked. They passed it back and forth as they washed, sluicing off the grit and grime from their bodies.

"Borrowed it from another inmate." The word felt strange on his tongue. To think of himself as an inmate. Borrowing things. "Decent guy. We get to keep this half, but have to take the towel back."

"Nice of him."

"I think he felt sorry that I was detoxing."

Michael did look at him then. "It's not an easy position to be in. I understand that. He licked his full, bruised and bitten lips. "I want you to get out of here alive. Whatever bad blood's between us can't matter here. We can't do it alone."

"I know."

"I can't do it if I'm supporting your strung out ass."


Michael raised an eyebrow. He looked skeptical. "I'm not sure about that. But. Every time it gets too much, that you think you'll cave, use me. Let me be your drug. And for every day you don't use, I'll do anything you want."
His eyebrow went up. Stomach tightened. "Anything?"

Michael stepped forward. Placed his hands on Alex's stomach. Leaned in and sucked on his neck. "Anything," he breathed. "But only if you don't use."

Powerful incentive. Alex was already addicted to the body pressed against his.

"Is it a deal?"

"Yes," Alex whispered, head whirling. "It's a deal."
"Hello, Pretty."

Michael blinked. Looked around, dizzy and confused. "What? Where..." His throat caught in his throat as he tried to raise his hands to his eyes and failed. They were tied together behind his back.

T-Bag smiled that eerie smile that was so reminiscent of a snake. "I'm so glad you're here, pretty," he said, kneeling in front of Michael. His hands ran up Michael's thighs and, in the back of his mind, Michael wondered how he'd gotten his other hand back. "This has been a long time coming, boy."

"No." Michael twisted, tried to pull away.

T-Bag leaned in. Licked his neck. Ran his hand over Michael's crotch. "God, Pretty. The things I'm gonna do to you."

"No!"

Michael jerked awake. His eyes flew open.

T-Bag was gone. Alex was sprawled next to him, one hand tightly clamped around Michael's wrist. His head was tilted back, mouth open, and he snored with every breath.

Michael looked at him while his heart slowed back to a normal pace.

He'd had sex with this man. Twice. He'd promised more sex. Promised to let Alex do anything he wanted to Michael. And, what's more, Michael was actually looking forward to it. That didn't happen very often. Sex wasn't something he did for enjoyment; it was something he used to control others. Every once in awhile he met someone he truly enjoyed being with, wanted to be with--like Sara--but, under most circumstances, it was just sex.

But Alex...

Holy crap.

No one had ever made Michael come that hard before. Or made him crave for it to happen again the way Alex did.

There was a sound behind him.

He turned his head.

Tony was snuffling against Michael, shifting and squirming to get more comfortable. He really was a good looking kid. His eyelashes were amazing, thick and dark and long. Michael was tempted to run his fingers over the ends, but he didn't want to wake Tony up. Michael had been sleeping since sometime yesterday afternoon; he had no idea what time it was now.

He couldn't help it. Those eyelashes were calling to him. Michael reached out and touched the curled fringe of them, ran his finger over the ends. Then down the well shaped nose. Over cheeks that should be full and flush, instead were thin and pale from not enough food and sun.

Dark brown eyes opened. Blinded sleepily, licking his lips. When he saw Michael gazing at him, he smiled, eyes lighting.
Michael immediately felt guilty. He knew how this kid felt about him, the crush he had. Michael didn't share his feelings, felt nothing but brotherly or perhaps paternal affection. And yet here he was, caressing the too-young face in a gesture easily mistaken.

"You're awake," Tony said softly in Spanish. "You wouldn't wake up yesterday."

He didn't really remember much after he and Alex had come back from the shower. He'd been so exhausted from stress and sex and everything, he'd fallen asleep almost as soon as he'd entered the closet. "I was tired."

"I know." His eyes flicked to Alex. "You and Senor haven't been sleeping. You must sleep when you can here."

"I know." He licked his lips. His stomach rumbled. "I know, but I worry. And I don't sleep, I've never slept."

The dark eyes went back to Alex briefly. "I told you that you needed to relax." He grimaced. Pouted. "You finally did."

Michael's stomach dropped. "Tony..."

"It's okay."

"I'm sorry." He cupped Tony's face in his hand. "You're too young. And you deserve so much better." He stroked his thumb over Tony's cheek. "I'll get you out. And I'll give you the world. I promise."

The words rang hollow in the air. He had no idea if it could be done. No idea of the layout or the weaknesses. The guard schedule or... or anything.

But he had to do it. He, Alex, and Tony. They couldn't stay here. Michael would rather die.

The boy moved closer. "How much better can I get than an angel?" he whispered. His mouth ghosted over Michael's face. His lips. "You're the nicest person I've ever met. The most beautiful. You would never hurt me." He nuzzled Michael's neck.

He tried to push Tony off, but Alex's grip tightened around his wrist.

"Tony," Alex said, voice gravelled with sleep. He sat up and pulled Tony off Michael and into his lap.

Tony blinked, fear entering his eyes. He didn't try to get away, though, just sat in Alex's lap, looking at Alex through wide eyes.

"Mine." Alex squeezed Michael's wrist, raising it.

"I know," Tony said, nodding. "Yours. I just..."

"Can't help it," he finished. "I know. But he's mine, so you don't touch." He glanced at Michael speculatively, then back at Tony. Leaned in and whispered something too softly for Michael to hear.

A brilliant grin broke out over Tony's face. "Okay," he said. He climbed off Alex's lap. "Time for breakfast?"

"Haven't heard the alarm yet," Michael said, looking curiously at Alex.
Alex's face was unreadable, eyes hooded as he returned Michael's gaze.

"Is time." Tony opened the door. Sure enough, there were men wandering the halls, heading towards the cafeteria in hopes of getting something edible before it was out. "Come on."

Alex reached for Michael's wrist. Pulled him to his feet. "Sleep well?"

"How long was I out?" Michael's heart was in his throat as Alex pulled him nearer, until there were scant inches between their bodies.

"I guess about twelve hours or so." He licked his lips, his gaze dropping to Michael's mouth. "You needed it. Have you slept at all in the past year?"

"No."

Alex moved closer. Pressed his mouth against Michael's. Sank his teeth into Michael's bottom lip. Sucked on it, his free hand going behind Michael's neck. Holding. Fingers digging into his skin, mouth not being so much kissed as mauled. Teeth, tongue, forceful pressing. Overwhelming and it felt as if he were being held up by Alex's hand around his neck. At his mercy.

He shuddered. Pushed back into the kiss.

And then Alex pulled back. Gave him a wicked smile. "Let's get some food."

"But..." He blinked, dazed.

Alex lifted his hand and pressed his thumb into Michael's mouth. "Just a little taste of what I'm going to do to you later."

Michael sucked on Alex's thumb, used it to show what he would do, gladly, now, if he'd stay, but Alex pulled away. Ran his thumb down Michael's cheek, then turned and led him from the closet.

They were halfway to the cafeteria when the alarm went off. Almost immediately, men flooded the halls, trudging like cattle for their morning feed.

"How are you feeling this morning?" Michael asked, always a half-step behind Alex.

"Empty. Like there's a huge, gnawing hole inside me. Like I'm going to go insane at any moment if something doesn't fill it."

He didn't know how to respond to that. So, he shrugged and said, "At least the shaking's stopped."

Alex threw him a look. "For now."

"If you're feeling better today, I was hoping..."

He never got to finish his sentence. Without any warning, Michael was torn away from Alex. Shoved against a nearby wall, forehead cracking against the grimy concrete. His arms were yanked behind him. Cold metal snapped around his wrists and he was pulled away.

"What..." Michael started. He was silenced by a swift punch to his kidneys.

Hands were on his body. Sliding down his sides, his front. Patting his hips. They found the shiv he had tucked in the front of his pants. It was taken away before the hands returned, down each leg, over his crotch, his butt, down again.
When the hands were done with their search, Michael was hauled away from the wall. One hand clamped around his neck, the other was on his bound hands.

"Come quietly, Senor, or I will have to hurt you," a deep voice said as Michael was propelled down the hall.

"What... where... who..." The man was shoving him so fast and hard down the hall, he could hardly keep his feet under him. Concentration split, he couldn't focus his brain on what he needed to ask.

"Where the fuck are you taking us?" Alex shouted from somewhere behind him.

Relief flooded him. "Alex?"

"I'm right behind you. I think we're in the custody of some guards, but for all I know, they're inmates in costume."

"Where are you taking us, sir?" Michael asked in Spanish.

"The warden."

Fantastic.

"They're taking us to the warden," Michael translated for Alex. "Why now?" he asked the guard.

He got no answer.

They pushed deeper into the warren, passing cells and men until they finally came to a door. One of the guards opened it with a ring of keys around his belt, and Alex and Michael found themselves in an empty hallway, dark and cool. A few more turns, and they were led into an office.

A uniformed man sat behind a table. Papers were spread out in front of him, and his beefy fingers clutched a pen as he filled one out.

Without looking up, he said, "Michael Scofield."

Michael was pushed into the chair across from the man. He sat awkwardly, stiffly, giving space for hisuffed hands.

"You are here because you murdered a man in cold blood. The man has been identified as Mr. William Kim. A government agent for the United States." The pen stopped. Dark eyes looked up at him. "His agency has told us to persecute you to the full extent of the law."

"What's he saying?" Alex asked. "He said Kim's name."

Still looking at the warden, Michael answered, "I killed him."

Silence. Then a short, barking laugh. "Like hell you did."

"Shut up, Alex."


"Alex. Shut up."

The warden's eyes flicked from Michael to Alex and back. "Do you want to change your plea, Mr.
Scofield?" he asked in English. "The weapon is being inspected. If there are more than one set of fingerprints on them, that and a plea of not guilty could get you a trial instead of a sentencing. Won't do you much good, but..." He trailed off. Shrugged.

He shook his head. "I killed him."

"Very well." He gestured at the guards.

One of them came behind Michael. He was uncuffed, one hand at a time. Fingerprinted. His picture taken. A plastic band with a number was placed around his wrist, too tight and Michael could feel the sharp edges bite into his skin.

Finally, the warden nodded. "I'll file the paperwork tomorrow. Expect your sentencing trial in maybe six months."

"Six months?" Michael repeated. "That's..."

"That is fast. There is outside pressure to get you put away. You are a danger to society, Mr. Scofield." The warden's lips twitched. "Good luck surviving here." He nodded to the guard.

Michael was pulled from the chair. Dragged to the door.

Panic surged through him as he realized what was happening. "Wait!" he said. "What about... Alex and I are..."

"You have each killed men in this prison since arriving. You've stolen supplies, sleeping space, and are generally thought to be a menace together," the warden replied, opening another folder. "You will be separated."

He struggled against his captors. Was shoved against the door, nightstick at his throat.

Alex just stood there. Looked at him. His face was blank. His eyes burned.

"I'll keep my promise," Michael said desperately. It wasn't enough, he knew, and if Alex really wanted drugs, he'd get them. But... "I'll make up every day."

The other man nodded. "I'll find you."

"Alex..." The guard opened the door. Dragged Michael from the office.

"I'll find you!" Alex repeated, calling after Michael.

The guard pushing Michael along laughed. "Fucking queers," he said. He lowered his mouth to Michael's ear. "Don't worry about missing him, pretty gringo. I got paid well to take you somewhere you'll be taken care of."

His stomach twisted. He closed his eyes.

* * *


Michael walked along, propelled through the halls by the guard. Men were coming back from breakfast, standing around, talking. Some playing dice or cards. Smoking. Yelling. A few groups stood around and anger was in the air around them, crackling. Fights would break out. Someone would be hurt, maybe die, and there was nothing Michael could do. Nothing at all, even to protect himself. He was helpless, stranger in a strange land, one he couldn't make sense of.
They turned a corner. They were at the cells now, stuffed full of men and bed: two bunk beds and generally some blankets and pillows on the floor. Four, maybe five to a cell designed to hold maybe two.

Down a row of cell. Fifteen away from the door. The guard stopped.

"Raoul! Brought you your boy, just like I promised."

Michael's heart stopped as the hugely muscular man who'd given him the pastry stepped out from his cell. His broad shoulders brushed against the narrow opening of the door as he did. When he saw Michael, his face split into a smile.

"Thank you, Senor Gomez," he said to the guard. One huge, beefy hand reached out and took Michael by the shoulder, at the juncture next to his neck.

"It was a pleasure doing business with you," Gomez answered.

Raoul nodded, then frowned. He looked a little past Michael and cocked his head. "Why's he here?"

Michael turned his head and saw Tony standing just behind the guard.

The guard shrugged. "He followed. He's your problem." And then he turned and walked away.

"Shoo, Gatito," Raoul said.

Tony shook his head. "I stay with Michael. I won't be any trouble. I promise."

Raoul looked from Tony to Michael. "You want him stay?" he asked in English.

"Yes."

"Okay." He pulled Michael forward, into the cell. "Come."

Michael entered Raoul's cell. Almost immediately, he tripped over something. And again.

"Sorry," Raoul kicked a path through the junk littering the floor. Some of it hit Bellick, who was huddled in a far corner, between the second bunk bed and the wall. He led Michael to a bunk and sat him down on the bottom bunk. "You bed." He glanced at Tony, who was hanging back at the cell's opening. "He sleep here too, if you want. Otherwise, floor."

"I speak Spanish," Michael said.


Michael resisted until a wave of hopelessness washed over him. Closing his eyes, he complied, turning toward the beefy giant.

Hands almost as big as his head framed his face. And then, surprisingly gentle fingers traced his forehead. Outside along his cheeks, down his jaw. Up and over his mouth and nose. Eyebrows and around his eyes. Then back down again, down his neck, over his collarbone. Both hands down one arm. One of Raoul's hands wrapped around Michael's forearm, just below his elbow. He pulled, straightening Michael's arm, then bent it. A few more times, then down to his wrist. Raoul threaded their fingers together. Rotated his wrist. Moved down his hand and began slowly wiggling each finger. Then he switched to Michael's other arm.
Michael opened his eyes. Raoul didn't seem to notice, so focused was he on his task. Testing Michael's limbs, making sure his arms worked.

His mind flashed back to when he was a kid. How when he'd get a new toy, a new action figure, and he'd take it out of the box, the first thing he'd do was test all the points of articulation. That's how he felt.

Hands tugged at his shirt. "Off."

"I don't..." But Michael thought better of it. Best to just go along for now, until he could come up with something. A plan of escape, to find Alex. For something...

But now, compliance.

He pulled off his shirt and dropped it on the junk-littered bed.

Raoul smiled in approval. "Very beautiful," he said, running is fingers over the tattoo. "It must have taken a long time."

"I guess."

Fingertips, rough and calloused, dragged over Michael's skin. Followed lines and traced patterns. Sharply pinched his nipples, and Michael's stomach contracted in fear. Raoul was leaning in, closer, his hot, moist breath painting Michael's skin as he continued his explorations. Following the painting that covered the map of Fox River, swirling over the faces of the angel's fighting. Scraping lightly over Michael's navel and traveling lower.

Michael was struggling to breathe. He was about to be raped. Raped by a man three times the size of his brother. And he was going to be raped in front of Bellick and there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Hands moved his Michael's thighs. Straightened his legs, against as if testing to make sure he could bend. He moved down, untied Michael's shoes. Pulled them off and dropped them to the floor. The socks came next.

"What happened? You're missing two toes." He caressed the scar tissue on Michael's foot, back and forth slowly.

Michael licked his lips. "A, um. They got cut off."

Raoul frowned. Fiddled with the spot a few moments more before sliding his hands over Michael's foot. Tracing his arch.

"Raoul!" someone shouted from outside.

He glanced out of the cell, then back at Michael. "Stay. Here." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a half-empty box of cigarettes. He handed them to Michael, then fumbled on the bed until he found a candy bar, which he also gave to Michael.

"Thanks," Michael said, suddenly acutely aware that he'd had nothing to eat since yesterday at lunch.

Raoul nodded. Pat Michael on the cheek, then rose and left the cell.

He fell back against the bed. Winced and sat back up. There was a shoe, a piece of brick, and a deflated ball under him. Frustrated, Michael swept all three to the floor and lay back down.
Tony crawled onto the bed. Wormed his way into Michael's arm, throwing one leg over his hips. "You okay?"

"No." He put his arms around Tony. Held him close.

"It will be okay," he whispered. "Senor will find us. And you will get us out. Si?"
He squeezed his eye shut, holding back the tears that threatened. "Right. Right."

"Michael, don't."

"I'm sorry. I'm just..." He inhaled. "I miss my brother. So much. And Alex... Raoul is so big. How am I supposed to fight him off?"

"Maybe he will be gentle."

Michael snorted.

"Scofield."

He sighed. Kissed Tony, then sat up, pushing the boy away.

Bellick had crawled out of the corner. Both his eyes were nearly swollen shut and he'd been stripped down to an undershirt and loose pants. His skin was sallow and dirty.

"Bellick." Michael licked his lips, thirsty. "Why are you there? On the floor."

"Because I'm not important enough to get a bed, you fucker." He rubbed at his nose with the back of one hand. "How'd you end up here?"

"Don't know. The guards caught me and Alex before breakfast, took us in. They fingerprinted me then sent me out." He lifted his wrist and showed Bellick the bit of plastic wrapped around.

Bellick nodded and lifted his own. "At least they don't tattoo it. Though in your case, what could it matter."

He nodded and rubbed is head. Looked around the cell. "What is all this stuff?" He broke off a piece of his candy bar and stuffed it in his mouth.

"He collects it. Spends the day wandering the yard or the halls. Picks up stuff, brings it back here."


"He's a magpie," Michael said thoughtfully. He unscrewed the cap and swallowed some. "The other day, when he came to me. He said he wanted all three of us. All three gringos." He took another sip, followed it by some more candy. "We're just another part of his collection." His eyes slid to Tony. "You probably shouldn't have come, Tony. Now you're part of it, too." He handed Tony a piece of chocolate.

He shrugged. "Senor said I should stay with you. Take care of you."

"What?"

"Yesterday, when you were asleep. He said if anything happened, if we got separated, I stay with
you. And, if I could, I can leave and find him, tell him where you are."

"Good foresight on his part." Michael sighed. Rubbed his eyes. "You know this place pretty well, don't you?"

"Very well, yes."

He nodded again. Looked down on the floor at all the crap littering it. "Here's what we do. We need to sort through this stuff. See if there are any boxes in here and categorize it. Maybe there's something we can use."

"For what?" Bellick asked.

"Escape." He shrugged. "Or defense. Or something. At the very least, if we can get everything together, there'll be more room." He slid to the floor. "First, we need to find boxes. If there aren't any, Tony?"

"I'll go now. I know where some empty ones are."

Michael nodded. "And stop by the closet. If no one's moved in, bring our supplies. But don't go in if there is. And don't... Don't trade sex for anything."

Tony rolled his eyes, but nodded. "I'll be back." He bent down and kissed Michael lightly. "It'll be okay." Then he darted for the door and disappeared.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. He didn't believe Tony's reassurance, but he kept his doubt to himself.

Bellick snorted. "How the fuck do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Get people to line up, ready to die for you?"

"I don't. At Fox River, they just followed me because they wanted out. That's all." He picked up a sock. Set it to one side. Found a broken twig. Then another. And another. Started a pile of them. "You going to help?"

"Why bother? Raoul finds out what you're doing, he'll just break you in half. I've been pushed around enough, thank you."

Michael blinked at Bellick. "I'm just organizing his collection. Making it neater. Giving us space. Why would he be upset at that?" He raised an eyebrow. "Who knows. Maybe he'll be so grateful, he'll lay off on you a bit."

"Actually, I'm counting on you being here to do that."

A thrill of fear went through him, but Michael pressed it down. "Even so. Make yourself useful, or when I figure a way out, you're not coming."

Bellick looked at him through narrowed eyes. Snorted and shook his head. "You can't get out of here."

Michael didn't answer. Just stared back at him.

"It's impossible. Completely impossible. It can't be done."
He shrugged. Went back to sorting.

"You're a fool, Scofield. A completely fucking moron."

Michael ignored the other man, put him from his mind.

A moment later, Bellick heaved a sigh. Crawled out a little further. Began picking through the detritus around him.

Michael held back his smile of triumph.
"So. You are the American tourist who came to our city for drugs, sí?" the warden said once Michael was gone.

Alex rubbed his eyes wearily. Instead of shaking as he did yesterday, his skin was tingling. Electricity skittered over his arms, his chest and back, his neck. It made him feel very hot, just beneath the skin, flashing hot and warm, then furnace hot again. He was nearly certain he was glowing with it. "Sure," he said, because there was nothing else to say.

"You don't sound sure."

"Well, that's because I didn't know the drugs were on that boat. The other man, Michael? He set me up. Framed me."

The warden ran his eyes over Alex's body and sneered. "Accuses the man in the middle of detox."

He shrugged. "I was on medication."

That got a laugh from all the guards. "Medication. Of course. Well, here, we do not give your kind of medication." The warden scribbled in Alex's file. Gestured at the guards, who stepped forward to Alex. They printed and numbered Alex quickly, binding the plastic bracelet much too tightly around his already prickling wrist.

"Drug possession is not as serious an offence as murder is. But don't expect a quick trial. The system is overburdened."

Alex snorted. "I doubt I'll make it out of here alive anyway. Someone wants me very dead, and I'm not talking about anyone in here."

The man laughed. "You, sir, are very paranoid." He looked up at the guards and barked something in Spanish too quickly for Alex to understand. "Good luck, Senor Mahone. Perhaps, if you find a corner and stay out of trouble, you will survive until your trial."

"Yeah, right." He rose from his chair, rubbing his wrist where the plastic bracelet was cutting painfully. He hadn't noticed any of the cons wearing a similar bracelet in the area he and Michael had been in. Even considering the withdrawal and the fact he'd been sick the past few days, it was something he would have noticed. Especially on Tony. But there'd been none. Which meant, either everyone took it off or the area he'd been in had been composed primarily of cons who hadn't had their paperwork filed yet.

The guard turned down a hall away from the direction Alex and Michael had been before. Unlike there, here there were no cons lining the walls, no signs of life in places you wouldn't expect. Apparently, the guards kept this hallway clear, forcing everyone deeper into the prison.

Three more turns and they came to the first sign of life. It was a big not unlike the one Arturo had led Alex to the day before. Mattresses lined walls, bags at the end of each. Men were sprawled across the mattresses or standing around, talking, playing cards, smoking. They watched Alex as he was led past, sized him up.

They went through three of these rooms before they hit an actual cell block. When Alex glanced in, he could see that they were small, barely enough room for two, but stuffed full. By the red staining the floors and walls, Alex could guess how it was decided who got to sleep in the cells as opposed to
out, not to mention claiming the beds. He also noticed that most of the men seemed to hang around in a group, around four or five, clustered around a central figure. He wondered if the gangs here ran one per cell or if several teamed up together.

And what happened when a new inmate was added.

"Here." The guard stopped abruptly. "Cell veintidós." He shoved Alex at it.

He stumbled, catching himself on the gritty-warm bars. The two men sitting on the left-hand bottom bunk playing cards turned at the sound.

A hand clamped on the back of his neck. "Quiénes tú?"

Alex turned. His skin was prickling more fiercely now, skin hot and tight.

The man was as tall as he, but larger. More built. Green eyes stood out startlingly against ashy brown skin. Dark hair was cropped short. Biceps bulged as the hand tightened on Alex's shoulder.

"Alex."

"You American."

"Yeah." Not for the first time, Alex cursed the fact he'd chosen to learn Arabic and not Spanish. It'd made sense at the time, considering his work for PSYOP, but it wasn't doing him a lot of good now.

"Why you here?"

"Drugs."

He stepped back. Ran his eyes over Alex, taking in every bruise, every cut, every tiny shudder. "You the gringo that fuck up Jose. Messed with Miguel. Si?"

"Si."

The other man considered it. Cocked his head to one side. "I Guillermo." He pointed to a group of five men standing nearby. "That Natal, Diego," he started, but Alex lost track of who was who. Finally, he was done pointing out his gang and turned back to Alex. "If you do what we say, you can stay. If no, we do what we want with you then give you to whole room. Comprende?"

Alex nodded. "So. It's do what you say or rape?" He snorted. "Figures."

Guillermo smiled. Moved into Alex, pressing him tight against the cells. One of his hands went above Alex's head, wrapping around the bar. The other caressed along Alex's jaw. "You do what we say, Alex. If you don't, we need something to practice fight on. So no one breaks our gang apart."

His teeth were clenched. Body stiff, every muscle clenched.

The other man laughed. Leaned in and nuzzled Alex. A huge, slimy tongue licked down along the line of Alex's jaw.

He shuddered. Pain burst behind his eyes. Tears rose to his eyes, his stomach lurched. Never in a million years had he truly thought... If it were just Guillermo, he'd have a chance, but it was an entire room. And Alex didn't want to die.

Without any conscious thought, Alex found himself nodding. Agreeing. Anything to buy himself time, to get out of the block, to find Michael and...
"Good." The man bit his neck, then pulled away. "You go there." He nodded toward the cell. "Your space in corner. Maybe, you get a... a pillow later. If you good." Guillermo pulled away and shoved Alex toward the cell's opening.

Alex stumbled. Caught himself, straightening his shoulders. When he walked into the cell, he did so with a semblance of pride.

The air in the cell felt heavy. Oppressive. It smelled dank. Damp and faintly of urine. The sharpness stung his nose, rolled Alex's stomach.

The two men on the bunk were watching him. Cards were still in their hands, but they were frozen, eyes following Alex's every move.

He moved to the corner Guillermo had indicated belonged to him. "Do I at least get a blanket?" he asked the men--boys, really; they couldn't be older than twenty.

They glanced at each other. One moved, hanging over the side of the bed. He pulled out a ratty grey blanket and tossed it at Alex.

The urine smell nearly overwhelmed him, but it was at least dry. Alex shook it out, wincing at the various bugs and vermin pellets that fell to the ground, and spread it on the floor. Then, he sat, pulling his legs to his knees.

The boys were still watching him.

Alex stared back a moment, studying.

They looked to be roughly the same age. One's hair was shaved close, the other's hung longer but butchered, uneven. One looked amazingly like Guillermo, with the bright green eyes against ashy skin. The other had hazel eyes set deep against his darkly tanned face. Both were skinny, underfed, with big hands that spoke of growth malnutrition may prevent from happening. One still had the plastic band around his wrist. Both had bare feet, but Alex saw a few pairs of shoes scattered around.

After sizing them up, he looked around the cell. Two bunks with blankets and pillows on all four beds. There were at least three more makeshift beds on the floor, not including his. Under one bed, he saw a few sticks, shivs, paddles, chains, and other weapons.

A shudder went through him. It didn't stop. Now he had the skin prickles and the shakes. Fantastic.

"You want smoke?" one of the boys asked.

He thought about it, thought about Michael's offer. Wondered if nicotine counted as a drug to the pious little church boy. Then he decided that if you could get it in rehab, he could have it and still have his way with Michael.

"Yes."

The boy pulled a cigarette from his back pocket and tossed it to Alex. It was followed by a lighter. He lit up, then tossed the lighter back. No use pressing his luck.

It'd been a long time since he smoked. His first inhale, he just held the smoke in his mouth, getting used to the feeling again.

"Gracias," he said, blowing out the smoke. "What's your name?"
"Luis. This is Santos."

"You related to Guillermo?"

"Si. He my... um, my tio."

Tio. He knew that one. "Uncle. Ah."

Luis nodded.

The nicotine had hit his bloodstream by this time. The shaking had eased somewhat, his body so desperate for drugs, it'd take anything. It'd been so long since he'd smoked; he'd started when he was thirteen, as a way to rebel against a father who only noticed him when he needed a punching bag. When he'd asked Pam to marry him, she'd said he'd have to quit before they could set a date. He'd managed to kick the habit in a month, and they'd been married a month later.

Now, he supposed it didn't matter. The only thing at stake was fucking Michael and, right now, it didn't look like it would be possible. By the time Alex found him again, they'd both be raped and brutalized and one of them would most likely be dead.

He blew out a stream of smoke, despair falling over him. This situation was impossible. All the guards did were feed them, shuffle them back and forth, and... and what? Pick up the dead bodies? Who, exactly, was it who ran this fucking place?

Alex closed his eyes. Smoked the cigarette as far down as he could. It eased his shaking, although his skin still hurt. He felt dirty. Disgusting. He wanted a shower, but doubted he'd get one. And, if he did, he bet he wouldn't get soap.

All those supplies, gone. Abandoned and left to be taken by the next scavenger to move into the closet.

And Michael...

Alex had actually managed to sleep the night before. Michael had been dead to the world and warm and clean-smelling for the first time since they'd gotten here. In the dim closet, he'd been able to pressed close to the other man, lay there, breathing in his scent. Allowing his warmth to penetrate the layers of cold and chill withdrawal had wrapped around him.

It'd been... nice. And now, Michael had been torn from him. And he was trapped in this hellhole.

His mind drifted. Sleep tugged at him. Moments he wasn't afraid for his life were boring, and all he could do was sleep. Best to do so anyway. The more he slept, the more he could keep his strength up. The more alert he would be.

The problem was, there was no one here he trusted to watch his back. And while he knew he shouldn't, he couldn't help but succumb to the warmth that rushed over him. His shoulders relaxed. Head titled back against the bars of the cell. Eyelids pressed as if they weighed thousands of pounds.

A warm wetness hit his face, startling him.

Alex flinched. Jerked back.

Laughter.

The gang was standing just outside the bars. A man had his fly open, penis out. He grinned down at
Alex. Wrinkled his nose. And let loose another stream of urine.

That did it. Alex was up and out of the cell. He threw himself at the man.

It was confusing. His fists sank into the other man. Alex was hit, kicked. There was a sharp pain in one arm. Teeth on his ear.

He ignored it all. Instead, he ripped and clawed at the other man with all his strength. Drove his hand into the pisser's throat.

He convulsed. Coughed. Alex followed with a jab meant for his stomach, but he missed. Hit lower.

There was a screech unlike anything Alex had heard before. The man's back arched, then he curled. Pushed Alex away, rolling into a ball on his side. He retched, vomit spewing over the floor, getting Alex's shirt.

Oh *fuck*.

A hand clamped on Alex's neck. Yanked him to his feet.

"Cunt," Guillermo spat in his face. "It one thing to fight. Another to do that." He whirled Alex. Shoved him against the bars. "You fight like a little girl." Rough hands ripped and tore at Alex's pants. "You deserve to be taken like one."

Alex struggled against the other man, but he couldn't get away. The boys were on the other side of the bars, holding his arms.

Guillermo barked something in Spanish. A moment later Alex's legs were pulled apart and held against the bars as well. His pants and underwear were pushed down, assed bared for all to see.

"Now you learn you place, bitch," Guillermo growled in Alex's ears.

Alex closed his eyes, tried to relax. Stupid as that sounded, but he could feel Guillermo, large and hard against the crack of his ass. Couldn't stop anticipating the pain, the degradation, the tearing, the blood, the...

The head of Guillermo's cock pressed against Alex's entrance. He growled laughingly against Alex's' neck and then...

"Mierda!" Guillermo howled. He pulled away from Alex, leaving him to sag with relief against the bars.

"Now, really. If you have to have your posse holding down the object of your intentions, you just ain't trying hard enough," a voice drawled.

"You dead."

"I'm sure we can solve all this peacefully, if we tried. No reason to resort to violence."

"You stab me."


"Mierda," Luis cried. "No!" He let go of Alex's arm. Ran out of the cell.

The men holding his legs let go. Alex saw one of them immediately tackled by another inmate.
Another gang.

"Alex," Santos said, letting go of his arm. "Go. Run."

He stumbled back. Fell into someone else, but was shoved aside. As he pulled up his pants, he saw that fighting had broken out everywhere. Guillermo was on the ground, blood spurting from a wound on his neck.

"Boy's right," the voice who'd challenged Guillermo said at Alex's side.

Alex turned and found himself staring down into the dark eyes of one Theodore "T-Bag" Bagwell.

"Take the opportunity and run," the man said.

He glanced at Santos. "Come."

He shook his head. "No. I part of this gang. I get killed anywhere else. Just go." He stepped back into the cell and pulled out a club. "Go!"

"Come on!" T-Bag shouted, halfway down the block already.

Alex ran.

By the time the lunch alarm rang, Michael had made a very small dent in the junk. It wasn't an easy task; among the bits of odds and ends were decomposing animals and rotten food. He kept half expecting to find the remains of Raoul's former cellmate buried underneath the junk. After the cat, nothing would surprise him.

The worst of it, Michael made Bellick deal with. He took a perverse pleasure in ordering the other man around, although he did his best to hide it. They were stuffed in close quarters, which always led to resentment anyway. Plus, if he lorded his position over Bellick now, when Michael was inevitably brutalized or humiliated in some way, Bellick wouldn't hesitated to hold it over him.

Although, Bellick being Bellick, he probably would do it anyway. At least this way, Michael knew he didn't deserve it.

"What are you doing?" Raoul demanded when he reentered the cell.

Michael looked up. "Organizing your things. See? All the sticks right here. Rocks are here. Utensils there. It'll make everything easier for you to find." He hesitated, then said, "I didn't think you'd mind. I thought it'd help you."

He looked around. Nodded. "Good. Is good," he said in English. "Come. We get food." He reached down, wrapped his huge hand around Michael's forearm, and pulled him up.

His stomach cramped at the mention of food. Michael pressed his forearms against it, leaning forward slightly. The little bit of chocolate hadn't been enough to satisfy him, and the rotten food hadn't been enough to kill his appetite. Not that skipping meals in a place like this was wise. He'd only been here... well, a few days, and already he was already dropping weight. Food, shelter, and water, the first order of survival.

Well. Shelter was being forced on him. Might as well concentrate on food and water.

Raoul half dragged, half led Michael to the mess hall. The whole time, he talked: to himself, to Michael, to men passing by, to random things he found lying on the ground. He picked everything
he saw up to study, whether it be a rock or a piece of shirt. Once, he stated to pick up what was
clearly a piece of shit, but Michael distracted him just in time.

What he picked up and kept, he handed off to Michael. Michael, unsure what to do with it, simply
passed it back to Bellick.

They got to mess hall to find it not as crowded as Michael had expected. True, he'd never made it to
an afternoon meal, but still. It seemed only half as full as usual. Before Michael could ask about it,
though, he found himself pulled tightly to Raoul's side and pinned.

"What are you doing?" Michael asked, unable to stop from stiffening and trying to pull away.

"So they know. People always try to take my stuff," Raoul answered, slipping back into Spanish. "I
don't want them thinking they can take you." And, with that, he bent his head and bit Michael's
bottom lip.

The pain shot through him, down his chin. He felt the skin break. Blood well.

The bite changed to a kiss. A lick. Another kiss. Then there was a nip to his ear. A hard chomp on
Michael's neck. Raoul's huge hand slid down to Michael's back, underneath his shirt.

Oh fuck.

He put his hands against Raoul's chest. Tried to hold them back. "You can't... you can't..." His mind
skittered over the word rape, not wanting to either egg Raoul on or offend him, "Are you going to
fuck me right here?"

Raoul pulled back. Smacked Michael so hard across the face, bright points of light exploded before
his eyes.

Tears obscured his vision. Michael spat blood on the floor. Wiped his nose with the back of his hand.
Straightened and met Raoul's eyes.

The other man pulled Michael to him. "I don't want to hurt you," Raoul said, nuzzling Michael's
cheek. "But you don't question me, understand? You belong to me. I'll do whatever I want wherever
I want and you don't ask. Okay?"

He couldn't stop the trembling. "Sorry." Michael winced. He hadn't meant to say that. He hadn't
meant to say anything. But he was still keenly away that this man could just snap his neck with little
effort. And that knowledge made him weak.

God, he missed Alex and the strange security being his "property". He missed freedom and Lincoln
and being on the run. Right now, he even missed Fox River.

"It's okay. Even pretty puppies need to be trained." Raoul pat Michael on the head. Then he turned,
hand wrapped around Michael's forearm once more, and headed to the food line.

Michael followed numbly. Barely noticed as the plate he tried to pick up was taken from his hands.
As he was denied any food, given just a bottle of water. Was led to a table packed with men,
nowhere for him to sit.

Except Raoul's lap.

He heard someone ask about him. Raoul answer, pride evident in his voice. And why not? Michael
was, after all, the pride of his collection. Prize in that collection of shit.
Food was pressed to his mouth. He jerked back, uncomprehending, before he realized that Raoul was actually feeding him. God, what next? Bathing him?

Michael shuddered. But he ate. It was, at least, better than Bellick got. Bellick, who had to sit on the flood and collect the scraps that Raoul threw.

At least he was getting fed. And Raoul was more intent on feeding Michael than himself, which Michael supposed was good. Even better was the fact Raoul fed him, but his attention was elsewhere, so Michael was basically left alone. Alone and able to drift. And observe.

Like...

All around them, men sat in groups. Each group had a definite leader. This was mostly true for every table, barring a few. Some tables were obviously together, their group on the large side. Others seemed to have two distinct groups—gangs; might as well call a spade a spade—together. Allies, at least for the moment.

Those in the room not belonging to a gang didn't get a table. They either sat along the sides of the room, on the floor, or had drifted outside to the yard. Michael could see some of these loners being courted, gang members approaching them, giving gifts of food or just talking. People trying to secure more power.

Michael wondered who the top gang was. Who ran the prison in the guard's stead.

Raoul didn't really seem to belong to a gang per se. He obviously knew all these men, and they knew him. There was a comfortableness around them that came with having a set group. But there didn't seem to be a real connection. Not like at some of the other tables, where gangs had matching tattoos or headgear or even colors. The only thing connecting these men seemed to be their size.

Michael was not a small man. Yes, he tended to the thin side, especially after well over a year of eating only when reminded, then going to prison where not only was the food unappealing, but he'd been preoccupied with pulling off the escape. Plus, he'd lost weight during the chase. So, he was thin, yes. But he was also six foot tall, not exactly lacking in the height department.

Yet, among Raoul and the rest, he felt about the size of a two year old.

All eyes were on him, suddenly. Michael blinked and swallowed the food Raoul had pushed into his mouth moments before. His mind rushed back over the half listened-to conversation. Realized he'd been asked a question.

"Uh," he stuttered. "I'm in for murder."

The man who'd asked the question gave a little chuckle. "More dangerous than you look, then."

He raised an eyebrow and stared steadily back.

"I saw you kill the other day. I was coming in from the yard, and a man tried to take you. You killed him."

He went cold. Muscles in his neck tightened, pain shot through temples.

"Pretty and dangerous. It was sheer luck you got him. Still. He's dead." The man looked at Raoul. "You finally got something good in that collection of shit you've got."

Raoul frowned, offence written clearly on his face. He thought about what was said, his fingers
stroking down Michel's arm. "He is good," he finally said. Squeezed Michael's cheek. "Pretty."

The man rolled his eyes. "Yes. Real pretty." He turned away and began talking to someone else.

Raoul was still stroking Michael's arm. His eyes were distant as he gazed down at his plate. Thick fingers pushed food around on his plate. He picked up a fork and passed it to Michael. "Keep."

Michael sighed. Looked down at Bellick and handed him the fork.

Bellick rolled his eyes. He'd had the foresight to bring a sack along, in which he put all the accumulated debris. The fork was added. "Think I could have anything else to eat?"

Hesitantly, Michael reached for the plate. His fingers closed around something fried and greasy when Raoul slapped his hand away.

"I feed." He picked the fried thing up and placed it at Michael's mouth.

He pulled away. "No. Bellick's hungry."

"Eat." He pushed it into Michael's mouth.

Relenting, he bit in. Chewed.

"Michael!" Feet pounded against the floor. "Michael!"

He turned in Raoul's lap. Tony was running through the mess hall at full speed. His cheeks were flushed bright red, sweat making his dark hair stick to his forehead.

"Michael." He practically fell into Michael's lap as he stumbled to a stop.

"What's wrong?" he asked, catching Tony. He held the boy up. "What's going on?"


It took a second. "Alex." A jolt of fear went through him. Michael leapt from Raoul's seat, heart pounding.

He made it three steps before a huge hand clamped on his right wrist.

Michael didn't think. The moment he felt the weight on his wrist, his right wrist, he snapped.

"Let go!" He whirled and smacked Raoul across the face. Yanked his arm.

It came out of his socket with a ripping pain that sent him to his knees.

"I warned you," Raoul said. His fist collided with Michael's cheek. And again. And again.

His head hit the floor. Face on fire. He tried to block the other man, but it was like trying to stop the wind. It just kept coming, again and again.

Michael heard screaming. Shouting. He got one arm over his head. Curled, legs to something.

Then, quite suddenly, it stopped.

He couldn't think. His head spun. The world was nothing but pain and shouting and whirling.
Gradually, he became aware of one voice. High, fast, a blur of undecipherable Spanish.

Tony.

Then, arms gathered Michael up. Hugged him tightly. "Lo siento," a voice whispered. Then again, faster, over and over.

I'm sorry.

Michael cried out as he was lifted from the floor. His useless arm was trapped between his and Raoul's body.

"I don't want to hurt you," Raoul said, practically crying as he carried Michael out of the mess hall. "I don't. But you make me. You did it. Tried to get away, when you're mine. I had no choice."

He squeezed his eyes shut. A mistake, as his eyes were swollen; even his eyelashes felt bruised. Blood seeped out from his mouth. Overwhelmed by the pain, Michael's mind grayed out. He drifted.

When he woke, he was lying on the bottom bunk back in Raoul's cell. Raoul was holding him, rocking back and forth. Tony sat at his side, holding his hand.

"Michael?" Tony leaned over. Placed one hand on gently on Michael's swollen cheek.

He wet his lips. "Thirsty."

Tony glanced up at Raoul, then crawled off the bed. A moment later, he returned with a bottle of water.

His arm was still dislocated. The pain almost made him throw up as Raoul moved him into a sitting position. He bit back a grown, tears coming to his eyes.

"My shoulder," he rasped after he'd drunk as much as he could.

Tony rolled his eyes. Shook his head. "He afraid guards take you from him."

Raoul adjusted against him. Kissed his hair and pet him.

"Raoul? What are you in for?" Michael asked. He closed his eyes. Pain made him tired.

A hand ran down his chest, soothing. Or, at least Michael supposed it was to be meant to sooth.

A long time passed. Finally, Raoul sighed. "It was an accident. I killed my wife. But it was an accident. She made me mad and I lost my temper."

"What did she do?"

He shrugged. "Didn't come home on time. I thought someone else was trying to take her from me."

He sighed. "I loved her very much." His arms tightened around Michael.

Michael's eyes moved to Tony's.

Tony leaned in. "I find Senor?"

"Please. Quickly."

He kissed Michael lightly twice on the lips. "I got fast. You sleep." He kissed Michael one more
time, then rose from the bed. "I be back, Senor. Okay?"

"Bring something for him to take the pain away, Gatito. I don't want him hurting."

Tony clearly had to suppress rolling his eyes. Instead, he simply nodded. With one last sympathetic look to Michael, he turned and ran from the cell.

And Michael did the only thing he could do in anything resembling comfort: he slept.

* * *

T-Bag was fast and hard to keep up with. Especially since Alex had to hold his pants up as he ran. Between the adrenaline and the stress and pushing through an unending wall of men, he couldn't fasten them. Was lucky to even have gotten them up in the first place.

"This way!" T-Bag rounded a corner, the fourth since they'd left the block Alex had been taken to.

News of the riot had spread, and there were still people heading towards it. But not as many, not the wall of people they'd had to fight through at first.

Another corner, and they were in a dormitory style room. T-Bag slowed to a walk, allowing Alex to catch up.

"I'm just on the other side of here. Little corner I managed to stake out for myself yesterday."

Alex nodded. Zipped and buttoned his pants as he looked around. He'd been through this dorm earlier, with the guard. Today. Christ, it'd only been today. Strange how time seemed to lengthen when you were being sexually assaulted.

Out of the room and around another corner. Just like the first hallway Alex had slept in, this one had people sitting or lying against the walls, living. Not lucky enough to get a cell, or even a dormitory. Or a closet.

T-Bag turned. Looked at Alex, arms crossed over his chest, head cocked.

Alex returned the gaze. He was still on alert, adrenaline still running through him. The man in front of him was no less dangerous than the men they'd just left. Smaller stature and one hand he may be. That hadn't stopped him from killing while on the run, that wouldn't stop him from trying to kill Alex here.

However. T-Bag had just saved him. He wanted something.

Alex swallowed. "Thank you," he said gruffly. "For saving my ass."

He got a toothy smile that was swallowed by T-Bag running his tongue over his lower lip. "We are in a foreign country. We Americans have to stick together."

Of course.

He wasn't sure what to say. Wasn't sure if T-Bag even knew who he was. Knew that Alex knew who T-Bag was.

Or if T-Bag knew that Alex had taken Michael. And wasn't planning on giving him up.

"My name's Theodore," T-Bag finally said. He held out his hand. "Most people call me T-Bag."
Alex took it. Shook. "Alex." He licked his lips. Released T-Bag's hand. "I know who you are."

"Oh?" A wary, caged looked came over him. Fists clenched.

"I was the FBI agent assigned to capture the Fox River Eight."

The shark's grin came back. "And, might I say, what a wonderful job you did. Thank you for doing your part to make this world a better and more safer place to live in."

"I got Abruzzi. Manipulated him so he walked into a hail of bullets."

"And, for that, I thank you. Vengeance," he said, holding up his stump, "is served."

Alex eyed it. He'd heard that the man had lost a hand, but until now, he hadn't known Abruzzi had anything to do with it. "What happened?" he asked.

"Mr. Mafia used an axe to separate myself from my hand when we first escaped." T-Bag gave him another shark's grin. "I was trying to secure my seat on his plane by semi-permanently attaching myself to Scofield. It somehow slipped my mind that even body parts can be removed."

His eyes slid to T-Bag's other arm. Another bandage was wrapped around it, this one stained dark brown with blood and green. An infected wound; it'd have to be looked at. Alex supposed he could offer as thanks for the rescue. It galled him to be indebted to the psycho and he wanted to pay up as soon as he could.

"That happen in here?"

T-Bag glanced at his arm. Shrugged. "Just before I was brought here. A doctor of dubious talent stitched it up, but I tore those stitches the first day when someone thought my size and visible handicaps might make me an easy target."

"What happened to that man?"

"He's with the angels now."

Adrenaline was fading. Alex could feel how tired his muscles were, each one quivering in exhaustion. He'd kill for another cigarette, just to tied him over. Soothe his drug-hungry nerves. He leaned against the wall. "How long have you been here?"

"They brought me in two days ago. You?"

He tried to put it together. Most of the days were a confusing blur, especially once the detox hit. "I think three, four days?" He showed T-Bag his wrist. "They only processed me today, though."

"They did me when they brought me in. Already cut my slave bracelet off." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a shiv made of glass. Guillermo's blood still coated it. "I was staying in the same block as you," he continued as he cut the bracelet from Alex's arm. "After I offed the first man who tried to claim me, they pretty much left me alone. Spent some time trying to figure out how the hierarchy worked there, then left to find my own accommodations."

"I take it the gang I was given to was the top?"

"Top of the top. I knew if the big fella who almost stuck it to you was killed, the rest of the vultures would swoop in, ready to take his place."
"Thank you."

"Like I said, we Americans have to watch out for each other. Ain't no one gonna do it for us." He cocked his head. "You speak Spanish?"

"No." I had someone who did, though, he added silently. He wondered what had happened to Michael. If he were still alive, still one piece.

"So, you've been here for some number of days. But they brought you in to bunk with ol' green-eyes today. Where have you been residing up till now?"

The closet. Damn. He could get back there now. If Tony was looking for him... hell, if Michael was looking for him, they'd probably start there. And now that he was free to wander...

Of course, he didn't know how to get there from here. But he might be able to get it from either the yard, the mess hall, or the guard's entrance.

"You know where the mess is?" he asked, avoiding T-Bag's question.

The eyes brows went up.

"I had a closet. That I was staying in, but I don't know where I am. If we could get back there... Well. A closet is better than a corner." Even though he didn't particularly want T-Bag there, especially when Alex got Michael back. But, right now, he had no other choice.

T-Bag nodded. "A closet is better than a corner." He leaned down and scooped up his blanket. Another shiv fell out. This he held to Alex. "If we run into trouble. You use it against me, boi, and you'll wish you were back against those bars with Green-eyes in your ass."

Alex smirked. Stepped forward and shoved T-Bag against the wall. Held him with just the weight of his body. Kicked his legs apart, keeping him off balance. "That right?"

The other man tried to throw him off, but couldn't. Alex's superior weight and training had him pinned. And he knew it. "I concede the point," T-Bag finally said.

Something sharp dug into Alex's side. Without missing a beat, he switched arms pinning T-Bag. Caught the shiv. Used T-Bag's hold and twisted his arm around, brining the point into T-Bag's side.

"We done?"

He gritted his teeth. Nodded.

Alex squeezed T-Bag's hand in a way that forced him to open, dropping the shiv. He caught it and slipped it into his pocket. "Lead on, then."

The other man was coiled tightly, vibrating with fury. He stopped beside Alex, clearly not willing to let him at T-Bag's back. Which was fine with Alex; he wasn't planning on letting T-Bag behind him, so side by side was fine.

Silent, tense, they walked down the hall together. Alex's skin was pricking again, and his forehead split with a headache. Plus, arms hurt where he'd been held against the bars, he could still feel the imprint of the bars on his face, and the stink of fear made him feel dirty.

He'd almost been raped. By a man who wasn't even that much bigger than himself. By a man he should have been able to take down. But he hadn't been able to, he'd been overwhelmed and...
He'd never really thought...

Who ever did really think that would happen?

He'd been worried about Michael. Michael was so pretty. Smart, brilliant, capable of taking care of himself, but...

This was different. This place was different. Whatever danger he'd been in during his stay at Fox River was multiplied here in Sona.

Somehow, Alex had never thought to include himself in the danger. Michael was young. Beautiful. Vulnerable-looking, even if he had a spine of steel. But Alex?

He'd been arrogant. And stupid to think he was safe from prison rape because of age and illness.

He wouldn't make that mistake again.

Resolve didn't make the fear go away. The shame. The dirtiness. He wanted to wash it away, literally and figuratively. He needed a shower. A safe space. A time to prove, to remind himself, that his body was his own.

God. He really hoped Michael was okay.

The lunch bell rang. Alex's stomach lurched when he heard it. He hadn't had breakfast, hadn't had anything but a cigarette and some water all day. He needed food and sleep and drugs. The last he'd forego, if only for today. He'd trade T-Bag for drugs if it came to that, but the promise of Michael's body could hold him for today.

"Senor," a familiar voice called.

Alex stopped and turned. "Arturo." He looked around him and realized he was in a dormitory he recognized.

Arturo was sitting on his bed playing cards with another inmate. He set his cards down and rose. "I hear the guards move you and the other gringo."

"Yeah, they did. Separated us. Do you know where he is?"

Arturo nodded. "I see Tony. He ask about you. Say he and the other gringo are with Raoul."

"I don't know where he is. Do you?"

Arturo nodded. "I see Tony. He ask about you. Say he and the other gringo are with Raoul."

"I don't know where he is. Do you?"

"Not what cell. But you see him, you find your gringo."

"If you see Tony again, tell him that I'll be at the closet. Do you know if anyone's taken it?"

"Si. Migel take back. Easy take from him again, though." Arturo stepped closer. "I help you, if I can stay."

He was tempted to say yes, if only because his stomach was cramping again and the headache made it hard to see. But Arturo was young and T-Bag was already eyeing him as if he were a piece of pie. It was going to be hard enough once Alex got Michael and Tony back; he didn't need another person to have to protect from T-Bag.

Of course, he could get rid of T-Bag.
"Thank you. But..."

Arturo's face fell, but he just shrugged. "Okay. But, one day, Senor..."

"Thank you, Arturo. I know I owe you."

"I say we bring the boy along," T-Bag said, eyes running slowly over Arturo's form. "One can always use a little extra help."


Alex tried to apologize with his eyes; Arturo nodded at him, so the message seemed to be received.

"The closet is small," Alex said. He put his hand on the nape of T-Bag's neck. Turned him around and started leading him from the room. "With you, there's four, and there was barely enough room as it is."

"Four? Who are these other two?"

"Tony, who's an urchin I picked up on the first night. And." He licked his lips. "Michael."

T-Bag's eyes were sharp, cutting him. "Michael? As in Scofield?"

"Yes. And if you touch him, if you so much as look at him in any way I don't approve, I will fuck you up so fast, you'll wish that I'd just cut off your other hand. Do you understand?"

T-Bag stopped. Cocked his head, looking vaguely dog-like. Stared at Alex with a gaze so penetrating, he felt it pierce through him.

"Is this because you have a strange sense of honor and are protective over our resident pretty-boy, or do you own his ass?"

"What do you think?"

"I think anyone willing to throw down with me has got to have some form of prurient interest."

He turned and stepped into T-Bag's personal space. The other man raised his chin. Glared back.

"You lay one finger on him, I will kill you."

T-Bag smirked. "Very well. Pretty is safe from me. That is, as long as you are around to protect that beautiful ass of his."

He thought about it. Nodded. Punched T-Bag once in the gut. "Then we have an understanding. Let's go."

Now that he knew where he was, he felt a bit more confident. He still held back just a bit, not wanting to give T-Bag the opportunity to shiv him in the back.

Miguel was just closing the closet door when Alex and T-Bag rounded the corner. His back was to them; Alex didn't give him a chance to turn around. He just ran up and slammed Miguel into the door. Jabbed him in the kidneys with his fist. Kicked the back of his knee, then swept his feet from under him.

"I hope you didn't mess up the place too badly," Alex growled in Miguel's ear. "And that you didn't think you were moving back in."
He jerked. Tried to throw Alex off, but Alex had his arm twisted behind his back. Every movement Miguel made just wrenched that arm tighter.

"My closet!" Miguel said. "It was mine. I take back."

Alex stepped on the back of his knee. "And now I'm taking it back again." He pulled the shiv from his pocket. Wrapped his arm around Miguel's neck. Pressed it against his flesh. "Next time I see you near this closet, I will cut your throat." He gouged a chunk out.

Miguel surged against Alex. The shiv dug in deeper, drawing more blood.

Finally, he relented. "Okay." He relaxed in Alex's hold. Slumped. "Is yours. I no try take again."

"Good." Alex climbed off him. Kicked him to the flood. "Go."

Miguel picked himself up. Glared and left.

"Looks like you can take care of yourself just fine," T-Bag said. "Still. In a place like this..."

"Safety in numbers." Alex opened the door and stepped into the closet.

It was just as they'd left it that morning. No; there was one more blanket inside. Miguel must have brought it in. Other than that, the bag of clothes was in the corner, the light was covered by the sock, and the two mattresses were still pushed together.

Christ. Two mattresses. One fifteen year old kid and a pedophile. Alex was going to have to sleep next to T-Bag. They'd have to keep Tony against the wall with him and Michael as two human walls. And even then...

Provided, of course, Alex found Michael and Tony again. And got them back.

"Cozy." T-Bag dropped his blanket. His body immediately followed and he stretched out on Michael's mattress. He stretched, long and luxurious, and heaved a sigh. "Now this is living. Better than a cell, with all them prying eyes. And much better than a corner." He propped his head on his fist. "Seems like you and Pretty have got yourselves a bit of a love nest here."

"Whatever." Weary, Alex sank down. Rested his head against his knees. He felt like shit.

"You're looking a bit peaked there, Mister FBI."

"Hungry. Haven't eaten since yesterday."

"I believe that obnoxious sound we heard earlier means that something that passes for food is being served."

What he really wanted was to lie down and sleep. To have another cigarette. To find some drugs. To fuck Michael. Anything.

Food would have to do. "All right. Let's go." He rose. A wave of dizziness overtook him and he had to lean against the wall as T-Bag opened the door.

"Senor!"

Alex opened his eyes. Tony was pushing past T-Bag. He launched himself at Alex. Buried his face against his chest in a tight, desperate hug. A torrent of Spanish tumbled from the boy's lips, his flush, sweaty face leaving an imprint against Alex's shirt. He stepped back, grabbed Alex's arms and
tugged, still speaking a mile a minute.

"Tony. Tony," Alex shouted, allowing himself to be dragged. "I can't understand you. Speak English. And slower."


"Pulled out his arm?"

"Si! He can't move it. Just hangs there. Like this." Tony demonstrated.

"Out of its socket," T-Bag said.

"Si!" Tony nodded, then stopped and looked at T-Bag, obviously confused. Then he shook his head. "Come. Michael need us."

"Well, then lead the way."

Tony turned and took off down the hall. Alex and T-Bag followed.

* * *

Michael was lying on the bottom left bunk in a cluttered cell. His face was black and blue, one side swollen. Blood painted his lips, stained the skin underneath his nose. His eyes were closed and he breathed evenly, sleeping or unconscious, Alex wasn't sure.

The man who held him was huge. Alex remembered Michael telling him about the man who'd approached him a few days before. Somehow, he hadn't been expecting...

This man was huge to the point of ridiculous.

Alex hesitated at the opening of the cell. Tony pushed past him. Crawled onto the bed next to Michael.

"Michael," he whispered. Kissed his slightly less bruised cheek. "Wake up."

"No," Alex said. He moved into the cell cautiously, eyeing the man who held him. "Let him sleep. I need to put his arm back in the socket, and it might help if he's not awake." He eyed Raoul warily.

Tony said something to Raoul in Spanish. The other man nodded. Shifted.

"I pull out," he said brokenly. He sounded near tears. "I did not mean."

That hadn't been what Alex had been expecting to hear. Not the words, nor the tears. Size or not, this man was nothing but a child.

A huge, dangerous child. But a child, nonetheless. With the right words, right actions, he could probably be controlled. Used.

He glanced quickly at the junk on the cell floor. The man had amassed quite a collection. There might be something useful in that.

The man might be useful. If they could keep him under control.

And a cell was better than a closet.
But. To the task at hand.

"It's okay," Alex said as soothingly as he could. "I know it was an accident. Of course it was. You'd never hurt him."

He blinked. Nodded. "No. I would not. But he try to leave. I have to keep him."

"Of course you do. Of course. He's valuable. Pretty white man in here? You need to keep him. But, I have to put his arm back in now, okay? Can you hold him steady for me?"

"Si," he said eagerly. "You fix?"

"I'll fix him. His arm," Alex amended. "Just hold him."

"Okay." Raoul moved onto his knees. Cradled Michael against his body, muscular arms wrapped around Michael's thin torso.

It'd been a long time since Alex had to do this. Memories of the army, of injured men surrounded him. The same smell of pain and desperation hung in the air, flowed from Michael.

Alex pushed the memories away. Focused on the man in front of him. He could see Michael's eyes moving under his lids. He was waking up, swimming towards consciousness.

He wished he had drugs to give Michael. A muscle relaxant for the shoulder. Anything.

But he didn't.

He had to make the best of it.

Alex sat on the bed and carefully draped Michael's arm over his shoulder. Wrapping his hands around Michael's forearm, he moved. Pressed at the arm, finding the socket.

The joint popped back in with a sickening crack. Michael's eyes flew open. His back arched, a low, pained cry escaping his throat. He jerked away from Alex, smashing hard into Raoul.


Michael panted. Tears rolled down his face, but he seemed unaware of them. He rubbed his face against Raoul's shirt. "What... I..."


Michael's eyes fastened blurrily on Alex's face. He nodded, breathing in. He coughed. "I'm gonna..."

Coughed again, sitting up, and vomited over his shirt and Alex's pants.

Alex winced. Looked up at Raoul, who also had half digested food on him. He expected an outburst, anger. A beating that he was going to have to take for Michael.

To his surprise, there was none. Just Raoul stroking Michael, rocking him back and forth. "Is okay," he kept whispering into Michael's hair. "Is okay."

"Tony." Alex looked up at him. "Can you get us a change of clothes from the closet? And soap?"

"Si." He scrambled over Michael. Kissed Alex swiftly on the cheek. "Thank you, Senor."
"Just go," he said gruffly, embarrassed. He liked the kid better when he was throwing oranges at his head. He looked up at Raoul. "He'll need food. Water." Licked his lips. "I need food."

"Si. Si. I get food. You stay. I protect you. Si."

Alex hesitated, then nodded. He still didn't have a complete sense of who this man was, but, right now, he looked to be their best option. If they could keep him calm, he would keep them safe enough for Michael to begin to look for a way out.

They just had to stop him from ripping Michael's arms out.

Raoul gently lay Michael on the bed. Climbed off. The minute he rose, Alex heard T-Bag swear.

"Oh, hell no. I ain't staying around for this murder-suicide pack. Not with someone who's big enough to squish you like a bug."

"Good," Alex said. He turned, suddenly inspired. "Then you can guard the closet until we get back. Make sure no one takes it."

T-Bag eyed Raoul warily as the big man moved past him. "Guard the closet." He stepped back, away from Raoul. Looked at Alex. "You mean live in it?"

"Until we get back."

"Right," Raoul gone now, T-Bag gained some of his swagger. He leaned against the bars. Looked in. "What about the boy? He part of the deal?"

The..."No. Tony stays with us." He glanced over at Bellick, who was sitting in the corner, picking through the crap on the floor. "You could take Bellick."

Bellick looked up. "Fuck off.... Wait. I mean, fuck, yeah. Stuck in a closet with a one armed pervert gotta be better than stuck in here with Rhino, the fucking retard." He climbed to his feet. "Sayanora, suckers."

"You're awful eager to share a small space with a man you told not one week ago you hoped he'd go down in a hail of bullets," T-Bag said, not moving from where he was.

"Well, why don't we stay here talking about it some more so when Raoul gets back, you're stuck here too. Cause seeing you on the end of one of his rages would do me a world of good after the week I had."

T-Bag blinked. Shook his head. "I ain't no one's bitch."

Bellick smirked. "That man's three times your size with a rage button you that don't turn off once it gets pushed. He will smush your inbred, hillbilly ass flatter than flat, then crawl onto bed and treat Scofield like a little princess while you try to pull the pieces together. So. If you want to stay for that, be my guest. Me? I'm taking the closet."

"I'm sorry," Alex said, sliding one arm around Michael's shoulders. "But the two of you seem to think you have a choice in this. You don't. You will both go to the closet where you will play nice until we get back and decide what to do with you. End of story. Got it?"

The look on both men's faces were perfect. Bellick clearly remembered how easily Alex had neutralized him eons ago back in Illinois. And T-Bag, although not completely convinced, still had a healthy dollop of fear for him.
"Get out of here," he said. "Before Raoul gets back and you have to pretend that I don't already control you." Then, when they didn't do anything, he said it louder. More forcefully. "Move!"

Bellick did right away, following orders. T-Bag moved much slower, pulling away from the bars with an insolent air. He smirked at Alex and Michael. Licked his lips.

"Have fun." He laughed, then, finally, turned and walked away.

"Christ." He turned to Michael.

Michael's eyes were closed. He almost looked like he was sleeping, but he was muttering to himself. Shifting, moving his arm.

"Michael," Alex said, shaking him. "Michael, wake up."

Fuzzy blue eyes opened. "Alex?"

"Yeah. We need to get your arm into a sling." He glanced at the cluttered floor. "You think there's one down there?"

He shook his head. Wiped his running nose on the sleeve of his shirt. Blood was mixed with snot, and Alex winced to see it. "No. I don't think there's anything, like, useful there." He rubbed his eyes. "Was that T-Bag?"

"Yeah. He sort of... helped me out." He grabbed the hem of Michael's shirt and tugged. "You should get out of this. It's disgusting."

"What else is new?" He tried to lift his arm. Bit off a cry.

"Okay, don't worry. We'll cut it off." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the shiv. "This way, we can use it as a sling, too."

"Fine."

Alex slit the shirt down the middle. Slid it off Michael's chest. "Bend your elbow, put it across your chest," he instructed.

Michael did, watching as Alex tore off the part Michael had sicked on. Then, Alex rigged it until he could wrap it around Michael's arm and neck, securing the injured arm to his body.

"Thanks," Michael said quietly. His eyes were lowered, head down. "I wasn't sure if I'd see you again."

"I told you I'd find you."

"I know." His eyes drifted shut. He swayed.

"Lie down."

Michael nodded and did as told. Alex stretched out next to him. Even though Michael's torso was bruised and cut, Alex slid his hand over the skin. Felt the warmth, the smoothness. Closed his eyes, something tight in his chest unknotting.

"Tony said you were in a riot."

"Well. No." He moved closer to Michael. "T-Bag started the riot by killing... the leader of the gang I
was given to. It was a distraction. Allowed to get me out. I..." He licked his lips, shame suffusing him. "I was almost... almost..." He couldn't say the words. They tightened his throat, warmed his face. Turned his stomach, and if he kept thinking, he was going to throw up.

He pushed what happened away. To the back of his mind. Smashed it down as deeply as he could. "I was almost killed," he said. Lied. Told the truth. It didn't matter. It was safe. Death was something he'd faced hundreds of times, on the job, in the army, as a child living with an alcoholic, rage filled father. Death was safe. Easy.

"My cellmate, the man they gave me to. Had to teach me a lesson. With every other man in his gang, and there were too many of them. I would have been killed."

Michael climbed over Alex and rolled onto his side. Pressed against Alex, their faces together. Broken and bloody lips rested against Alex's own. "I'm a doll. Petted and cosseted and fed and beaten when bad." He closed his eyes. Moved his head down, bristly hair brushing over Alex's face. "He hasn't even... I mean, earlier, before this, Raoul... kissed me. Mauled me in front of everyone, and I thought he was going to.... but he didn't."

He didn't. Of course not. This whole time, Alex had been convinced that... that he'd have to be on the lookout for men who'd take advantage of Michael. Who'd be drawn to his looks, to the vulnerability he exuded. Who'd have more stamina, who'd be able to outlast Michael's fighting skills, who'd overpower him. Rape him. Alex had been so sure that he'd be fighting for Michael, and picking up the pieces if he failed.

To hear this. Michael's virtue safe as the prized possession of a mentally disabled giant while Alex was against the bars, pants around his ankles, cock in his ass...

No. Never happened.

"I'm glad," he said truthfully. Because he wouldn't be able to deal with it right now.

"What happened?" Michael asked.

Damn it. "One of the gang members started fucking with me. I fought back. The leader took exception and set his dogs on me. If T-Bag hadn't stepped in..."

He was interrupted by hysterical laughter.

"T-Bag the hero," Michael choked out. "One handed and still able to take down gang leaders. Like a fucking cockroach, he just doesn't.... And thank God he's not dead, because otherwise..." He broke off in another peal of wild laughter. Tears leaked out the corners of his eyes. And still he laughed.

Alex stroked the side of Michael's face. He didn't say anything; there wasn't anything to say. All he could do was wait this out, wait for Michael to calm down, wait for one of them to think of a way to get away from the giant safely.

And as for getting out... well. Maybe they hadn't made much progress so far, thanks to Alex. But, on the bright side, they had a better idea of the layout of the prison now. So. Small favors.

Finally, Michael calmed. The laugher faded into silence. Just Michael breathing, noisily, through a congested and bloody nose. Chest heaving. Tears, silent.

Alex wiped away a tear with his thumb.

"I'm sorry," Michael whispered thickly. "I shouldn't.... I'm not weak, I swear."
"I know."

"No." He sniffed. Wiped his nose on his hand. "It's just been so much. What? Four days and I just feel overloaded."

"You need to learn to block things out."

"Thank you, Dr. Mahone. I'll take that under advisement." He closed his eyes. "I've been mostly left alone. Except in the mess. Mostly." He pressed his face into Alex's shoulder. "He grabbed me by the wrist. I was trying to get to you, and he grabbed me and I... I attacked him."

"Pretty, but stupid." Alex slid his hand down Michael's injured arm. Carefully wrapped his hand around his wrist. "This one? He grabbed this wrist?"

Michael's eyes slid shut. He let out a shuddering breath. "Yeah. Can you... can you take the bracelet off?"

He sat up and picked up the shiv. Carefully, he sawed through the plastic binding around Michael's thin wrist. When it broke apart, he pulled it off and tossed it on the floor. "There." He wrapped his hand around Michael's wrist again. Lay down. "We're kind of fucked up, you know. Just a few days ago, I wanted you dead."

"No you didn't."

"I thought I did." A violent shudder went through him. Pain knifed through his head. His stomach. "All I wanted was to get back to you."

"You just want me for my body," he said with a crooked smile.

"You did promise I could do anything to you."

Michael opened his eyes. "You still want to? After..."

Alex moved in. Kissed Michael. The kiss was much gentler than any they'd shared so far. Less driven out of anger and lust and more... because he wanted to.

"Were you smoking?" Michael asked when Alex broke away.

"Yeah. A kid gave me a cigarette. And I really needed something." He kissed Michael's cheek, avoiding his mouth; he'd forgotten that Michael had thrown up, and the taste had been disgusting.

Michael nodded. "Whenever Lincoln went to rehab, he'd come out smoking. It was the only drug they were allowed." He met Alex's eyes. "Raoul gave me some cigarettes earlier. They're in my back right pocket."

He smiled. Shifted until he was over Michael, avoiding his injured arm. Eyes locked on the bright blue below his, Alex slid his arm underneath Michael's body. Wiggled his fingers until they fit in the back pocket. Found the cigarette and slid it out.

"Alex," Michael whispered raggedly.

He lowered his head to Michael's neck. Kissed and licked along the smooth column. Nibbled the flesh just above his collarbone. "Better than any drug,"

Michael laughed. "Right."
"I bring food!" Raoul announced.

"Fuck." Alex pulled away from Michael and sat up.

Raoul was carrying a bag with what looked like a week's worth of food. Setting it down on the bed, he unpacked chicken, fruit, tortillas, and rice. More food than Alex had seen since he arrived.

"You okay?" he asked Michael once he got the food unpacked. Raoul sat on the bed next to him. Tentatively touched Michael's face. Ran a finger down his arm. Touched the sling.

Michael nodded, looking tired. "Yeah. I'm okay."

Raoul nodded. Stroked Michael's neck. Turned and looked at Alex. "You stay. Here, with me. I give you food. Protect you."

"From everyone except you, that is," Alex said around a mouthful of chicken. "Barely one day and you almost ripped Michael apart."

"I not mean to! He make me."

Control him, Alex, he reminded himself. Don't antagonize.


Raoul frowned. "Sleep. Si. You sleep here."

"Nosotros tenemos sexo," Michael clarified.

The confusion cleared from the larger man's face. "Ah. Si. He is very pretty. Si. Sex is okay."

He blinked. Interesting. He'd expected more of a fight, an argument. He'd expected to have to manipulate the other man into it. Raoul giving in right away was... surprising.

"Oh. Then. Okay." He took another bite of the chicken. "Good."

"You stay?"

"Yeah. I'll stay."

Raoul grinned. He pet Michael's head, and almost big enough to cover the whole thing. Then he glanced around the cell. Frowned. "Where other gringo?"

Fuck. "Well, Michael and I were staying in that closet. Now that we're here, I figured the closet was yours. I sent him to guard it, make sure no one else too it."

"Oh." He frowned, then shrugged. "He still mine, si?"

"Si."

"Okay." Raoul leaned over and kissed Michael on the forehead. "I be back." He got up. Pat Alex on the head and left the cell.

Alex let out a long breath. "Thank God that worked."
"I'm surprised he noticed Bellick missing so quickly," Michael said. He picked up a tortilla and took a bite. "He barely noticed Bellick when he was here."

"I figured. I just wanted him out. The man gives me the creeps."

Michael flashed a smile. "And yet you allied yourself with T-Bag."

"He gives me the creeps, too. Locking them in a closet together makes me feel better." He rubbed the back of his neck. Finished his chicken. "A little."

"You're eating," Michael said when Alex reached for another piece of chicken. "I haven't seen you eat like this since we got here."

"I'm feeling a little better. My skin hurts, but I can eat." He rubbed his eyes. "I hope the worst is over."

"Me, too." He picked up a tortilla. "So much for my knight in shining armor."

"Huh?"

Michael smirked. Tore at the tortilla, mashing it between his fingers. "I was hoping to get away from Raoul. I can't... Like I said, I'm overloaded. I can't see anything big right now; I'm trapped in the details, and I can't think past running off and being smushed like a bug. When he pulled my arm out, and I sent Tony to find you... I kind of hoped you'd get me away."

"Michael Scofield, in need of rescue?"

Blue eyes glinted under long, dark lashes. "Sometimes, even a hero needs break."

"Wanted a chance to play damsel?"

His lips twitched. "Maybe not a damsel. But I am yours to protect. So, I guess I was hoping you'd protect me."

"Michael. Why did I pull you out of the rain?"

"Because you wanted my ass."

He threw a piece of chicken at Michael. It hit him in the face.

Michael laughed. It was a strangely welcome sound.

"Because you're under the delusion that I can figure out how to break out of a prison when I don't even know the layout? Or have tools? Or a plan?"

"And what does having a giant who adores you and is willing to protect your scrawny ass give you the ability to do?"

He sighed. "Provided he doesn't accidentally kill me."

Alex put his hand on Michael's leg. Rubbed his shin through his jeans. "You know how to handle people. I know how to handle people." He squeezed. "You're able to manipulate people with more than just your body. Although, I'm sure Raoul would be thrilled if you cozied up to him one night."

"You might get jealous."
"Damn right. Mine." He squeezed harder. "Raoul is a child. He can be played. We just have to be on our guard. I'm sure we'll be able to get him to allow us to explore. We go through this crap and see if there anything we can use. And we figure out a way out of this hell hole."

Michael snorted. "Oh, yeah. Just that easy." He lay back and closed his eyes. "Do you think we're allowed visitors here?" His voice had a deep, unpleasant ache to it.

Alex finished the chicken. Licked his fingers. "Probably. Don't know how or where. Just keep an ear out, I guess. Why? You expecting your brother to stick around? Or your lovely lady friend?" He scooped some rice from the container into his mouth. "Tell me. Since she's the one who actually killed Bill Kim, do you really think she'd show up here? At a prison?"

Michael surged up, face a mask of fury. He moved, fist clenched, towards Alex. Broke off with a pained grunt. "Fuck. Fuck." He moved closer, slower this time. Socked Alex in the arm. "No. No, I don't think she'll come. I don't want her to come." Breathing heavily, he slumped against Alex. "How did you know?"

"That it was her?" He shrugged. Moved closer and rested his head on top of Michael's. "You wouldn't. Not unless the gun went off on accident. Lincoln would freeze. He's a lot of things, but he's not a killer."

"And Sara is?"

"Sara Tancredi is used to making difficult decisions in a split second. It's her job. She can assess the situation and do what needs to be done. Which she did."

Michael's eyes closed. "Never thought of it that way."

"You know, she's actually a good match for you. You're a detail man. You mull things over, examine things from all sides. Contemplate and then you act. She's whip smart, can think on her feet, can be spurred to action. Just what you need in your life."

"Except now I'm stuck in a Panamanian prison hell hole, and she's out there." He yawned. "She should probably leave. Move on with her life now. Forget me."

"You're breaking my heart, Scofield."

"What about you?"

His throat closed. He blinked rapidly, eyes burning.

"Alex?"

"Everything good... about me. It was all her. And my son." He closed his eyes. A surge of anger went through him, anger at Michael for putting him here. At the Company. At himself.

A weight settled on his lap. Warm lips pressed against his. "Stuck together," Michael whispered. He kissed Alex's cheek. Ran his fingers through his hair. "If I said that I regretted... certain choices that I made... that they were made out of anger and a desire to hurt rather than.... I was angry. Because you were winning. And cheating. Because I might have let you come along if you'd asked, even though you killed my father. And David and Abruzzi and..."

"Patoshik."

"Right." Michael rested his forehead against Alex's. "I wanted to hurt you. And I guess I could say
that... that I regret the impulse that drove me. But, the thing is, I'm kind of. Kind of really glad that you're here."

He let out a long breath. "Well," he said, putting his arms around Michael. "I can't say I'm glad to be here. But, guess I'll make the best of it."
Chapter 7

Tony finished folding the last shirt and put it in the bag. That done, he looked around the closet to make sure he hadn't left anything. There was no saying how long they'd be with Raoul, and even if they somehow got away, they might not be able to go back to the closet. He wanted to make sure he got everything.

"You are not staying in here, there's not enough room," a voice said. The door to the closet opened. "You will sleep in the hall and I will take the.... Hello. What have we here?"

Tony straightened, bag in his arms. The man who had been with Alex was back. The skinny, creepy one with only one hand. And he talked funny. He was very hard to understand.

"That's the whelp that's been following Michael all day, T-Bag," Bellick growled. "What the fuck are you doing here, kid?"

"Señor tell me to get Michael clothes," he said.

"Oh. Right."

"So," the one-handed man said, coming closer. "How do you know our erstwhile leader and his pretty companion?"

He was beginning to understand how Alex felt. Not that Tony didn't feel that way sometimes, but he understood a lot more English than he let on. And understood more than he could speak. So when Alex and Michael were talking to each other, Tony could pretty much follow along with what they were saying.

This man, though. It was like he was speaking a whole different language. Tony recognized about one in every four words.

He hesitated, working it out, before he thought he could answer. "I stay with them. With Señor and Michael. Help them."

"And how did that come about?"

Again, he had to think before he could answer. Even then he wasn't entirely sure. "Señor... found me? Took my corner."

The other man smiled and swaggered closer. "Is corner slang for virginity?" He reached out. Ran his thumb down Tony's cheek. Over his jaw. "No. Of course not. Good-looking little thing like you wouldn't have any virginity left from the moment you set foot in a place like this, now, would you? Boy like you, why. You're just the prison bicycle, aren't you?"

He shook his head, confused. "I no understand."

T-Bag smiled. Reached down and cupped Tony through his jeans. "Everybody's had a ride."

Oh. "Si."

T-Bag's face fell for a moment. Then he shrugged and tightened his hand over Tony's penis. "You know, I usually like my boys with a bit more innocence, but I'm willing to make an exception in your case."
He frowned. Shrugged away from the other man, stomach twisting. "No. I get this back to Señor and Michael now."

"Now wait. Don't go so fast. No reason to rush off." T-Bag removed his hand from Tony's crotch. "So. Señor Alex found you in the corner of a prison. And he took you?"

"He take my blanket. I stay and show him around. He need me, but he no want me. Not then. But I show him he need me, so I stay."

"How did you show him he needed you? On your knees?" T-Bag thrust his hips against Tony's leg. He shook his head. "Señor no want me," he explained. "Not ask me for that." It hadn't been disappointing then, but it sort of was now. At first, Tony'd been willing to sleep with Alex because that's what he did. Now, even though Alex said he didn't want him, Tony would still be willing, but for different reasons. Underneath the Señor Shitbag routine that he play, Alex was a good man. Not a nice man, but he cared for Michael and was smart and quick and there was just something different about him than most men Tony knew. Plus, he was nice to look at. Not pretty like Michael, but there was something about him. And he had those amazing eyes.

Yes. If Alex wanted, Tony would gladly roll over and allow Alex to take him. For different reasons than before.

"So why does he keep you around?"

"I get food. Clothes. I know people."

"What about Michael?"

Tony felt his face grow warm at the mention of Michael. "What about Michael?"

"Ah. I see I struck a nerve." He ran his thumb over Tony's bottom lip. "Have a little crush over our resident celebrity, do you?"

"Celebrity?"

"Ah. You don't know about Michael Scofield? Broke seven other men out of a prison in the United States? Was on the national news, coast to coast?"

"Si. He tell me. He break out of prison for his brother. He is very smart."

T-Bag's smile grew. "You liiii-ke him," he drawled. "Has he slipped it to you yet? Worked himself inside your tight little body and had his pleasure?"

He'd never been so hot before. Or so embarrassed. There'd never been any need. Tony was a well known slut, someone who'd put out for anyone to keep himself safe and get what he wanted. But now, just talking about Michael and sleeping with him... he was embarrassed.

"No. He say no to me."

"Oh, poor boy. But, then, I'm not surprised. Michael Scofield is notorious for turning down the most tempting of temptations." T-Bag leaned close. His breath was hot against Tony's neck. "You know, Michael Scofield and I have always had an understanding. He needs me and I need him. We work together, always have, always will." He pulled back just a little. "Now. You say you're a man who can get things. Sounds to me like you know how the game is played around here. The ins and outs. Would you'd be able to find a safe, quite, out-of-the-way space for that long-delayed and ever hoped
for union to take place?"

"Uh..."

"Just wait. I'm not done." His hand moved over Tony's chest. Fingers danced around a nipple. "Let's say you do help me out with setting up a rendezvous with that beautiful man. Should you do that, I might just be willing to leave you alone with him a few hours. Have a taste yourself. What do you say?"

He yanked back from the other man. Moved away. "No," he said. "You don't touch Michael. Michael belongs to Señor."

"Yes, well, that may be so, but I can't imagine that he likes this arrangement. After all, Señor is the man who was sent after Michael, ostentatiously to take him back to prison. But what he actually did was try to kill Michael. He killed a boy not much more than your age, too. And a man who wasn't more than a child in his mind." T-Bag pressed Tony back against the wall. He tapped one finger against Tony's forehead. "Señor is a merciless killer. Michael is a pretty little boy with a mind a criminal mastermind would weep to possess, but he ain't a killer. Would cry at the very thought. If you got him away from Señor, you'd be doing him a favor."

Tony licked his lips. Shook his head. "Michael likes Señor." It was a bit of a sore spot with him. The two men had started out fighting, started out not liking each other. And then, it started to change. Alex got sick, and Michael took care of him. And then, Tony left to go to church only to come back to find them both glowing and looking sated. Alex had stopped shaking and had been reclining against the wall, looking off into the distance, comfortable for the first time in awhile. And Michael had been sleeping, head against Alex's thigh, a smile on his face.

Tony's heart had just about broke.

"Michael can manipulate people when he wants to. Plays them like a violin to get what he wants."

"It's true," Bellick said, finally joining into the conversation. "He had the prison doctor and the warden eating out of his hand back when he was in Fox River. Got the warden to give him all these special favors and stuff, then turned against him. Knocked him out and locked him in a closet."

"He not using Señor."

"Of course he is," Bellick said. "He'll use Raoul, you, and anyone else he can. He doesn't care about anyone but his brother."

T-Bag shot him a dark look. "Now, that ain't true, Bellick."

"Yeah, it is. He's got this wife, right? This stripper whore. And he just..."

"Shut up!" T-Bag pulled away from Tony, stormed to Bellick. His one good hand clenched in Bellick's shirt and he shoved him backward. "I know that simian brain in your bulbous head works a tad bit slow, but, for once in your pathetic little life, think before you speak." With that, T-Bag pushed Bellick out of the closet and closed the door. "The thing about Mr. Scofield is that he may start out using everyone and everything in his path, but his heart doesn't stay safe. He cares. He cared about the doctor, about the warden. I'll bet he cared about his wife. He cares about you."

Tony nodded. He knew that. Michael wouldn't sleep with him, but he protected Tony. Was nice to him. Played games with him. And, even if he didn't really like Tony, if it was all just a game, it didn't matter. Tony liked him, and he'd do anything Michael wanted. Anything Michael needed to keep him safe.
As for Alex....

Maybe Michael was using Alex, but Alex probably knew that. If anything, they were using each other.

"I go back now," he said. "Michael needs clothes."

"Michael is fine," T-Bag said, but Tony pushed him away. "All right, all right. But think about what I said. I want to talk to Michael, and I want to talk to him alone. You can help make that happen. And then, like I said, after you and he could talk or whatever."

"Michael... he say I'm too young," Tony said, stopping at the door.

"How old are you? Fifteen? Sixteen?"

"Si."

A warm hand clapped him on the shoulder. "Hell. That ain't nothing. Señor Alex? He's, like, fifty. Twenty years older than Michael. You ain't barely more than ten years apart, much closer in age. He's just looking for reasons there."

Tony shook his head. "Señor Alex... Michael like him. He give Michael what he want."

"Probably not anymore," T-Bag purred in Tony's ear. "Do you know how that riot got started?"

"No."

A hot puff of air against his ear. The slight graze of teeth. "Have you heard of a man named Guillermo?"

He nodded.

"Señor Alex was given to him. And when he didn't play nice, Guillermo decided to teach him a lesson. Had I not stepped in, Alex would be truly ripped up, both inside and out." Another wave of hot breath washed against his neck. "As it was, Alex was used just enough that I wouldn't be surprised if Michael goes unsatisfied for a long while now. Or, worse, becomes the object upon which Señor Alex takes out his aggression and self-loathing."

Tony turned. Found himself nose to nose with the other man. His eyes looked like they'd melted into one.

T-Bag stepped back. "You wouldn't want Michael to be hurt because Alex hates himself, do you? Because the anger inside Alex bubbles up and unleashes against our resident beauty?"

He couldn't help but shake his head.

"Then find a way for Michael and I to be alone. For me to talk with my friend and make sure he and I are on the same page here." He pressed his thumb against Tony's mouth. "And then I'll leave the two of you alone to talk yourselves. Comprende?"

"Yes," Tony said, throat dry. "I understand."

"Good boy. Just, one thing more. Don't tell Señor Alex or Michael about our conversation. Let it be a surprise."

Tony had heard that before. It never led to anything good. "Okay," he lied. "A surprise."
T-Bag smiled. Reached behind Tony and opened the door. "I look forward to seeing you again."

He nodded and walked away. His heart was very heavy. Alex had been hurt. When Tony had first come, Guillermo had promised to protect him. He'd been very rough and Tony had been bleeding for days. So, he'd left. Guillermo hadn't really cared. He only let valuable people into his gang, not trash like Tony.

He wondered how far Guillermo had gotten with Alex. If Alex was hurt. Bleeding. Even if he wasn't, something like that... He should never have to go through it. The man may be an ass, but underneath it, he was good. Tony could see that. Anything he did, he did to survive. But he was not a bad man. He did not deserve to be hurt.

But T-Bag was right. He might be angry. Might lash out. And Michael should not be hurt.

Which left Tony. He would have to do whatever he could to make sure whatever violence Alex was feeling was taken out on him, not Michael.

"Hey. Gatito!"

Tony turned. A guard was standing outside in the yard. "Yes?"

"You know where Scofield is? His brother is waiting in the visitor's courtyard."

"He can't visit anyone right now. He's hurt and sleeping." He was about to turn away, when it felt like a bolt went through his brain. "Can I see him?"

"Whatever." He gestured toward the door on the other side of the yard, where the visitor's courtyard was.

Tony scampered across the yard. Through the door, still clutching the bag in his arms.

There was a man standing at the far end, behind the chain-linked fence. He was wearing a dark shirt, partially unbuttoned over his muscled chest. Black hair, like Michael's, was shaved close to his head. Green eyes shone from heavy lidded brows. He wasn't as pretty as his brother, but there was something attractive about him.

"You Michael's brother?" Tony asked breathlessly once he was at the fence.

The man narrowed his eyes. "Yeah. I'm Lincoln. Who the hell are you?"

"I am Tony. Michael is my friend. He can't see you today. Was hurt earlier, but is okay now. He's tired though."

"What? Hurt? What do you mean?"

Tony hesitated, then decided to give as edited a story as he could. He didn't want Michael's brother worrying too much. "There was a fight. Michael's arm was pulled out."

"What?"

He couldn't remember the word T-Bag had used earlier. "Um. Like this." He led his arm hang limply at his side, like Michael's had been.

Lincoln visibly relaxed. "Oh. Is it still out of the socket?"

"No, Señor Alex put it back in. Michael's okay now. Just tired. He throw up, though." He held up
the bag. "I bring him clothes."

"Okay. Uh, is Michael okay? Other than the fight? He hasn't been... is he okay?"

"Michael's okay. He and Señor Alex take care of each other."

"Alex? Like, Mahone? The FBI agent?"

"Si. They partners."

Lincoln frowned. It was like a thundercloud came over his face. "That man killed our father. He tried
to kill us. Michael is not safe with him."

Tony sighed. "They help each other. Señor Alex get off drugs, and Michael help him. Men want to
hurt Michael, and Alex stop them. They get along enough. Not always."

"I want to see him."

"Not today. Tomorrow. I promise." Raoul could be distracted, if needed. Or, maybe, they'd be able
to convince him to let Michael go. Or... somehow. "He will be okay, Señor. I promise."

"Will you take him a message for me?"

"Yes."

"Tell him... Tell him to take care of himself. And that Sara's safe. And that I'll do everything I can to
get him out of here. And that... Tell him his big brother... loves him."

Tony smiled. Nodded. "I will tell him."

"Thank you."

He nodded again. "Good-bye, Señor. Come back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow." Lincoln nodded, face set grimly. 'I'll be here."

* * *

"Michael. Michael!"

Michael blinked. Flinched away from the smack to the side of his head. Blinked again and looked
over at Alex. "What?"

"You've been staring at that plate for about five minutes. Snap out of it."

He looked down at the plate fragment. Unlike the other fragments he'd found, this one had a pattern.
Brown flowers, swirling around on a thick porcelain.

Another smack.

"Sorry. Sorry." Michael set the plate aside, into a growing pile.

"Maybe you need to take a break. That's the fifth time that's happened."

"I'm fine." He rubbed his eyes. Pressed his fingers against them. "Where's Raoul?"

"He... doesn't appear to be around." Alex rose and went to the cell door. Looked outside. "Down at
the other end. Think he's growing tired of us already?"

Michael shrugged. "Doubt it. We're still a novelty, at least for the next few days." He stood and moved over to the bed. "When Linc comes tomorrow," he said, leaning against it tiredly. "When he comes, will you come with me?"

Alex snorted. "Yeah," he said rubbing his hands together. "Because that's a good idea. Real good. You, me, and your brother. Little family reunion. Somehow, I don't think he'll be too happy that the man who killed his father is fucking his brother."

"We don't have to tell him about that." He closed his eyes. Tilted his head back. "I'm so tired."

"So go to bed. What time is it, anyway?"

Michael shrugged. "Nearly dinner? I don't know." He rubbed his stomach, careful not to jostle his injured arm. "Then just to the gate? You don't actually have to come out. Just. Be near."

Alex threw down whatever he was holding. It shattered on the concrete floor, pieces scattering. "I'm not your security blanket, Michael. If you need someone to hold on to, take Tony. Or Raoul, he'll be happy to cling."

"Something wrong?" He tried to muster up some energy, but the continuing ache in his arm was draining it all.

"Why you think that?" He leapt to his feet, all manic energy and blazing eyes. "Why should something be the matter? I mean, we're only in the worse prison on earth, stuck in the cell belonging to a giant with the mind of a child with a penchant for collecting things. We've become things to be collected. I haven't had a good shower in days. I piss and shit in a hundred other guys piss and shit. And I haven't had drugs in over five days." He grabbed Michael and pushed him harder against the bed. Pushed close into Michael's space until their bodies were tight. "Yeah," Alex growled, breath hot against Michael's skin. "There sure as fuck is something wrong."

It was so hot here. He'd just changed into a new shirt not four hours ago, and already Michael could feel that he'd sweated through the thin cotton. Alex, too; his shirt had been clinging to him for hours now, beads of sweat rolling down the sides of his face, his neck until it blotted in the black fabric. A short scruff of hair had grown on his chin, filled in the lean cheeks. It was a good look, and Michael had to keep stopping himself from reaching out and rubbing his palm against the bristle.

Michael's stomach turned in a slow circle. He lifted his chin. "Well. You got through this day without any drugs. Besides nicotine. That doesn't count."

"Doesn't count?"

"It's legal. And they're your lungs." He licked his lips. "I did make a promise to you."


Teeth scraped over Michael's jaw. Bright hot pain flamed.

He reached out with his good hand. Squeezed Alex's arm. Panted.

"Saint Michael has a guilty conscious. He likes to be punished. Doesn't he?" When Michael didn't
answer fast enough, Alex pressed hard against his injured shoulder.

Michael cried out, half pained, half surprised. His knees went weak and he slumped, weight on Alex, totally as his mercy.

"Well?"

"Yes," Michael admitted, cheeks going hot. He closed his eyes, unable to look at Alex.

"Saint Michael thinks this is where he belongs. In prison. Locked away. Punished for his crimes."

Again, he didn't answer quickly enough. Alex twisted his shoulder back, drawing another tortured cry from him.

"I don't... I don't..." he gasped, fingers digging into Alex's sides. "Lincoln was innocent."

"That wasn't my question, Saint Michael." Alex bit him. Hard. Broke the flesh and he could feel it give. Feel the blood.

"Not here."

"Not. Here." Alex wrapped his hand around Michael's wrist. Pulled at his arm, hurting Michael.

Michael bit his lip this time, not wanting to make any more noise. Not wanting.... "I deserve prison for what I did. So do you."

"We're not talking about me, Saint Michael."

"But you act like you shouldn't be here. Like... like the drugs are the only reason... but you killed. Shales. David. Haywire."

"Abruzzi."

"Abruzzi was a murderer."

"Judge and jury. Saint Martyr Michael." Another twist.

"Stop it!" He couldn't take it anymore. Take the pain, the taunting. Couldn't take...

He pushed.

Alex pushed back. Twisted his hurt arm. Wrapped his other hand around Michael's throat. Squeezed. "You said I could do anything."

"I didn't mean..."

"Saint Michael, willing to sell his body, little whore, because he feels guilty. Alex needs to be put away, the bad, bad man is a killer, but Saint Michael didn't mean this. Not this place. You wanted prison, not hell. So he feels guilty and gives the drug-addicted Alex what Saint Michael thinks the pervert wants."

Tears stood in his eyes. It hurt too much, his shoulder, his throat. The words that pecked, pecked, pecked at Michael, digging deep because Alex was inside him, always inside his mind, always seeing everything. Always peeling the layers back and leaving him exposed. "Stop," he whispered, desperate for air. "Just... not this."
"What then? What's okay? Not this, but this?" Alex dropped Michael's arm. Ripped at his fly, undoing the button and zipper.

He struggled. "No. Wait, not..."

But Alex pushed his jeans and underwear down. Flipped Michael around, hard metal of the bed cutting into his cheek. Mattress against Michael's face, and Alex held him tight. Hand on his ass, fingers in his crack.

"What about this, Saint Michael? You said anything. Do I get this? Is it really mine? Because you were panting for it yesterday, panting for this." He grabbed Michael's hand--the injured one. Yanked it around and Michael couldn't help the scream at the tearing pain. And then his hand was against Alex's crotch, pressed against grimy denim. "You were gagging for this." Alex thrust into Michael's hand. "Don't you want it now? Saint Michael, the whore. Don't you want it?"

He was trembling. Shaking out of control and tears were coursing down his cheeks, pain making him see red. But he managed to focus, just enough, concentrate. Pull himself together enough to say, "You don't even want it. Th-this isn't you, Alex. This.... You're not getting off on this. Not even hard."

The sweaty body pulled away. There was a sharp, swift jab to Michael's kidney's.

Michael fell, dropped to the floor, too tired and pained for anything else. Dizzy dimness obscured his vision, but he could see just enough to catch Alex's retreating figure through the bars.

Carefully, he pushed himself up. His arm was killing him, but he didn't think Alex had pulled it back out. He'd just wanted to hurt Michael, scare him. Punish him. Maybe punish himself. But not re-injure Michael. Not really.

He stood on shaky legs. Pulled his pants back up. His right hand was numb and he couldn't fasten his button. Of all the times for Tony to take off again. He'd come back earlier to tell them about Lincoln. Then, he'd gone off with some kids near about his own age. Michael had encouraged him to go, hopeful there might be someone in this prison whom Tony didn't feel beneath. Didn't feel he had to sleep with to get anything.

And now, Michael would give anything to have the comfort of that small, warm body pressed against him. To hold him. Snuggle against him and make him feel safe.

Instead, all he had was a pillow, a urine-scented blanket, and his own dark thoughts.

* * *

Alex heaved and emptied the last contents of his stomach on the dirt packed ground. As he shook, knees liquid, he braced himself against a wall, head pressed into the corner where two brick walls came together, enclosing the prison. Trapping him in.

His body shook once more. Stomach leapt to his throat. Nothing came up. Nothing was left. Alex retched dryly, water gathering under his eyelids. Sweat stood out all over his body, sticking his clothes, slicking him.

He felt dirty. He was dirty. Inside and out. Body and soul and there was nothing he could do about it.

On shaky legs, he stumbled away from the vomit-soaked corner. Made it a few steps before falling against the wall. Slumping to the ground.
What the fuck had just happened? Why had he done that? Attacked Michael, his one ally in this place. His ticket out and the only thing that'd kept him sane. The only person who gave a fuck whether he lived or died in this place.

And Alex had just turned on him.

So much for Michael's assertion that Alex wasn't a scorpion.

He just... snapped. They'd been sitting there for hours, sifting through Raoul's junk. He had spent a lot of that time watching Michael. Watching Michael work. Watching Michael shift uncomfortably, rubbing his injured arm. Watching Michael focus on something so hard he turned into a statue, gaze inward, mind somewhere else.

He was comfortable. He knew someone had his back. That Alex was there, ready to defend him. To fight for him. To keep him safe. Michael had a defender.

Not that he fucking needed it. They'd been separated for maybe two hours. In that time, Michael had been fondled, petted, and, yes, beaten. His arm had been pulled from his socket. Then, he'd been taken back to a cell where he was cuddled and cried over. Treasured, like a doll. Like something beloved.

And Alex?

He laughed. Wiped his fist over his mouth.

It wasn't fair. It wasn't how it was supposed to work. Michael was the weak one. The one who needed to be defended. The one who couldn't kill, couldn't fight. He was the pretty one. The one who wore his emotions on his face. Who showed his horror, his disgust so easily. Who had the looks--those wide eyes, the long lashes, the full lips--that made him a target.

It was supposed to happen to him. To Michael. He was the one who should have been...

But it wasn't. It'd been Alex. Stone-cold killer, Army trained, FBI agent, live-the-job-be-the-job Alex Mahone.

He wasn't weak. He wasn't a target. He didn't show every emotion on his face and he wasn't horrified by what he saw around him. Mildly disgusted, but nothing people did anymore could faze him.

It shouldn't have been him.

And knowing that it had, that he'd been the one against the bars while Michael... wasn't.

The worst part was, Alex knew that's not how it really worked. Just like he'd told Michael regarding Bellick: if you couldn't defend yourself, you deserved what you got. Alex couldn't defend himself; Michael hadn't needed to. Not today. That was that.

Which didn't stop the steady, slow burning anger in the pit of his stomach. The shame that crawled over his skin on pinprick legs.

He wanted drugs. Needed them. He couldn't stand this anymore. Especially not now. Not after...

If Michael hadn't felt complacent enough to drift off, Alex wouldn't have... snapped. But he had. Michael trusted him and he shouldn't. Alex was going to kill him. Had chased him across the country. Had killed his father. He...
"Señor?"

Alex blinked. Looked up.

Tony was standing over him, looking uncertain. He picked at his pants with his fingertips. Shifted his weight from side to side.

"What do you want, kid?"

He didn't answer.

Alex snorted. "Go back to the cell. Michael needs you. I just roughed him up. He'll need comfort."

"Si, I know. You hurt his arm. I see." Tony dropped to his knees. Scooted closer to Alex.

"You saw."

"Yes. I was in cell across the hall. Playing marbles. I not leave you right now, Señor."

"Me? Why? You want to throw more oranges at my head?" Alex laughed. Leaned his head against the wall and closed his eyes. "Go right ahead, Tony. Throw away. Or, even better, why don't you just fucking smack me upside the head. It's not like I don't deserve it."

Tony was silent.

He laughed again, feeling wrung out. Empty. "He offered to let me fuck him. Or something. I don't know what he expected me to do, but it wasn't what I did. He wouldn't..."

"You are angry. You take it out on him."

"Yes. And yes." Alex opened his eyes. Watched a cloud twisting wispily in the atmosphere.

He felt like he was being placated. That Michael was humoring him, stringing him along. Keeping him in line with sex. Like Alex was some idiot with no control. Who was led by two things: drugs and sex.

It was bullshit, of course. Michael was getting as much out of their arrangement as Alex. It wasn't even an exchange. Michael wasn't whoring himself for protection. They were already committed to that. It was... justification. Something they both wanted, but felt a need to qualify. They were only doing it because Alex was detoxing and he needed something to keep him on the straight and narrow.

Tony sat next to Alex. Snuggled against him.

"What are you doing?" Alex shoved him away.

Tony snaked his arms around Alex. Crawled onto his lap. "You can hurt me. Take your anger out on me. Not Michael."

"Jesus Christ." He lifted Tony off his lap and tossed him to the ground. "Don't start with me, kid. Okay? I'm not in the mood. Go snuggle with Michael."

"Señor," Tony said softly. Then he sighed. Rested his head on Alex's shoulder. Closed his eyes, long lashes resting on his cheeks.

And with a sickening lurch of his stomach, Alex realized what Tony was doing. What had
happened. What he knew.

"Get away from me," he hissed. He leapt to his feet. Kicked Tony.

"Señor!" Alex was on his feet. Following. "Alex. Stop!"

He turned. Grabbed Tony by the throat and slammed him against the wall they'd been sitting against. "What did that fucking pedophile tell you? That pervert? What?"

Tony's fingers dug into Alex's shoulders. Nails bit into already too-sensitive skin. "I... he tell me what happen. To you. I won't tell anyone, I promise. But, Señor, Alex, I worry. Okay? You can be a shithead, but Michael like you. Okay? And maybe I do, too."

"But you like Michael more."

He blushed. "Yes."

"And you don't want me to hurt him."

"No."

"So you think I should hurt you instead of hurting him, because you're used to it."

He nodded.

Alex dropped Tony. Stalked a few steps away. Rubbed his face. "You and Michael deserve each other. Both of you masochists willing to sacrifice your bodies for some higher ideal."

"Michael not... sacrifice. He wants sex with you."

"Oh, I know."

"You want sex with him."

He laughed.

A long-fingered, bony, teenaged hand pressed against the small of his back. "You very proud man, Señor. What happen. Is hard."

There was a lump in his throat. His eyes pricked.

This time, thin arms wrapped around his waist. "You a very strong man, Señor. To come so far. Get over drugs. Protect Michael. Me. Yourself."

He shook his head. "I couldn't... There were too many."

"Only way. You too strong otherwise."

He snorted.

Tony's forehead pressed against Alex's back. "They try to break you. Because you are strong. They no try with me because I am a kid. Michael, they not know how strong he is. Raoul does not count. But Michael strong. You strong. They will not break you."

God. Didn't Tony realize he already was?

* * *
Night. Raoul was asleep, wrapped around Michael like an octopus. Arms, legs. Face pressed against his neck. Hot, fetid breath washing over Michael's sweaty skin.

His arm throbbed. A dull, knifing pain that traveled over his neck. Into his temples. Jaw and teeth.

His stomach hurt too, but that was something else. That was fear. Sorrow. Anguish.

Alex wasn't wrong. Michael did feel the need to be punished. Felt cleaner, better, calmer when he paid for his sins. He deserved prison. Needed to be locked away. Had done horrible things and hurt people and needed to be punished.


That's why Michael was willing to escape. To break out and break Alex out. They get out, go back to America and turn themselves in. Somehow, he'd convince Alex that that's what they needed to do.

If Alex ever came back. If Michael could ever relax around him again. If Alex could be persuaded to do what Michael wanted.

What did Alex want? Did he want proof that Michael wanted something more than a protector? That he was aware that their deal was nothing more than a pathetic attempt to excuse what he really, rather desperately, wanted?

Alex had been the star of some of Michael's more sordid fantasies over the past weeks. Even as the stress of being on the run took its toll, and he reunited with Sara, visions of Alex would creep into his dreams. To finally have the chance to come undone under his hands....

All Michael had needed was the excuse.

And now Alex was gone. He hadn't come back and Raoul hadn't seemed to notice. Or care. He'd been high when he came back to take Michael to dinner. Pot, from the smell of it. High and mellow. He'd fed Michael was care, stroked his back. Brought him back and left him.

There was no sex. Seemingly no expectations of sex. Michael was a teddy bear, not a sex toy. Not to Raoul.

He was a Michael sandwich. Raoul at his back, Tony at his front. And the only person who made him feel like a person was... missing.

He couldn't do this. He had to move.

Careful not to wake him, Michael eased out of Raoul's grasp. Wiggled and squirmed and inched until he was free.

"Michael?"

Michael turned from the cell door. Tony had pushed himself up, eyes heavy-lidded and slightly unfocused.

"Go back to sleep, Tony," Michael whispered.

"Alex is in the yard. Where the corners of the wall meet. By the tree we sit at."

His cheeks warmed at his obviousness, but he just nodded. "Thanks." Then he turned and left.

The prison was quiet. Men slept, snored. Talked. Grumbled. It was different in the cells than the
halls. Less desperation. Less fear. But the hopelessness. It was still here.

Alex was just where Tony said he'd be. Pressed into the corner, legs at his chest. Eyes closed but body tense.

Clutching his arm to his chest tightly, Michael went to him. Sat close enough that their bodies were pressed together.

"Go away, Michael." Alex's voice was flat. Tired. He didn't even open his eyes.

"Something happened. When we were separated. You took it out on me."

Alex's lips twitched. "No. It just occurred to me that I was nothing more than another in a long line being manipulated by the judicious use of your body. And I'm not really interested."

"In my body? Or being manipulated?"

"If you could, you would manipulate everyone you meet. Twist them around until they couldn't think. You enjoy your mental superiority over others. If you're too superior, or not superior enough, you're forced to resort to other methods. You're lucky you're good looking. And that you look vulnerable. You are appealing, Michael Scofield, and you use it to your advantage." He rolled his head to the side. Opened his eyes. "I will give you what you want. I'll protect you. Stay with you. All you have to do is get me out of here."

Michael felt his lips twitch. "But how will I get you to turn yourself into American authorities if I don't use my body?"

Alex snorted. "We will discuss that later. Probably in your dreams."

"Alex..."

"Michael. Let me think about getting out of here before you suggest anything else."

He shook his head. "I don't... What happened yesterday. What I was asking for today. I wanted it. Want it. Want you." He shrugged with his good arm. "I wish I was using you. I'm used to that. I'm not used to... to wanting."

Alex closed his eyes. "I just attacked you."

"You've done it before."

"But..."

"I think. I think you're right. But it's not just being punished. It's being punished by you."

It wasn't quite a smile, but Alex's lips twitched. "Who's you're daddy?"

Michael snorted.

"Is your arm okay?"

"Sore. But it's okay."

"You need to learn to fight back. Even against me. When I'm out of control like that, just... just go for the knees. Take me out." He rubbed his face. "I'm mostly over the physical side of withdrawal. But, God, Michael. I want it. And I'm pissed and frustrated and just want to tear everything apart to
get something. Something to take the world away from me. That's why.... That's why you have to remember. Go for the knees. Don't let it get too far. Just stop me."

Michael shook his head. His hands were trembling. "Why can't you tell me what happened when we were separated? It's not just the drugs."

"Pretty boy." He reached out. Dragged his thumb over Michael's bottom lip. "I am not a puzzle to be solved. Concentrate on getting us out, not on the missing hours. Nothing important happened, anyway."

Michael closed his eyes. Leaned into Alex's touch.

Their mouths came together. Teeth grazed over Michael's bottom lip. He reached out. Wrapped his hand loosely around Alex's wrist as their kiss deepened.

Felt Alex flinch. And knew, with even more certainty, that he lied.
Tap. Tap. Tap.

Waking irritably, Alex batted away the thing tapping at his face. He squeezed his eyes shut tighter and pressed his face harder into his pillow.

The tapping started again. Right in the center of his forehead. It was like water torture without the water.

He grabbed the thing, snarling. Opened his eyes.

Raoul's face split into a grin. "Buenos dias."

Jesus fuck.

Alex cleared his throat. "Morning."

"Why you sleep up here? Not with us?"

"There wasn't any room." He cleared his throat again and pushed himself into a sitting position. His eyes felt raw and scratchy and his skin crawled. He rubbed his eyes. "You, Michael, Tony all in one bed? I couldn't fit in there."

"Gatito should not be in bed. You should. He is nothing." To prove his point, Raoul reached down. The next moment, he was dangling Tony by the arm over the floor. "You do not sleep in bed with us," he said to the groggy boy. He shook him. "You are nothing." He dropped the kid.

Fuck. "I'd rather he be in the bed than me," Alex said. "Michael is comfortable with him. Calm."

Raoul frowned. "I thought you do sex with Michael."

"Um. Yeah. But, uh..."

"We can put the mattresses on the floor," Michael said sleepily from the bottom bunk. "It's almost all clear now. That way, we can all be together."

"What?" Raoul looked down at Michael, clearly puzzled.

As Michael translated what he had said into Spanish, Alex eased himself onto the floor. Tony was still on the floor, arms folded and pillowing his head. His eyes were closed.

Alex crouched next to him. His knees cracked as he did. His back and neck both ached, but he pushed that away. Put his hand on Tony's shoulder and shook.

Tony opened his eyes. When he saw Alex over him, a look of uncertainty crossed his face. He smiled tentatively.

"You all right?"

"Si. I know how to fall."

He pat Tony on the shoulder and rose.
Only to be pushed against the back wall by over two hundred pounds of pure muscle.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, heart in his throat.

Raoul shushed him gently. Ran fingers down his face, tracing his eyes, his cheekbones, nose, and jaw. They traveled down his neck to his collarbone. Stroked. Trailed down one arm.

He couldn't breathe. His vision swum. Sweat broke out all over his body and he trembled out of control.

"He's just... testing his product," Michael said. He was out of bed, right behind Raoul. His wide, hands out, placating. "He did it to me yesterday. Don't... I mean, it's nothing."

In other words, don't do anything to get yourself killed.

Alex clenched his teeth so hard his jaw ached. Allowed Raoul to bend his arm at the elbow several times. To wiggle each finger. Roll his hand at the wrist. Then, after inspecting his left arm, he moved to the right.

He was a child. Raoul. A child inspecting his toy. That was it. He couldn't.... He wouldn't...

Then what the fuck did he want with the two of them?

"You arms are strong," Raoul said. He took Alex's shirt by the hem and tugged upward.

Another surge of panic went through him, but Alex mercilessly squashed it down. He allowed the giant to remove the shirt and drop it to the floor.

Again, Raoul caressed him. It was an intimate gesture, but surprisingly non-sexual. Everything he did was slightly clumsy and there was a curious expression on his face. He was learning, looking, feeling. Nothing more.

"You have... uh, strong? Músculos. Here." He pushed against Alex's stomach.

"Uh. Yeah." He wasn't in the best of shape--and nowhere near as muscular as Raoul--but he'd kept himself up as best he could. Nothing was more offensive to him than an out-of-shape FBI agent, one who couldn't even run a block without doubling over for air. So, even while chasing Michael, he'd run every day along with push-ups and sit-ups. Kept his body as strong as he could. He was nothing spectacular, but it was something.


"Muscles," Alex provided.


"Okay," Alex said, unsure what else to say. "I can train him."

"Protect, too. When is too many from others."

"Yeah."
"Good. We go later. After breakfast." Raoul put his hands on Alex's stomach, thumbs pointed toward his navel. He squeezed. Then, he trailed his hands down over Alex's hips, his thighs. Down one leg, circling his calf. Testing to see if he could bend at the knee. Tracing his feet.

The alarm sounded, quickly followed by the pounding of feet.


Alex stayed pressed against the wall. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to regain control of his body. He was shaking, his stomach churning. He felt sick, completely and utterly.

"Here."

Something soft was pressed into his hands. He opened his eyes to find Michael had handed him his tee-shirt. His blue eyes were huge, face pale.

"Thanks." He pulled his shirt back on. Smoothed it down as best he could. The shirt stank of sweat and body odor. He hated wearing dirty clothing, but what else could he do? There were hardly any laundry facilities in this place. All he had was half a bar of soap, and that was only if Tony had remembered to bring it. "He do that to you, too?"

Michael nodded. "Apparently he found a few defects with me. He didn't like my toes so much." He smiled shyly. "He didn't say anything about me not being fit enough, though."

Alex found himself returning the smile, something hard in his stomach loosening, easing. "Who knew the body-builder would be such a fitness freak?" He rubbed his hand over his face. "With a build like that, though, he probably does steroids. Wonder where he gets them."

"Does it really matter?"

"No." He sighed. Dropped his hands. "So. Now, in addition to your protector, I get to be your personal trainer."

"You gonna ride me hard?"

Oh, fucking Christ. He said it with such an innocent tone, light and playful. But his eyes...

Heat pooled in Alex's groin, washed out over his limbs. He reached out and grabbed Michael's belt loops. Tugged.

"You wanna be ridden hard, Michael?" he growled against Michael's neck. He bit the soft flesh. Sucked.

Michael groaned. "Yes," he whispered. His fingers tightened in Alex's shirt, pulling.

"No sex now! Breakfast."

Alex bit down again then released Michael. "Breakfast," he whispered breathlessly. "I'll ride you later."

"Promise?"

He smiled and pushed Michael away. "Let's go." He pushed ahead of the other man, carefully stepping over the still-sleeping Tony. The kid looked like he was out for the count and, frankly, Alex didn't blame him. Tony had had... a lot to deal with the day before. They all had, of course, but Tony had done a lot of running around. Putting things back together.
Alex would bring him back some breakfast.

"Tony?" he heard Michael say.

"Let him sleep." He turned and looked at Michael, who was crouched over Tony. "We'll bring him back breakfast. But he needs sleep."

"At least let him get back in bed," Michael said. He shook Tony again. "Tony? Get up."

Tony groaned and muttered something in Spanish.

Michael laughed. "I'm not your mother and you don't have to go to school."

He said something else that made Michael laugh again. "I don't think so. We'll bring breakfast back for you. But you don't need to sleep on the floor. I'm just getting you back to bed."

"Okay then." He climbed back onto the bed. "Kiss good-night?" He batted his eyelashes.

"Fine, you little tease." Michael leaned down and lightly kissed Tony on the cheek.

"No fair. You kiss him."

"Tony..."

"Fine," Tony sighed. He looked at Alex. Fluttered his eyelashes again.

"Dream on, kid." He rolled his eyes and walked out of the cell.

A few moments later, Michael caught up with him. Raoul nodded at the two of them, then turned and started walking. They followed.

"You feeling better today?" Michael asked.

He wondered what Michael was referring to: the withdrawal or his meltdown. He chose the easier one. "I feel like crap. I feel if I don't get something, I'm going to go insane. My head and stomach both hurt, but not half as much as my skin."

"Poor baby," Michael said. He handed Alex a cigarette.

"That's Daddy to you."

He just laughed.

"Do you have a lighter or anything? Because, otherwise, it's just me sucking on this."

"What, you don't like sucking on things?"

"You, Mr. Scofield, have a dirty mind."

Michael gave him a smile and licked his lips.

Alex smacked him lightly on the ass. "Do you have a lighter? Or, to be more specific, did you find a lighter in Raoul's crap?"

"Well, I found a book of matches. Hope that will do." He pulled it from his pocket and handed them to Alex.
There were six matches in the book. Alex had to stop walking, his hands were trembling so hard.

"Do you want me to?" Michael asked when Alex failed to light the match for the third time.

Irritated, Alex shook his head. Struck the match again.

This time, it lit. The smell of sulfur filled the air as Alex lifted the match to the cigarette. It caught flame. Alex shook the match out, inhaling deeply on the cigarette. Smoke filled his lung. Spread through his body.

Almost immediately, Alex felt better. His headache eased. The pinpricks faded from his skin. Even some of the muscles in his neck loosened.

He exhaled, blowing smoke into the air around him.

"Better?"

"Somewhat." He rolled his neck. "I really wish..."

"Do it and you'll never get to touch me again," Michael said sharply.

Alex smirked and took another long drag from the cigarette. "I really wish this place had decent coffee," he said with a sidelong glance at Michael.

"Yeah, right. I'm sure that's what you were going to say."

Alex just looked at him.

Michael sighed. "Look, I grew up with an addict, okay? You don't want coffee or cigarettes or sex. You want something to take you away from everything."

"You're partly right." He flicked ash off the tip. "I do want something to take me away. Because no matter how good I feel, I still feel like fucking crap. There's just varying levels of crap. But that doesn't mean I don't want coffee or cigarettes or you." He cut his eyes sideways and ran an appreciative eye over Michael's form. Thin and out-of-shape the kid may be; he was still hell of an attractive man. Fucking beautiful, and if he was offering, Alex wasn't going to turn him down.

Michael flushed and looked away. His balled fist were stuffed into his pocket, shoulders hunched over.

"What?"

"I don't trust this," Michael said. "You. I mean, I'm just afraid.... Raoul was doing pot last night. And he keeps giving us stuff. Food, cigarettes... pretty much anything so far." Chewing on his lip, Michael glanced over at Alex. "I'm pretty sure you won't go looking for drugs. But what if Raoul just comes and... and gives it to you?"

That was a good question. It was one thing to not actively go after, but to turn it down when offered?

Alex didn't get a chance to come up with an answer. Raoul grabbed him and Michael and pulled them into the mess.

"We get food. Sit," he said over the din. But Alex quickly realized that, when Raoul said, "we" he was only referring to himself. Every time he or Michael tried to take anything, their hands were slapped. However, whatever they wanted was put on the plate.
Raoul finally led them to a nearby table where his friends were. Or body-building buddies; all the men were huge. They nodded at Raoul when he took his place at the table, moving aside so he had room. Michael was pulled very close to Raoul's right, almost in his lap, but not quite.

"Sit here," Raoul said to Alex, patting a space to his left.

Alex complied after exchanging looks with Michael. Michael looked frustrated. Boxed in. And when Raoul pushed a plate of food in front of Alex, then pressed some fruit against Michael's mouth, rage kindled into those deep blue eyes.

Meeting that angry, frustrated gaze, Alex lifted a piece of food to his mouth. Bit. Chewed slowly and swallowed.

Michael breathed out hard through his nose. But he opened his mouth and accepted the fruit.

Message received.

The meal continued. Raoul ignored them, for the most part, talking with people at the table and feeding Michael with an almost absentminded air. In between mouthfuls, Raoul would pet Michael: stroke his hair, his back, his leg or arm. Gentle, soft caresses, like someone would give a beloved pet or a young child. Not sexual, not really, but loving.

And Alex was... not ignored. But given independence. Allowed to feed himself, given space. He was still a possession, but one with a bit more leeway.

Michael was a doll. Alex was an action figure.

"Hey!" Raoul shouted suddenly. He surged from his seat and ran across the room.

Both Alex and Michael turned. Over at the food were Bellick and T-Bag. They were being shoved and jostled away from what little food was left, but both kept trying to grab whatever they could. Neither had noticed Raoul storming across the room towards them.

"Ten bucks T-Bag slips away before... Oh. He's gone," Alex said. He moved closer to Michael. "Bellick hasn't even noticed."

"Bellick's interested in one person and one person only."

"Too bad he's not good very good at looking after that person." Alex winced as Raoul grabbed Bellick by the collar of his shirt and smacked him hard across his face.

Next to him, Michael stiffened.

"Don't watch if it bothers you," Alex said.

"Bite me." His voice shook.

Bellick was hit again. And again.

Michael flinched each time a blow was struck. So tense he trembled. He was holding his hurt arm with the opposite hand, entire body jerking.

Fucking Christ.

"Fine." Alex moved closer to Michael and bit him on the neck.
Michael inhaled sharply. Practically fell into Alex, hand leaving his arm and propping his weight on Alex's chest. "What are you doing?"

He released Michael's neck. Licked. "You told me to bite you."

"Not literally." Michael pulled away. His face was bright red.

"Well, you didn't specify that. How was I supposed to know?"

Michael rolled his eyes. Then, he stiffened. Grabbed Alex's forearm.

He turned.

Raoul was dragging a bloody and stumbling Bellick back to the table. Upon reaching, he threw Bellick to the floor. "You sit! No food. Bad boy. You come back when morning!"

Bellick spit blood on the floor. Looked up, miserable. "Please. Please, I'm so hungry."

"No!"

Raoul sat down so hard the table shook. Then he reached over and dragged Michael into his lap. Turning away from Bellick, he rocked back and forth, nuzzling Michael's neck. One huge paw pushed potatoes and eggs onto a tortilla. He wrapped it, and raised it to Michael's mouth, crooning softly.

Michael's face screwed up, but he ate. Chewed, swallowed, coughing as he did. Bits of food came back up, but Raoul picked up some water and eased that into Michael's mouth as well.

Bellick was still spitting and coughing. His nose was leaking blood, and his eye was swelling up again. He glanced up at Alex. Spat.

Alex thought about tossing the man something, but he didn't want to risk getting the same treatment. If there was anything left after Tony ate, then Bellick could have something. It wasn't Alex's fault Bellick couldn't fend for himself.

The action figure, the baby doll, and the broken, unloved toy. What a fucking Goddamn mess.

* * *

Lincoln had been in and out of prison for years. Since he was at least fifteen years old. All kinds of prisons, all kinds of visiting areas.

None like this. Not a yard surrounded by guards. Separated from the one you were visiting by a chain link fence. Never a dusty walkway and hot, hot midmorning sun leaching the life out of everything.

He cracked his knuckles. Cleared his throat and tried to breathe.

He'd been here almost fifteen minutes and Michael still hadn't shown. Who knew why? That kid yesterday had said Michael had been in some kind of fight. Injured his arm. And Alex Mahone had helped him. After chasing the two of them across the country, killing Tweener and Abruzzi. Trying to kill them, he was helping Michael now?

He wanted something, that much was certain. Hopefully, Michael would be too smart to fall for that asshole's game.
The door to the prison opened. Michael emerged, walking slowly. Carefully.

Jesus Christ.

Lincoln grabbed the fence. Curled his fingers around it, wishing he could tear it aside. Grab his brother, take him away—anywhere. Somewhere safe. Hide him.

Oh, God.

The entire right side of Michael's face was a molten bruise. His eye was puffy, but because of his perpetual squint, Lincoln couldn't tell if it was swollen shut or not. His lips were bitten and puffy, blood clinging at the corners. There were marks all over his neck, teeth marks, bruises. He held his arm tightly to his chest and walked slowly, favoring his left leg.

The clothes he wore weren't the ones he'd been wearing the last time Lincoln saw him. Both the shirt and pants were a few sizes too big; Michael kept hitching the pants up every few steps.

He looked exhausted. Awful. And there wasn't a damn thing Lincoln could do.

Michael finally reached the fence. He gave his brother a small smile. "Hey."

"Mikey... God. Michael, are you.... You okay?"

He nodded. Rubbed his forehead. "I'm fine, Linc. I know I look like crap, but I'm okay."

"You'd say that no matter what. How can I trust that you're telling me the truth?"

Michael reached out. Ran his fingers over Lincoln's. "I'm okay."

"What happened?" He wanted to shove his hand through the link. Grab Michael's and hold it tightly.

"Lots of things. It's rough here. The guards don't really get involved. They stay behind the scenes or out here." He looked up at the tower. "They grabbed me yesterday. Like an ambush. Big guns and cuffs. They came in as we were going to breakfast and pulled us back. Said I wouldn't get a trial date for like six months or something."

"Yeah, I know. I've been trying to.... There's a guy at the US Embassy that thinks maybe we can move that up. Or, at the very least, move you. Somewhere safe. We're working on it. We'll get you out."

Michael swallowed. Dropped his hands from the fence and stepped back. "That's great," he said, voice hollow.

"Michael..."

"It's just... there's this kid here. Fifteen years old. He's so young, Linc. Just a little kid. And then Alex..."

"No. Alex Mahone killed our father."

"Your father," Michael said softly.

Lincoln frowned. "He's... You... Back when we met him, you seemed willing enough to call him Dad. To mourn him. You can't just..."

"No one deserves to be here, Lincoln," Michael said, close to tears. His body shook and his eyes
were bright. "This place. It's not justice. It's hell. It's... You can't even understand. There are dead bodies just... just lying on the ground because they only get taken out once a day. And the toilets barely work. There's nowhere to sleep. Alex and I had to fight and hurt and.... for a closet. And he's detoxing from these sedatives that really screwed him up. And I'm going to die here, but I can't let anything happen to Tony. Or Alex. You have to help get them out. Please."


Michael blinked. A tear spilled from his eye, but he did as he was told.

"Come here."

He expected Michael to resist, and he did. He crossed his arms tightly over his chest and look away. Then he raised both hands to his face. Scrubbed his eyes. When he lowered his hands, his eyes were screwed tight.


He wavered again, then did as he was told.

Lincoln reached back through the fence for Michael's hand. He wrapped his fingers around Michael's. "You are not going to die in here, Michael. We're going to get you out."

"But Tony. He's just a kid. He's LJ's age."

"Do you know Tony's last name?"

He shook his head, obviously miserable.

"Michael, it's okay. Ask him. Find out his name and tell me tomorrow. I can't make any promises, but I'll see what I can do."

Michael let out a long, shaky breath. A tear fell from his eye. "What about Alex?" He opened his eye met Lincoln's.

His jaw tightened. "Mikey..."

"It's my fault he's in here."

"He's a killer."

"The Company..."

"Who the fuck cares?" Lincoln shot at Michael angrily. "The Company what? Threatened him? Threatened to dig up some crap he'd done in the past? He deserves what he gets, Michael. He..."

"No one deserves this place!" Michael shouted. There was an edge of hysteria to his voice. "God, Lincoln, they.... Look at me!"

"I know, but..."

"No, you don't understand. I... I got lost my first night here. In the rain. I was outside, thinking and it overwhelmed me and I just... Alex dragged me out, saved me. He protects me."

"Bang up job he's doing," Lincoln said with a pointed look at Michael's arm.
But Michael shook his head. "The guards separated us. Gave me to this man. Alex was almost killed, but he got back. Put my arm back in my socket. We work together, Lincoln, and I can't just leave him now."

"He would leave you."

Michael gave a half-tilt of his head, like a shrug.

Lincoln knew he wasn't going to win this, not right now. So, he did what he knew he had to: he lied. "I'll talk to the guys at the embassy. See what I can do."

Some of the tension ebbed from Michael. His shoulders relaxed and he let out a sigh. "Thank you."

"What does he want from you, anyway? In return?"

Michael's lips twitch. "Escape."

"Escape. You planning on breaking out of here?"

And there was that damn, secret little smile again. Like Michael knew something. Was planning something. "Well. I don't know if it's possible. But it'll keep me occupied, trying to figure out a way. Right now, I'm trying to figure out the layout. Then I'll work on guard rotations. Or something."

"Do you think you can do it?"

"I don't know. But I can try." Michael licked his lips. "This place. There's no justice here. Just brutality. We don't belong. I hope I can... If we break out, I hope I can convince Alex to turn himself in. With me. Both of us go back to the US and serve time there. Because this..."

"Do you honestly think he will?"

Michael shrugged. "I will. I can only hope..." He sighed and shook his head. "I don't want to talk about Alex anymore."

"All right. That's okay."

His brother nodded. Looked at his feet. "How... Where are you staying?"

"Hotel. I'm short on money, but.... They said if go back to the states, there's a good chance I can sue the government for reparations. Get something. But I told them I couldn't now, so..." He broke off and shrugged. "Anyway. Sara... Sara's staying with me. I feel bad about taking money from her, but she says we're in this together."

Michael's eyes sparked. "Sara. Is she okay?"

"Sara's fine, Mikey." He can feel something tight in his chest ease. Because he can give this to Michael, assurance about the woman he loves. "She wants to come see you."

"No." Michael's answer is quick, sharp. Negative. He shakes his head, moving away from the fence, wild-eyed. "No. Don't bring her here."

"Michael..."

"No!" And the near-hysteria is back.

"Why not?" He figures it's because Michael doesn't want her to see him bruised and hurt, but that's
just stupid. She's a doctor and she's seen worse.

But Michael just shook his head. "Just... don't bring her. Please."

Lincoln studied Michael a moment before sighing. "Okay. Okay, fine. I won't." He rubbed his hands over his head. "She wanted me to tell you that she's sorry. And thank you. And that she loves you."

Michael's face turned red. He closed his eyes and just... shook.

"Michael? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Michael whispered hoarsely.

"You sure, man?"

He nodded.

Lying. "Do you want me to say anything to her?"

Michael's lower lip trembled. "Tell her. Tell her that I'm sorry. And that she should just... just go. Live her life."

"Michael."

He opened his eyes. "Tell her to forget me, Linc. Please."

"But..."

"I should go. I'll see you tomorrow." Michael reached out and touched Lincoln's fingers on the fence, then turned and began walking away.

"Michael! Michael, talk to me, man. Don't just say that and walk away. You love Sara, remember? You..."

Michael disappeared behind the heavy door, leaving Lincoln shouting at an empty yard.

"You went to hell for her!" Lincoln shook his head and sighed. "She's not going to forget that."

* * *

He couldn't go back to the cell. Or the yard, or wherever Alex was right now. He couldn't face him, couldn't face anyone.

Couldn't face himself.

What the fuck was he doing? Playing at? He was trying to seduce Alex. Succeeding. And for no other reason than it was fun and Alex was sexy and Michael wanted him.

He was being selfish.

Michael stopped where he was, in the middle of the hall. At the far end was a large, slowly spinning fan. It was mesmerizing. He moved towards it, watching, studying.

Sara Tancredi was everything good in the world. Brilliant and driven to do good. Be the light in the world she so desired. She was caring and thoughtful and sensitive and... and brave and loving.

She'd given up everything for Michael. Trusted him when he told her Lincoln was innocent. Left the
door open. Followed him to Panama, brought the news of Lincoln's exoneration. She'd saved them time and time and again, and Michael had...

All Michael had ever done was brought destruction and ruin to her life. Cost her job. Her father's life. Her security. Gotten her tortured. Held by the FBI. On trial. Taken her from everything. Taken everything, and she... she...

She was still here. Waiting for him.

And what was he doing?

Trying to get into the pants of a man he should hate. And not for protection or to get something from him. Just because Michael was horny and scared and Alex was there.

It wasn't like him. And it disgusted him. That he could be like this.

She was better off without him. He'd always known that. Lincoln had to send her away, make her see it. Send her back to build a life. The kind of life she deserves.

A hand pressed against Michael's back. Warm breath caressed his ear, his neck.

"Hello, Pretty."

He closed his eyes. "T-Bag."

The hand pressed harder against Michael's back. Propelled him.

Michael allowed himself to be propelled. Stumbled forward, eyes closed, trusting T-Bag. Not caring what the other man did, almost hoping he led Michael somewhere that'd get him hurt. Beaten. Killed or... or something.

"Look at this. A cell with no occupant. Now, why do you suppose no one's yet grabbed this prime piece of property?"

Michael bumped into a wall. T-Bag urged him around so his back was flat against the cold concrete. A hot breeze wafted in from a window just to his right, brushing his cheek.

He opened his eyes. "I don't know. You kill the inmate?"

"I've only killed one man in here so far, and he was definitely not staying here." T-Bag's lips curled into a nasty little smile. He leaned in. "I killed the man who was torturing your FBI agent. As a favor, you see."

"Right." Michael licked his lips. Heaved a sigh. "A cell is better than a closet."

"I think I agree." His mouth ghosted over Michael's jaw. "And a big ol' empty cell is better than being stuffed in with that giant and his collection, don't you think?"

"Depends on who is in the cell," he said, playing along halfheartedly. "Depending on the person occupying the empty cell, it could feel even more crowded than Raoul's."

T-Bag smiled. Stroked Michael's jaw with the tips of his fingers. "I'm sure that tasty morsel of a boy you've got snuggling against you makes that cramped shithole almost cozy. He's got quite a little crush on you. You know that?"

"I'm aware of that fact, yes." He closed his eyes, feeling weary. "What do you want, T-Bag?"
The questing hand trailed down the middle of Michael's chest. Then, he slipped it under his shirt, and Michael still didn't resist. He just couldn't bring himself to care.

"Place like this can drive a man insane. Drive him to distraction. So trapped by all the stress and anxiousness of just being alive. Trying to stay alive. Worse even than Fox River, where there, even the worst and most contemptible of guards, was answerable to a higher authority. Where you had choices and the bone yard and your brother?" There was a pause, and then hot breath against the side of Michael's face, washing over his lips. "You had the doctor there, too. With her sweet little face and those lovely auburn locks of hair. Her long neck and pert breasts." He let out a shuddery breath.

Michael grabbed T-Bag's hand as his fingers closed around a nipple. Tried to pull away, but T-Bag held fast.

"Don't talk about her," Michael said, tugging at T-Bag's wrist.

T-Bag smiled. "The good doctor is off-limits. Understood." He twisted Michael's nipple. "As I was saying. Place like this can drive you crazy if you don't take the time to... unwind." He released Michael's nipple when he said unwind and licked his lips.

"Thank you for your concern, T-Bag. But I'll be fine."

"I think you underestimate the pressure here, Pretty."

"I think you underestimate my self-control."

"Or is you think your knight in shining armor will swoop in and take care of all your little problems for you? Well, I've got news for you. The odds of Mr. FBI laying a hand on your perfect little ass are slim to none, no matter what he may say."

Michael swallowed. It felt like something was stuck in his throat. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, Michael." He ran his hand up in the inside of Michael's leg. "Michael, Michael, pretty, innocent little baby-boy Michael. You may have the face of an angel, and the ability to turn even the straightest man's head. But." T-Bag licked along Michael's jaw. Tugged on his ear with sharp teeth. "But," he whispered into Michael's ear. "After what Guillermo did yesterday, I'd be surprised it Alex..."

"If Alex what?"

Michael opened his eyes.

Alex was standing at the door to the cell. His eyes were dark, face stone. Michael could see his fingers twitching, squeezing, as if he were preparing to wring T-Bag's neck.

T-Bag stepped away from Michael, arms up. "Ain't nothing going on here, boss. We was just talking."

"You were touching him," Alex said mildly. "All over. You were touching my property. That is unacceptable."

"He was standing in the hall. Lost in his own world. I pulled him in here to save him from villains and miscreants who might take advantage of his... distraction." T-Bag crossed the cell and pushed himself into Alex's personal space. "You know how he can get," he said softly, deferentially. "Trapped in his mind and not realizing what's going on around him. I was just watching his back. That's all."
Alex wrapped his hand around T-Bag's throat. Squeezed and dragged him to his toes, eye to eye. "Bull. Shit." He threw T-Bag out of the cell so hard the smaller man hit the far wall. "Go back to the closet and wait. If I see you set more than a toe outside, I will make you regret it."

T-Bag rose. Smoothed his hand and stub over his clothing. "So much for gratitude."

Alex growled.

Michael's knees went weak at the sound.

T-Bag ran. Or moved with a swiftness that was just short of a run. Michael could practically see the dust cloud left from his exit.

"What the hell was that, Michael?" Alex stalked to him. He took both of Michael's wrists in his hands and pinned them to the wall above his head. "I've been looking for you everywhere, and I find you here. Passively letting yourself be mauled by that pervert?"

"I don't... I don't..." He didn't know what to say.

"Something happen with your brother?"

His eyes focused on Alex's neck. "Not really."

"You're lying."

"No."

"What..." He broke off. Exhaled. Dropped Michael's hands. "Sara was there."

Michael didn't move. "No."

"But she's still here. In Panama."

"Yeah." He let out a shaky breath. "She wants to see me. I ruined her life, Alex. I ruined her life and brought her here and I haven't even thought about her in days."

"You're too busy surviving to think about..."

"Then why can't I get you out of my head?" he asked, anguished. "My survival has nothing to do with fucking you, but I can't... stop... wanting you. For no other reason than..."

Alex stepped closer again. Took him by the wrists and held him against the wall. "You're not used to this."

"No."

"Just wanting someone."

He shook his head. "I can't."

"Too good for simple, human emotions?" Alex's lips were on his face now, caressing. Feeling.

He was shaking so hard his teeth rattled. "I'm not any good, Alex. I keep telling you."

Alex let go of his wrists. Framed his face with both hands and kissed him. Really, really kissed him. Deep and tender and Michael felt it all the way down to his toes.
"I really don't have time or patience for your self-esteem issues. But you are human. No more, no less," Alex whispered. "We are in hell. And despite that, there's this... this thing between us. It's real and I can't explain it. I thought I hated you just a few days ago. Now, I need you in ways I could never imagine."

Oh Christ.

Michael whimpered. He wrapped his arms around Alex's neck and clung. Kissed and kissed and couldn't stop.

Alex pushed Michael into a darkened corner of the cell. His fingers tore at Michael's fly and zipper. Shoved his jeans down his hips.

"Alex," Michael gasped. "Alex, Alex. Alex."

"That's right." He flipped Michael around, face to the wall. Held him, one hand at the base of Michael's neck. The other...

There was the sound of a zipper.

"Suck," Alex growled. He shoved his fingers into Michael's mouth. Rubbed his cock against the crack of Michael's ass.

Michael did as he was told. Sucked on Alex's fingers, wetting them the best he could. His heart was pounding, skin hot and flush. Sweat beaded on his forehead and he rubbed it against the grimy wall, feeling dirt coat his skin and not caring.

Alex pulled his fingers from Michael's mouth. Traced the tips around Michael's entrance. Forced his way in.

"Oh fuck," Michael choked out. His fingers scraped at the wall. His body stiffened and he groaned again. Pain, fiery and hot streaked up his backbone.

The fingers moved. Stretched Michael.

Pain faded, replaced by warmth. His skin pricked pleasantly. Cock throbbed against the wall.

Alex pulled out his fingers. Spat. And then... And then...

"Shit," Alex swore as he worked himself in. He rocked against Michael, breath hot against his neck. Both hands were digging into Michael's arms, nails biting half-moons into his skins. "Tight," he gasped. Thrust, a little bit at a time, opening Michael, forcing his way in.

Michael couldn't talk anymore. All that came out was a wordless keen. His head fell back against Alex's shoulder. His knees were trembling, and he had to rest his weight against Alex.

Alex wrapped his arms around Michael's waist. Thrust the rest of the way in.

Michael cried out. And again and again. Alex pounded him, his whole body. Against the wall, bruising and it. Felt. So good.

He moved into Michael like he owned him. Like he belonged. Fast. Furious. Teeth scoring Michael's neck. Pulling Michael's head aside for better access. Fingers underneath Michael's shirt, twisting and pulling at nipples and bits of flesh until Michael was one huge bruise of furiously throbbing pleasure.

His orgasm hit in a head-spinning rush. Pleasure exploded out everywhere, narrowing his focus to
the cock in his ass, the teeth at his neck, and the fingers biting into his skin. Pain and pleasure and it was better than anything. Ever. In the history of the world.

His strength gave out. Alex had him at his mercy. Pounding into his limp, sated, exhausted body over and over. Off his toes and against the wall and so overwhelming, darkness edge around his vision.

Alex’s arms tightened around him. He grunted, body stiffening. Thrust again and once more and... and...

They slid to the floor, still joined. Alex spooned behind him. Stroked Michael's hair. Smoothed away sweat drops that clung to his face and rolled down his neck.

All Michael could do was lie there, passive. Trembling. If he spoke, he'd crack. He'd break into a thousand pieces never to be put together again.

Never the same.

This was supposed to be about survival. A way to get through this hell. To help Alex, to help Michael from getting too caught up in all the pain and anger around him.

It was supposed to be...

But it wasn't. Not anymore.

* * *

Michael slept.

Alex enjoyed watching him sleep. Had since the first night. Despite what one might expect, all the stress and danger, it didn't affect Michael as he slept. Not unless he had a nightmare, and those only really happened right before he woke up.

Otherwise, Michael was beautiful. Peaceful and just...

Those eyelashes actually fucking fanned over his cheeks. And the cheeks. Despite the kid's thinness, they somehow managed to stay full and rosy. And his lips. Lips made to be feasted on and fucked and ravished and bit and nibbled and marked.

Fucking perfect, from the upturned nose to the mole on his cheek to the long, swanlike neck.

And, as long as they were here, Michael belonged to Alex. Alex was free to do whatever he wanted to the other man.

He'd chased Michael for weeks. Spent hours ceaselessly pouring over everything he had about him, learning and memorizing. Immersing in all things Michael Scofield. In many ways, Alex felt closer to Michael than he had anyone ever before. Their minds were similar, their thought processes alike.

But until Sona, Alex had never thought of Michael's body. Never desired him. Michael had been just another con and the job had ended up being just another headache.

Now, everything was wrong. They were stuck in hell and there was no conceivable way out. Michael was going to have a breakdown any day. T-Bag was going to do something, and Raoul was probably going to lose it over something stupid and hurt one of them. Meanwhile, Tony was getting more and more seductive while being an increasing danger of being ripped apart by someone
(probably T-Bag) which would, of course, kill Michael.

And, on top of that, any moment, this place could go up like a tinderbox—either literal or figurative—and kill them all. Problem solved.

Except Alex didn't particularly want to die here. So, he and Michael would have to figure out something.

Michael stirred in Alex's arms. His eyes squeezed tighter, mouth tightened. Then, long, dark eyelashes parted. He rolled onto his back, winced and blinked up at the ceiling.

"Welcome back," Alex said. He moved his arm from underneath Michael's body and rested it above his head. Traced his fingers over the short brush of hair.

Michael's eyes darted to Alex's. A deep, darkly red flush stole over his cheeks and he averted his eyes, mouth pressing up at the corners.

He couldn't help the laugh. "You're blushing."

"No. No, I'm not," Michael said, looking as if he were fighting the smile back harder.

"You are too. You are blushing." He ran his thumb down one brightly colored cheek. "Why?"

"I'm not."

"You are. It's adorable. I'm just not sure why you're blushing."

He covered his face with both hands.

Alex shifted. Moved closer to Michael. Nibbled on his ear. "What has the lovely Mr. Scofield blushing like a deflowered virgin?"

"Nothing. I'm not. I'm..."

Alex slipped his hand underneath Michael's shirt. Slid his fingers underneath his waistband. "I'm not blind. I'm not even colorblind. Your Snow White-fair cheeks have turned a most distracting shade of red. Almost like an apple." He bit one of those tempting cheeks. "I'm hungry, Michael."

Michael squirmed. Gasped. "Alex," he groaned raggedly. "We shouldn't... We've been gone too long."

"Don't worry about it."

"But Raoul." His breath hitched. He tried to roll away, but Alex held tight. Stroked the hardening bulge beneath Michael's jeans.

"Don't worry about Raoul. We can handle him." He kissed Michael's neck. "I want to know why you're blushing. Are you embarrassed? Because that's just sad. A man who is used to using his body as a bargaining tool doesn't have a reason to blush when he's been used once again." He undid the button to Michael's jeans. "So. Why is my whore so red?"

Michael's head fell back against Alex's shoulder. He groaned, long and throaty. His hips rolled, pushing into Alex's hand, rubbing.

"Tell me."
He gasped. Gave a delicious little moan. Panting and said, "I just... I didn't know. It's never... Not like this, I didn't know." His hand came up behind Alex's neck. His fingers tightened and he clung.

Alex unzipped Michael's jeans. Pulled his hard and straining cock out. "So. You're saying I'm the best lover you've ever had." He squeezed.

Michael jerked. Precome dribbled from the tip of his cock.

He scooped it in his fingers. Yanked Michael's pants down, then undid his own zipper. It wasn't much lubrication, Alex forced his fingers into Michael.

"Yes," Michael whimpered. "Yes, you are. I didn't know. I... Ah!" He let out a startled shout as Alex, slicked only with spit and precome, forced his way into Michael's hot, pliant body.

A rush of pride and possession washed over Alex.

He rolled Michael onto his stomach. "Up."

Michael scrambled to his hands and knees. His mouth was open, panting, groaning as Alex slammed into him. Skidding him across the floor so he had to dig in, hold his place.


"Yes," Michael whined. He squeezed around Alex's cock. Writhed his hips, impaling Alex deeper and deeper inside.

Alex kissed the spot he'd bitten. Licked the bruise. Thrust again. Again. Felt Michael's body giving way, his head spin. His groin tighten and then...

Michael cried out when Alex came, his hands tightening on his shoulders. He reached underneath him, stroked himself. Moved back against Alex, who was growing soft inside him. Came with a gritting groan and startled little cry.

His hand skidded out from underneath him. Michael fell to the floor with a soft whoosh of air. Alex lay against him, breathing heavily, trying to regain himself.

Fucked and fucked again. This was way beyond a simple arrangement to make time pass easier. It was beyond even simple lust. This was...

Complicated.

Alex eased himself out of Michael's body. Redid his pants, watching Michael.

Michael's cheek rested on his crossed arms, his gaze turned inward. Deep and focused.

"You're blushing again."

"Yeah, maybe I am." Michael rolled onto his back. Averted his eyes as he used his shirt to wipe sweat and semen sticking to his stomach. Tucked himself back in and zipped up his jeans.

He caressed Michael's cheek. "You've never..."

"Not like that." Michael sighed. Closed his eyes. "Sex is just another tool. Another... thing. To use. It's not supposed to be like this."

"You shouldn't have to be in hell to discover that it's exactly what sex is supposed to be." Alex
kissed Michael's bruised and bitten lips lightly. Rubbed his forehead. "Poor little boy. Even more broken and twisted up than Tony."

He shook his head. "No. I'm... It's not like I'm..." He swallowed. Frowned. "I've always liked sex."

"I'm sure Tony has enjoyed sex. Likes part of it. He seems positive in his desire to be with you. He wouldn't do that if he thought sex was always painful and humiliating. He'd be content with what you already give him." He bent over and chased a drop of sweat up Michael's face with his lips. "You may have liked sex in the past, but you've never let yourself experience it. If it's just another tool, then you haven't known what it really is. What it can be." He kissed Michael and said, "Like, I said. Poor, broken little boy."

"If anyone broke me, it's you."

"I had to shatter through the layer you had wrapped around you. It's the only way to put you back together right."

Michael's expression flickered. Face fell.

Damn.

Alex kissed him. Stroked his face. "I know you're going to beat yourself up about this, so think about it this way. If you were to leave prison, if you were to go to Sara and sleep with her, you would have lost her eventually. If you can't give yourself completely to someone, they know. And Sara Tancredi, strong woman she is, would never have been able to take you the way you so desperately need to be taken." He licked away another drop of sweat. "So. I'll take you the way you need. We relive our stress to get us through this nightmare. And, when we get out, you'll be... freer to experience what you should, but never could have, with the woman you love."

A bright sheen appeared over Michael's eyes. He blinked and a tear mingled with the sweat and the rosy flush. "You know that won't ever be able to happen. I won't get out of this able to be with her. I realized that when I saw Linc earlier. Everything I wanted. It's gone."

"That doesn't mean you can't build something new. That you can't still have something with her, even if it's not what you'd originally hoped for."

He squeezed his eyes shut. "I just don't see how she could ever understand. Anyone could understand."

"You are not the first person to go through hell. Generations of men have gone to war and prison and captivity to come back to find their lives destroyed. To have to figure out how to live again. If Sara loves you, she will fight for you. Fight to understand and help you... help you regain yourself." His arms tightened around Michael. "It can be done."

"What if I go insane?"

Alex kissed him once again. Lightly, on the abused lips. "We should get back before Raoul gets upset."

Without opening his eyes, Michael wrapped his arms around Alex. Hugged him back down.

"Let's stay here," he whispered. "Not go back. Raoul will forget about us; he's already losing interest. We can take this cell and just avoid him. Get Tony and just stay here."

"That's a thought. We could. But are you sure there isn't anything in Raoul's cell that we need?"
Because that's my worry. He's got half the prison in there."

Michael sighed. "There's stuff we need in there." When he opened his eyes, they were dark. Flat.

"We'll be fine. It's only for a little longer. Only until we get what need from the bodybuilding giant. Then, we'll... leave. Escape."

"We need to get down into the sewers."

"Because no one would have thought of that before," Alex said dryly.

Michael scrunched his nose. "Even still. It can't hurt."

"Tomorrow, then. We'll get down, or get you down there. Somehow. Until then, back to Raoul."

"We're going to get killed."

"Not by Raoul."

"Raped."

"If he hasn't tried already, he's not going to." He extracted himself from Michael's arms. Rose.
"Come on. I think we missed lunch."

Michael whimpered, but allowed Alex to pull him to his feet.

"What's wrong?" Alex asked at the expression that passed over Michael's face.

"Nothing." Then, with another blush, he said, "Sore."

Alex grinned.
The rage inside was like an inferno. It threatened to explode and consume him and this whole God forsaken hellhole. This mockery of justice, little more than a holding pen for animals and villains and fools.

And him. Mr. FBI. The man who'd dared pursue him like a dog across the country. Who thought he could order T-Bag around, confine him to a closet like a child. Who treated him with markedly less respect than was warranted because he thought an education and degree made him better than T-Bag.

The man was nothing. The man's intellect was puny, minuscule, microscopic and paltry compared to his own.

And this nothing, this nonentity dared to defile the perfection of Michael Scofield.

T-Bag clenched his fist. He walked up to the nearest man, turned him around and punched. The man tried to fight back but T-Bag didn't give him the chance. He knocked the man to the ground and set on him, kicking his ribs. Felt them crack under his boots. Watched the blood as it spread hot, wet patches on his shirt. And when T-Bag kicked again, felt the crack of the sternum, his victim began bleeding from his mouth. Eyes grew dim.

He stepped on the man's throat. Felt it give. Felt the last gurgle, the last death rattle.

And still he wasn't appeased.

Pulling away from the dead man, T-Bag continued away from the cell where the FBI agent was pounding away into Pretty's gorgeous body as if he were a piece of meat. Touching and pawing what wasn't his.

Pretty belonged to him. He had from the first minute T-Bag had seen him. He just hadn't had the chance to properly lay claim yet, but there was never any doubt it would happen. T-Bag would have him.

And now... and now that FBI agent had touched him. Taken the Pretty the way T-Bag had always wanted.

And Pretty?

Had writhed and moaned like a bitch in heat, taking it. Loving it.

It wasn't fair.

He exited into the sun drenched yard. The little one was just to the right, crouching in the dirt, playing marbles by himself. T-Bag wasted no time. He stormed across the yard, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and slammed him into the wall.

"How long have Michael and Mahone been going at it like dogs?" he demanded.

The boy clawed at T-Bag's arm, eyes wide. "Que?"

"Michael. And Alexander Mahone. How long have they been fucking?" To accentuate his point, T-Bag thrust his hips into the boy's, undulating.
"Um... ah... Three day? Two? Before Raoul. Sunday. I go to church, and when I come back, they are together."

"Why?"

The boy blinked. "Because Michael is pretty and Senor is very handsome."

He slammed the boy against the wall. "But why? How did it happen? What brought them together, because, believe me, I know Michael Scofield. He wouldn't just start putting out in the seventh circle of hell for no reason."

The child just looked at him, eyes blank.

"What happened Sunday to drive them together?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me what happened that day."

"I don't know!"

T-Bag reached up with his good hand. He pinched the boy's nose closed and covered his mouth. "Walk me from the moment you got up, to whenever you left them. Tell me what happened."

He began to nod frantically.

"Talk." He removed his hand.

"Okay. Okay. We get up. And Senor is not there. He is gone, and Michael say... who sell drugs. I tell him Carlos, because that is who I tell Senor sell drugs. And there is food and blankets gone. So Michael ask me take him. I do, and we find Carlos and Alex. And he is getting drugs. Michael gives drugs back to Carlos, but he will not give us our stuff back. And then Michael.... he hit Alex and drag him back to the closet. I go to church."

"Michael hit Alex?"

"Si."

He eased the pressure on the boy. Drew into his thoughts, considering the implication.

Obviously, the Pretty enjoyed pain. Both the giving and receiving. Which meant, as T-Bag had long suspected, his rejection of T-bags advances were nothing but him playing hard-to-get. Something T-Bag could appreciate.

What he didn't appreciate was Michael allowing another man to besmirch his body while being coy with T-Bag. But that he could deal with later.

In the meantime, it appeared that Mr. FBI, Agent Alexander Mahone was a bit of a junkie. And while he may have it under control for the moment, T-Bag knew addiction.

His mood vastly improved.

"Thank you," he purred, leaning in.

The boy's skin was so smooth, not even the hint of stubble yet. Smooth and young and so very tasty.
"No," the child said softly. He pulled his face away from T-Bag's questing tongue. Lowered his eyelashes and pushed.

"I don't believe the slut of Sona is in any position to refuse me," he said. He slipped his hand underneath the boy's shirt. Stroke the flat little tummy before sliding his hand underneath the loose waistband of his slacks.

"You have nothing to trade. I do business. Not..." He pushed. When T-Bag didn't move, he tried again. A frantic look came over his face when T-Bag only increased the pressure, hand sliding further down his pants.

The fear made T-Bag's head spin.

"Stop!" The boy kicked him in the shins and began struggling in earnest. That delicious panic was painting his face. His fingers clawed at T-Bag's arms and tears welled in his eyes.

But, as wonderful as it all was, what T-Bag really needed was a quick fuck, not a long drawn out seduction.

So, he closed off the boy's airway again.

"Listen," he whispered in Tony's ear. "I really don't have time for this. Not today. Next time, you can fight me all you want, as long as you want. But I just spent the last two hours watching Alexander Mahone fucking Michael--my Michael--into oblivion. And then, he woke up, rolled Michael over, and fucked him again. I'm livid at seeing the desecration of my property and I'm feeling randy. So, unless you want me taking your unconscious body, of which I have no problem because it really is a beautiful body, stop fighting and come with me."

The struggling stopped. Big, crocodile tears rolled from his eyes, and he nodded.

"Good." He pulled his hand away. Replaced it with his mouth. Kissed the unresponsive on below his.

He pinched the boy.

That got the response he was looking for. Kissing, tears, and trembling all at once. The best combination.

"Hey!"

T-Bag was roughly pulled away from the boy. Spun around and turned to face the fucking giant.

"You no touch him!" Raoul said in that slow, awkward was of his. He looked at Tony. Frowned. "Why you cry?"

Tony shook his head.

Raoul looked back. "He mine. You no touch."

"I was just..."

"No!"

One huge, meaty paw came out and smacked T-Bag across the face. The blow sent him tumbling back, falling on his ass in the dirt.
"Mine. You no touch," the giant reiterated. Then he took Tony by the arm and led him off into the prison.

T-Bag watched them go, wiping a trail of blood that oozed from his mouth. New plan. First, kill the giant. Then, kill the FBI agent. And then, he could finally claim his property.

* * *

"He has a book," Michael said in surprise. He squirmed further under the bunk bed, avoiding the dead bodies of rodents and bugs, stretching for the treasure buried among it.

"What?"

"There's a book under here." He snagged it with his fingers. Backed out from underneath the bunk. "It's... Terra Nostra."

"English?"

"No. But I can read Spanish." He opened it. Read the first few words. Shrugged. "Sort of. Anyway, it'll be good practice."

"Because you'll have so much time to sit around and read while we're figuring a way out of here," Alex said dryly.

Michael rolled his eyes. "Yes, because we're so busy right now. No time to even sit down and relax and instant."

Alex stopped sorting through the junk they'd tossed aside earlier. He turned and looked at Michael, eyebrow raised.

He lowered himself onto the bottom bunk. Inhaled sharply.

Alex grinned. A smug, knowing, insufferably pleased grin.

"Jerk."

"Are you complaining?"

"No. But you don't have to be such an insufferable jerk about it."

"I'm being an insufferable jerk." He pushed himself away from the wall he was leaning on. Swaggered across the room. Bent over and pulled Michael to his feet, fists clenched in the front of his shirt.

Michael's heart pounded. His eyes were drawn to Alex's lips. Irrationally, he couldn't help hoping that Alex kissed him. Irrational, because this wasn't supposed to be about emotions. Because Alex had already kissed him. Because he was obviously going to kiss him again. Because... because... because it didn't matter, it shouldn't matter, whether or not Alex kissed him. He shouldn't care.

But, God, he hoped Alex kissed him.

"I'm being an insufferable jerk?" Alex whispered. He brushed his lips lightly over Michael's cheek. "You're the one having trouble walking."

"That could be due to any number of reasons. I didn't have the luxury of a bed of my own last night."
"Tell me, Michael. Are you always such a whiny little bitch?"

He bat his eyelashes. Leaned forward, bringing their mouths closer together. "I'm not whining. Just offering alternative explanations that take the wind from your sails a bit."

Teeth grazed over Michael's jaw. "Wind goes from my sails, and what happened earlier may never happened again."

This time, Michael just took what he wanted. He pressed his mouth against Alex's, taking the kiss he so desperately needed.

Alex wrapped his arms around Michael. Practically pulled him off his feet, returning the kiss with enthusiasm.

"You back!"

Michael pulled away from Alex, but wasn't released right away. Alex placed a light bite on his neck before he unwrapped his arms from Michael's body and stepped away.

"Tony?" Michael said on seeing the teary-eyed youth. "What's wrong?"

Tony shook his head. He wiped his eyes and shook his head again.

Raoul pushed Tony forward. It looked like it was supposed to be a gentle, but he misjudged his strength. Tony stumbled forward and practically fell into Michael's arms.

"He hurt," Raoul explained. "Man try take him. You make better?"

"Yeah," Michael said absently. He stroked Tony's back. "I'll make him better. Thanks."

He nodded and smiled. "You not go, right? You stay here."

He switched to Spanish. "We already said we would. Alex and I just need to be able to be on our own sometimes. That's all."

The other man considered it. Frowned. "But you come back. Is okay." He came closer. Kissed Michael on the forehead, then pet his head. "Good." As he left, he pat Alex on the arm.

"What happened, Tony?" Michael asked. He backed up to the bed and sat, bringing Tony with him.

"Nothing. I'm fine." But he trembled in Michael's arms, and folded himself more firmly against Michael's chest.

"No, you're not fine. You're upset. Did Raoul do something?"

"No. Raoul stop him. He say I his, so I okay. I okay, Michael." He wiped his eyes on Michael's shirt.

Michael kissed the top of Tony's head. "Raoul stopped who?"

Tony didn't answer. The trembling was easing, as were the tears. Now he was just leaning heavily into Michael, obviously soaking up the comfort.

"Tony, you need to tell us what happened," Alex said. He sat next to Michael and rubbed Tony's back.

"I okay now."
"We still need to know." Gently, he pried Tony away from Michael and sat him between them. "Tell us," he commanded, turning Tony's face to him and wiping away the last of the tears.

Tony let out a long breath. His eyes lowered and he whispered, "The man who talk funny? With one hand?"

"T-Bag," Michael said, wincing. Tony was so young, and so very attractive. He was exactly the kind of boy T-Bag enjoyed victimizing.

"What did he do?" asked Alex.

"He, ah. He want sex. I say no. He have nothing to trade, nothing I want. I tell him this. I do business. And he... he..." Tony frowned. Shook his head and switched to Spanish. "He covered my mouth and nose with his hand. I couldn't breathe and I couldn't push him off. He's very strong, and he doesn't look it. I pushed and fought, but he only seemed to like that. It made him more excited. He told me that he could either fuck me while I was conscious or unconscious. And he meant it." He licked his lips. "I sort of think that maybe he wouldn't have even minded if I was dead." A shudder ran through his body.

Michael wrapped his arms around Tony again and kissed his temple. "And then Raoul came and stopped him?"

"Si. He came and told T-Bag I was his. That he couldn't touch me. Then he asked if I was okay and hit T-Bag so hard he fell."

"What's he saying?" Alex asked.

After kissing Tony's forehead again, Michael relayed the story to Alex. Tony's eyes closed and he leaned against Michael heavily, resting all his weight. One hand reached for Michael's free one and twined their fingers and he curled his legs under him until he was tucked tightly in the space between Michael and Alex.

"And then Raoul hit T-Bag and took Tony away," Michael finished, wrapping his arm tightly around Tony. There was a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. All he wanted to do was wrap Tony in his arms and hold him until the fear went away. The memory. No one should have to go through that, through T-Bag. And, worse, it'd been all Michael's fault. If he hadn't allowed T-Bag to maul him... if he hadn't let T-Bag and Alex fight... if he hadn't gotten T-Bag excited, that rapist wouldn't have gone looking for something younger and weaker to prey on.

Alex's eyes were dark and his mouth was set in a thin, tight line. "Tony. Tony." He pulled Tony away from Michael and turned him around. Framing his thin face between his hands, he leaned in close. "You did exactly what you should have done. That man, Theodore Bagwell, is a very bad man. A rapist. A murder. And he likes little boys."

"I not a little boy."

"No, but you're young. And you look younger because you're not getting enough food, not like you need. And Bagwell, he might look thin and light, but the bastard is strong. Much stronger than he looks."

Tony nodded. "I try to fight him off, but he not move."

"It's not your fault. It's what he does. But I don't want to give him another opportunity to hurt you. From now on, don't leave the cell without Michael, Raoul, or me at your side. Understood?"
He frowned. "But I get you things. That you and Michael need."

"That was before. Now it's time for us to pay you back."

"But..."

"Tony." Alex stroked his thumb down Tony's face. Over his jaw and mouth. "What you've had to do to survive in here... that's something you should never have had to do. Trading your body, it's not right."

"I not mind," he said harshly. He tried to pull away, but Alex held him tightly.

"You've done nothing wrong. Nothing. You're a brilliant, beautiful, clever young man and you've survived. That's fantastic. But now you have us to help you. Michael and me. You don't need to do anything you don't want to do with anyone you don't want to do it with. However, Bagwell will come after you."

"But he want Michael." He looked at Michael, then lowered his eyes. "Yesterday, he ask me... he say if I can get Michael alone to he talk to him. And that I can..." He broke off, blushing.

"Did he say what he wanted to talk to me about?"

Tony shrugged. "He say... he say you have an... an understanding? He say you and him work together. Need each other. Then he say... he say...." The blush came back and he lowered his head. "But I say no. I would never." Then he looked up. "He want to hurt you. He came and want to know about you and Senor. He angry that you to do sex. He... I no want him to hurt you, Michael."

"I don't want him to hurt you," Michael replied, heart aching. He gathered Tony back into his arms, sick with guilt. "I'd rather it me..."

"No. I nothing. You very smart man. Beautiful. Alex... Senor care about you very much. Is okay if..."

"No, it's not okay! It's not okay. You're fifteen years old..."

"Sixteen. Is my birthday."

He groaned. Rested his forehead on Tony's. "Sixteen years old. Still so young, and you shouldn't have to make that decision. I'm the adult. I should be protecting you."

Tony turned, lifting his face. His mouth connected with Michael's in a soft, sweet kiss. A gentle pressure and the slightest hint of tongue. Slim, nimble fingers stroking along Michael's jaw, drawing a pleasant tingle to the surface of Michael's skin.

It was so different from Alex, even when Alex kissed him gently. Different, and yet, strangely, no less arousing. And he couldn't pull away, couldn't stop kissing Tony, even though he knew it was wrong. Tony had been through so much in his short life. He deserved a little gentleness, didn't he? Affection. A touch of something genuine. And Michael did genuinely care about him. Love him, even.

Finally, Tony broke the kiss. He was smiling. He stroked down Michael's neck. "You are too beautiful, too good for that man to hurt you."

"I'm not good, Tony." Desperation choked him. His vision wavered. "I'm not worth it. I..."
"Okay, both of you, that's enough," Alex snapped. He pulled Tony onto his lap and leaned him back. "Tony, you are one of the most remarkable boys I have ever met. You should have been killed months ago, but you've survived. You've survived and now you don't need to struggle anymore. Don't need to sell yourself, because Michael and I are here to protect you. And you, Michael." A smile flitted over his lips. "You are... something else. But a bad person? Someone who's all darkness? Never. That's whoever abused you talking. But it's not true. So stop it, both of you. No talk of sacrificing yourselves on the altar of Theodore Bagwell to preserve the innocence and beauty of the other. Got it?"

Michael felt his face warming. "Alex..."

"No. I'm sick of this, 'I'm all darkness' nonsense. And, you, Tony. Same thing. You're embarrassed and degraded over what you've had to do to survive. So you think you're not as good. But you're just as good as anyone. Better than most. Don't give yourself away anymore. Not to people who are going to hurt you. Or people you don't want."

Tony sighed. Closed his eyes. "He scare me."

"He scares Michael, too."

"Hey!" He smacked Alex on the arm.

Alex laughed. "I'm just telling the truth." He looked back down at Tony. "So. Do you promise not to leave without one of us around to protect you from Bagwell? Because, I know that, in the end, we can't stop you if you're determined, but I'll try to keep you here. I'll even tie you up if I have to."

Tony blushed and laughed. Michael could tell that he wasn't sure if Alex was joking or not. "Okay. I not leave without you."

"Good." He looked at Michael. "And will you promise not to go after Bagwell and offering yourself to him?"

"Only if you promise not to go off by yourself and kill him," Michael replied. He raised an eyebrow. "I don't want you killing anyone. Not if you can avoid it."

Alex's eyes flashed. "Michael..."

"You're a good man," he said. "But... please." He couldn't explain why it was so important to him, but it was. The people Alex had killed in the past couldn't be brought back, but if Michael could prevent deaths in the future, he'd try.

At first, Alex didn't answer. Finally, though, he gave a terse nod and said, "Fine. I won't go off and kill Bagwell."

"Then I won't let him do anything to me."

"Good. Because you belong to me, and I'm serious about that, Michael. I don't like other people touching you." He looked down at Tony. "You don't count. You may touch him all you like."

"Alex!"

Tony grinned. "Thank you, Senor."

"And call me Alex already. It's fine."
Okay. Alex.” He blushed slightly.

Alex bent down and kissed Tony. "Happy birthday, kid."

Tony arched up as Alex pulled away. Kissed him more firmly, his hand around Alex's head. "Thank you."

* * *

Night. It was never silent here. Never quiet. There were too many men, too much suffering and pain. It rustled in the air, seeped out of the walls. Clawed at Alex's skin.

Bad enough he was forced to give up the one thing that had made life manageable since Shales, but to do it here. It was torture.

Only one thing kept him remotely sane. And if he had any dignity left at all, he'd be sickened by how much he needed--wanted--that thing. Person.

It was a deep, clawing pain in the center of his body. Something like hunger, only worse. His hands were shaking again. His head ached. He ached.

He needed drugs. Drugs or to fuck.

He was so fucking weak.

Alex clenched his fists and rolled onto his side.

Next to him, nestled tightly between him and Michael, was Tony. Too young Tony. Just barely sixteen years old. Too old for his own damn good. Too pretty, too. Much too smart. Like a miniature Michael, willing to sacrifice himself if there were others around him to sacrifice himself for. And so willing to fall in love with the first person to show him kindness. To see him. Again. So much like Michael.

And Alex refused to be jealous of Sara Tancredi. Refused to think how when they finally got out of this hell hole, Michael's kisses and caresses and moans and body would go to her and not him.

He moved his eyes from the pretty teenage boy to the breathtaking man behind him.

Michael was sleeping peacefully, his arms wrapped around Tony. One was extended towards Alex, his fingers extended, reaching. When Alex ran his fingers lightly over them, then curled, then flexed.

What Alex really wanted to do was run his hand over Michael's bruised and cut cheek. To pull him over and kiss the bitten, swollen lips. To strip him from his clothes and...

He abruptly broke off that line of thinking. Instead, he pushed himself to his feet and left the cell.

The crushed box of cigarettes in his back pocket was nearly empty. He was going to have to figure out where and how to get more. He was fairly certain Raoul could get him more if he asked. And since Michael seemed to be okay with Alex smoking, he wasn't going to quit. It wasn't nearly enough to keep him sane, but it was something. It took the edge off just enough that he didn't have to claw his own skin bloody.

As he lit his cigarette and leaned against the bars of their cell, his mind turned to on Theodore Bagwell. T-Bag. The slimy, crooked, murdering, pedophile bastard who'd not only put his hands on Michael, but had tried to take advantage of Tony.
The latter was the worse crime. Michael, at least, had known exactly what he was doing when he'd stood and let T-Bag touch him. Better to betray Sara by not stopping a man who would, one day, probably overpower him anyway. Punish himself by forcing himself to submit to a man who sickened him, rather than enjoy being punished by a man whom he found attractive.

But Tony...

He drew angrily on his cigarette, jaw tight.

Tony was a kid. Yes, he'd been used more times than any fifteen year old had right. Yes, he'd survived by selling himself, but what else did he have? And what he gave, at least it was willingly, for a purpose. What Bagwell had tried...

Alex broke off that line of thinking. Instead, he turned his mind to how he was going to kill the other man.

He'd never committed premeditated murder before. Even with the escapees, he'd played it by ear each time. Abruzzi was easy. Alex knew that pride was a weakness, had set a trap, then played off that pride. Until the end, he hadn't been certain it would work, but, back then, he hadn't cared. In fact, he'd hoped Abruzzi would go with them, and Alex wouldn't have to kill him.

He'd been so naïve about the company back then.

Tweener he'd held off on until he absolutely had to. And, yes, he'd had to think about how to kill him, it wasn't the same as this.

Haywire... Haywire's death made Alex feel physically ill when he thought about it. How easy it had been to twist the poor man's mind, to manipulate him into ending his own life.

But this... Bagwell, Alex would never feel sorry about killing. He quite looked forward to it.

The easiest would be to sneak up on him from behind and slit his throat. Even better, go while he was sleeping. Sneak up and then gently, so as not to wake him drag the shiv across his neck. Then, once the blood was flowing, shake him awake and watch him panic.

Better than that. Tie him up while he was sleeping. Cut off his fucking dick. Stuff it in his mouth. Then slit his throat. And stab him a bunch of times. Maybe shove something sharp and jagged up his ass. Cut out his heart. Do fucking something.

He took another drag on his cigarette and exhaled slowly. Pushed the red haze away forcefully. Focused.

The shiv was back in the cell. He'd have to get it before he went. Unless he went for bloodless. Strangled the bastard sonofabitch. Feel that skinny neck between his hands as he squeezed and...

"What are you doing up?"

Alex glanced at the opening of the cell. Michael was there, sleepy-eyed, flushed, and sweating in the heat.

He lifted the cigarette to his mouth again and inhaled. "Couldn't sleep. You?"

Michael shrugged and came closer. "Raoul kicked me. Woke me up."

"Poor baby. You have it so rough here." He reached out and ran his knuckles over Michael's cheek.
His eyes fell shut. He leaned into the caress, moving even closer, until he was right next to Alex. "You mock." His voice was heavy, and he twitched when someone deep in the bowels of the prison shouted.

Alex sighed. Kissed the top of Michael's head. "I know, Michael." He dropped his cigarette and ground it out under his boot. "But you're holding up. You're doing real good. Just hang in there. Block everything out. All of them. All the pain." His arm dropped around Michael's body and he held him close.

"Right now, the one in the most pain is you." He opened his eyes and looked up at Alex, not lifting his head from Alex's shoulder. "I can't block you out."

"I'm fine."

"You're not."

His fingers tightened in Michael's side. "What the fuck do you want from me, Michael? I'm a goddamn fucking addict. I want drugs. I need them."

"No. You don't need them. You only think you do."

"The mind is a powerful thing."

Michael turned and nuzzled at Alex's throat. "What can I do?" His hot, wet tongue lapped at the tendon that stood out against, sending goose bumps crawling over his skin.

"Let me kill Bagwell."

The body against his went stiff. Hands tightened in Alex's clothes. "Please don't."

"He deserves to die. He's a killer. A rapist. A pedophile."

Michael pulled away. "I know. But you don't have to be the one who kills him."

"Then who will be? You?" He grabbed Michael by the shoulders and turned him, slamming him back against the bars.

He winced. "No. I... Just ignore him. Concentrate on... I don't know. Getting out of here. Tomorrow, we'll start. We'll go into the sewers. We'll..."

"T-Bag is not going to stop because we ignore him, Michael. He's not a monster under the bed. He's a real, flesh and blood menace."

"He'll find other victims."

"And you'll be fine with that," Alex sneered. He moved on hand to Michael's neck and wrapped his fingers lightly around. His fingers pressed against Michael's pulse, feeling the blood rush beneath the marred skin.

Michael's cheeks colored. Eyelashes shielded his eyes from view. "Maybe not."

Alex sighed. Studied Michael for a moment, then let out a breath, realization streaking through him. "You think he'll kill me."

His cheeks got darker. "No. Of course not." The words sounded wooden and rehearsed.
"Careful, one might almost think you cared about me."

This time, Michael looked up at him. His eyes were wet. "I don't want him to kill you."

"And I don't want him to kill you. Or rape you. Or Tony." He slid his hand from Michael's neck to his face, cupping it gently. "He's dangerous. And animal. And he needs to be put down."

"Not by you." Michael wrapped his arms around Alex's neck. "I meant what I said earlier. You're a good man, Alex. And I don't want you... to do anything to..."

"I'm not a good man."

"Yes. You are. The company manipulated you, that's all. You wouldn't have killed Tweener or Haywire if it hadn't been for them."

Alex cleared his throat. Squeezed his eyes shut. "I. I killed." The words stuck in his throat. He would rip out Michael's heart for drugs right about now. Hell. He'd rip out his own heart.

"Alex?"

"I killed someone else. One of the company. I think his name was John or something. After I was shot." He closed his eyes, unwilling to see the inevitable look of horror that would cross Michael's face.

"What happened?" Michael asked when Alex was silent.

He cleared his throat again. "I tried to quit. I wanted out. Fuck, I was rooting for you by that time. Everything I did, everything I figured out about your plan, you had a counter plan or just something else up your sleeve. And I was fairly certain, by that time, Lincoln was innocent, not that it mattered in the manhunt, but..." He forced his eyes opened. "I didn't want to kill you. I just wanted out." His stomach twisted and he closed his eyes again. "I was ready to serve my time. I was going to go back to Quantico and confess. Everything. And then..."

"Your wife?"

"My son." His voice cracked. "My Cameron. They hit him with a car. Broke his leg, forced him into surgery. I..." His legs were shaking.

"Shhh," Michael soothed. He kissed Alex, rubbing his hand against the side of Alex's face.

Alex leaned into the caress momentarily. Took strength from it. Then, he straightened and dropped his hands to his sides. "The agent flaunted it in my face. I don't know if he was the one who hurt my kid or just ordered it, but he... And I snapped. Snapped and shot him and stuffed him in the trunk of my car. Took him into the desert and buried the body." He wiped a tear that fell from the corner of his eyes and forced himself to meet Michael's eyes.

Michael swallowed. "You're a dangerous man, Alex. I don't deny that. Volatile. And you probably have seen too much, done too much, been ordered to do things that no one should ever have to do or see." He reached out with a trembling hand. Stroked along Alex's stubbled jaw. "But at the core, you are a good man. And all I'm asking is that you don't go seeking out T-Bag to kill him in cold blood."

"Even if, by doing so, I could protect you?"

"I promise I won't let him take advantage of me. I won't fall apart like that."
"What if Sara shows up to visit you? Reminds you how much she loves you," he spat, bitter. "Do you promise you won't let your guilt overwhelm you to the point you need to punish yourself by... by... giving yourself to that animal?"

Michael nodded. "I promise."

Alex shook his head. "I still think it'd be better to gut the bastard now."

"Do you honestly think he's not expecting you right now?"

"Honestly, I don't know. Depends on how seriously he takes my claim on you and Tony."

Michael reached out and closed his fingers in Alex's shirt. "I think... I think that he probably knows that you're serious. At least about me. I think he might have seen us. Earlier." He blushed and shrugged. "No sheet. No privacy."


Michael tilted his head back. Caught Alex's lips with his own and kissed. His hands slid into Alex's hair and he held him there. Mouths worked against each other. Tongues slid and caressed. Searched out and stroked sensitive spots.

He broke away first. Rested his forehead against Michael's, breathing heavily. "We need to stop."

"Why?" Michael asked in a gasping little moan. He rubbed his hips against Alex's, brushing against the sensitive bulge under Alex's jeans.

He pressed a sloppy kiss over Michael's mouth. "If we continue, we're going to wake Tony and he's going to want a birthday present." He nipped Michael's ear.

"So. Let's go somewhere else."

"You're insatiable, aren't you?" He laughed. Bit Michael's chin.

Michael blushed. Looked away. "Sorry. I'm just..." He cleared his throat. "It's new. That's all. Probably old hat to you."

Alex raised an eyebrow. "You seriously need reassurance that you're the best sex I've ever had? We're in prison, Michael. I'm detoxing. It's either fuck you or claw off my skin."

"I don't need reassurance," he said stiffly. He pushed Alex away. "I was just..." He rubbed his face. "I'm going back to bed. Don't kill anyone while I'm asleep."

Before Michael made it back to the entrance of the cell, Alex caught him. Yanked him back and pressed him against the bars, holding him there with his body.

"You are the best lay I have ever had in my entire life," he whispered. "I would rather spend all day fucking your brains out than just about anything else. But we have to get out of here. You need to get out of here. And we need to stop wasting time and do what we need to do to make that happen."

"You don't need to lie. I'm getting you out."

He grabbed Michael's face in his hand and squeezed. Leaned in and kissed him. "You're more addictive than any drug. And I am not lying."
Michael looked up at him. Blushed when he saw whatever confirmation he needed in Alex's face. "I'm sorry."

"You're used to being used. And used to being told your second best or worse. I understand." He kissed Michael again. "Now. Go back to bed. We have a big day tomorrow."

"Come with me."

He shook his head. "I'll come later."

Michael took his hand. "Come with me."

"I... fine." Alex sighed, but allowed himself to be drawn back to the mattresses spread out on the floor.

Tony had spread out over the empty portions of the bed while Michael and Alex were absent. Michael gently nudged him, urging him closer to Raoul. Amazingly, the kid moved without waking up.

"You think he's sleeping better now he has us?" Michael asked, lying down. He tugged Alex down to him.

"Probably. Can't imagine he'd have survived so long if he slept like the log he's been the past couple days." He stretched out next to Michael. Reached out and traced his face. "You sleep pretty heavy."

Michael frowned. "No, I don't. I've always been a light sleeper."

"You haven't been lately. I'd almost think you trusted me."

He licked his lips. Swallowed. "I do."

Alex sighed. Rolled onto his back. "You just think you do, Michael. It's the orgasms talking. Once you come down from the high, you'll come back to your senses."

There was a shifting, then Michael draped his body against Alex's side. Pressed his hot cheek into his chest, the heat seeping through the thin shirt Alex was wearing. "I do trust you, and it's not the orgasms talking. I've trusted you ever since you pulled me from the rain. Because you could have killed me while I was out, and you didn't."

"It told you, it's because I want you to get me out of there." He stroked Michael's stubbly hair.

"No. It's more than that." He lifted his head and looked at Alex through too-earnest eyes. "The only reason you ever wanted to kill me was because of the company. And, even then, you couldn't. You stood there, gun in hand, and couldn't kill me. You came up with another way."

"I wanted your money. I wanted out."

Michael shrugged. "You could have killed Linc and me and accomplished the same thing."

"I called Kim. Tried to frame you."

"Frame me. Not kill me." He reached up and pressed his fingers into Alex's mouth. "Face it. You don't want me dead. As angry as you might be with me, you can't kill me. And I never wanted you dead, even before." Carefully, exploring, he moved his fingers across Alex's face. I think, Alex, in some ways, I know you better than you do yourself."
His heart was in his throat. He cleared it, trying to find his voice. "Funny." His hand slipped under Michael's shirt. "I think the same thing about you."

"I'm fine with that. Are you?"

He shook his head. "You trust too easily."

"No," Michael said firmly with a shake of his head. "I don't."

Alex's stomach tightened at the quiet confidence in Michael's words. At the implication. His hands trembled, and he pressed them into Michael's skin. "Go to sleep," he said when he could trust his voice.

Michael frowned. Opened his mouth.

Alex cut him off. "Go to sleep, Michael." He pushed Michael's head down onto his chest. Held him there and closed his own eyes.

The other man relented. In a few moments, his body went slack, heavy and sleepy, holding Alex down.

Sleep was longer for him. He couldn't help wonder what the hell he had gotten himself into. And what he was going to do with this man who was falling in love with him and didn't even know it.

* * *

The next morning, Michael and Alex tried to slip away right after breakfast with Tony, determined to explore the bowels of the prison. Unfortunately, Raoul refused to let Michael go from the moment they woke up. He caressed Michael's face until he awoke, all but carried him to breakfast, then fed him in increasingly tiny increments until Michael was practically sucking on the giant's fingers.

He was going to have to rethink Raoul's intentions. The man was, after all, in prison. Deceased wife or not, it was possible he were lonely enough to turn to someone of the same sex.

The idea terrified Michael, but he pushed it aside. He was smarter than Raoul. He could handle him, he was sure of it.

Alex was another matter. Every time Raoul pulled Michael closer, Alex got more and more tense. His jaw tightened and eyes flared. And his hand dug into Michael's thigh until he felt another bruise forming.

"Come," Raoul said when the last of the food was gone. "We go make strong. Uh, exercise." He pulled Michael to his feet. "You help him, si?" he asked, gesturing between Alex and Michael.

"Yeah," Alex said, voice clipped. He reached out and wrapped his hand around Michael's wrist. Tugged. "Yeah, I'll help him. Later."

"Now. We go now." He tugged Michael back to him. "Later Sammy group go to weight pile. And after that, Guillermo." Raoul stopped. Frowned. "Oh, no. He dead now. Still."

Alex stiffened when Guillermo's name was mentioned. His hand tightened painfully on Michael's wrist until he gasped.

"Come." Raoul tugged Michael, pulling him away.

But Alex wouldn't let go and tugged back. "I'm in charge of his training!"

Blue eyes flashed. He yanked Michael back to him.

"Don't!" Michael snapped. He twisted his wrist in Alex's, trying to pull it away. "Just... don't."

Tony, who'd been sitting on the floor, stood. Put his hands around Alex's shoulder and tugged back. Whispered, stroked. Soothed until he released Michael's wrist and stepped back.

"Sorry," he said, voice sharp.

Raoul continued to frown at Alex. Pulled Michael to him. Tisked over the bruise on his wrist before raising it to his mouth and kissing it.

"No!" snapped Tony.

Michael glanced over at them. Now Tony was in front of him, holding him back, his thin body straining against Alex's, trying to stop him from getting closer.

"I'm okay," he said, looking at Alex.

Alex met his eyes. His jaw clenched.

Michael's heart contracted, and he turned back to Raoul. "I'm okay. Thanks."

Then, feeling hot, embarrassed, he leaned in and kissed Raoul on the cheek. "Let's go."

Raoul grinned, a blush on his cheeks. "Come."

He refused to think until they were out on the yard. Let everything wash over him, didn't think about what he had done. He'd tossed a bone to Raoul, but what did that mean? Was he committed to a course now, did Raoul think....

"Down. Twenty sit-ups," Alex said gruffly once they were at the weight pile. He leaned against the fence and gestured at the ground.

"What?" Michael was distracted by T-Bag, standing on the upper tier, gazing down at the weight pile. At him. Without Raoul's arms wrapped around him, or Alex's hand around his wrist, Michael felt stupidly vulnerable.

Alex rolled his eyes. "Get down and do twenty sit-ups. You'll do three sets, and three sets of push-ups to start." When Michael didn't move, he pulled away from the fence and pushed Michael into the dirt. "Get started."

"What about you?"

"I'm not the one Raoul wants to make stronger." He crouched in the dirt and held Michael's feet down. "Get started, boy." He glanced up at Tony, who was standing uncertainly by the bench press where Raoul was ensconced. "You too, string bean. You need some muscles."

Tony blushed and rolled his eyes. Then he dropped to the dirt and started his torture.

Michael narrowed his eyes and studied Alex a moment, before finally flopping onto his back. Started his stupid sit-ups. "What's going on with you?" he asked, panting, after he got to a painful seventeen.

"Three more."
Might as well be a hundred. His stomach was one dull ache and he didn't think he could manage one more, much less two more sets. This was torture.

Painfully, he curled up once more. Twice. Tugged on his thighs to get him up the third time and then... "Twenty," he grunted. "What's wrong with you today?"

"Nothing. Flip over and do twenty push-ups."

He laughed. "You have got to be kidding."

"Do I look like I'm kidding?"

"Who pissed in your Cheerios? Seriously."

"I didn't have Cheerios. I had something fried and rancid. Do your push-ups."

"Done!" Tony exclaimed. He flipped over onto his stomach and started doing push-ups.

"Suck-up," muttered Michael. He followed suit and flipped to his stomach.

He was fine until three. Then the tearing, numbing, throbbing pain in his arm sent him slamming into the dirt. He panted, trying to fight back the pain. Get control.

"Come on, Michael. You can give me more."

He thought about saying something, but decided it wasn't worth the hassle. Instead, he pushed himself back up. Took a deep breath and lowered.

"Fuck!" he grunted. His arm gave out, shoulder snapping out and back into the socket. The pain went right to his stomach, which streaked acid up his esophagus.

"Shit, Michael."

Arms pulled Michael up as he coughed and tried valiantly not to throw up. His arm throbbed and nerves seemed to streak fire down into his fingertips. Tony's concerned face swam before him, and Alex's hands on his shoulder, moving the bone more firmly into place.

"I don't remember everything," Alex said when Michael's coughing fit had subsided and the pain faded to manageable. He sighed and rested his forehead against Michael's. "I forgot about your arm. You should have said something."

"Yeah. Because you've been so easy to talk to all morning." He rubbed his head against Alex's. Wince as another streak of pain flashed through him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Lips breezed over Michael's temple before Alex pulled away. "Just... nothing. You okay?"

Michael thought about it. Nodded. "Yeah. I think I am." He rolled his shoulder slowly and winced at the pain. "Hurts, though." He risked a glance at Alex.

Alex was crouched in the dirt next to him, a grim expression on his face. His mouth was pressed into a thin line. When Michael looked at him, he looked away, glancing up. He scowled when his eyes fell on the upper level before snapping his eyes back to Michael. "So, you'll skip push-ups. We'll work your legs today, too."

"My legs aren't a problem," Michael sighed, lying back in the dirt for more sit-ups. "I ran enough in
the past few weeks to make it never be a problem again."

"Good." He glanced at Tony. "You still owe me two more sets."

Tony glanced at Michael worriedly.

"I'm fine, Tony," Michael grunted. "Just... do what Senor Shithead says."

"You want three more sets added on to what you already owe?" Alex asked, baring his teeth without malice.

He stuck his tongue out at Alex and continued his set. Once again, by the end, his stomach muscles were screaming. He hated sit-ups, hated this. Wanted to go home. And, most of all, he hated that he could still feel fucking T-Bag's eyes on him, gazing down, devouring.

"Ignore him," Alex said when Michael once again forced himself not to glance up at T-Bag. "He'll lose interest eventually. Especially if you don't take your shirt off."

Michael rolled his eyes. "Right. Because psychopathic serial killers are known for their short attention spans." He pulled his sweat damp shirt away from his skin. Flapped it a few times, trying to get the stale air to breeze. "Why don't you have to do any of this?"

"I already told you, I'm in shape."

"But you won't stay in shape by watching me and Tony work out." He wiped away the sweat that rolled down his face, blinking it from his eyes. "You'll lose all that muscle definition that has Raoul so impressed and then I'll have to train you."

Alex looked at him a moment, then rolled his eyes. "You know, I'm about ready to say that every time you complain, you have to perform a sexual favor on Tony."

Tony, who had been giving Alex dreamy eyes over the display of manliness, snapped to attention. "I like that idea." He shot Michael a huge grin.

"No," Michael said. He glared at Alex.

"I sixteen now." Tony got to his hands and knees and crawled to Michael. "Old enough to have sex." His lips connected with Michael's jaw.

"Stop." He pushed Tony away, holding him by the arms. "And you stop egging him on. I... I can't think about this right now, okay?" He exhaled slowly, hands tightening on Tony's skinny arms as he did. Then he leaned forward and gave Tony a quick kiss on the lips. "Okay. Okay, Alex, what torture do you have next for us?"

Alex smiled. "Squats. On your feet."

With a groan, Michael complied. He wished he was wearing a short sleeved shirt. Or just a lighter fabric. And color. But, on the other hand, the less he showed off his tattoos, the better. Too much
attention was being paid to him anyway.

By this time, Alex's sour mood seemed to be broken completely. He showed Michael and Tony what to do and how to do it, corrected their form and was more concerned that they do it right than do all he set out for them.

Of course, squats were easier than sit-ups. Michael had done so much running since breaking out of prison, his legs were about the only things that were in shape. Well. Maybe his lungs. He'd never been one for working out, never seeing the need and never having the time. Back in Chicago, he'd been married to his job and his volunteer work. There'd been no time to go to the gym even if there had been the desire.

As to the fact, as Alex pointed out while making Michael do lunges across the work-out area, that Lincoln obviously worked out and kept himself in shape, well. Michael loved his brother with a fierce devotion. But. But, Lincoln was, in some ways, the exact opposite of everything Michael had ever desired in life. And maybe some of that had crept into his views on exercise, as well.

But this, despite the pain and the shaky muscles, it wasn't too bad. Tony was having fun, approaching it like a game. Of course, to a kid who'd been selling himself to survive for God knew how many months, this was a game. He had the non-threatening attention of two men, he was in the sunshine, running and laughing. No one was coming near them and...

No, wait. Wrong. Because, as Michael and Tony raced each other, striving to be the first to make it to the wall that surrounded the prison, the winner promised a treat by Alex, Raoul and another man were approaching.

Michael stumbled. Fell against the wall. He pushed himself up with shaking arms and turned.

"Michael! Here," Raoul called. He came up and pulled Michael away from the wall. "Take off your shirt. He doesn't believe you have the tattoo."

Michael licked his sticky-dry lips. Swallowed, wishing he had some water. "Um." He glanced at Alex, who was still at the starting line he'd drawn. "Uh. Here." He pushed up a sleeve, revealing the blue-inked lines on his skin.

"Shirt. Off," Raoul repeated slowly in English. "So he see." He rubbed his hands over his chest. "No. This is fine. It's fine, right?" he asked the man who was standing next to Raoul, looking impatient.

The stranger never got a chance to answer. Instead, Raoul stepped close to Michael, gripped the shirt in his beefy hands and ripped.

The hot, humid air against his skin was a welcome relief. He was so hot and sweaty from his workout that he radiated more heat than the air around him. The relief was short lived, however, because the stranger was now close to him. His fingers ran over Michael's slick skin, tracing the tattoo. His eyes devoured Michael, feasted on him.

"You were right," he said to Raoul. "He does have the full tattoo." His dark eyes lit with something that wasn't quite a smile. "And he is very, very pretty." The fingers of one hand played around Michael's navel; the other came up and traced Michael's jaw.

He swallowed. Stepped back. His back hit the wall. "You've seen it."

"I have. And now, I intend to savor it." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a plastic bag filled
with marijuana and handed it to Raoul. "I'll return him by the football game this afternoon."

Raoul grinned, eyes on the bag. "Si. Okay. Don't hurt."

"Wait," Michael protested. "You can't be serious."

The man wrapped his hand around Michael's forearm. "You've been bought. Come with me so we can put that pretty mouth to use."

Behind Raoul and the man, he could see Alex. See the anger building in Alex's face. Felt Tony next to him, vibrating with tension. Saw T-Bag, practically falling over the railing as he craned to see what was going on.

"Come on, boy. Move." He tugged at Michael's arm.

Michael tore his gaze from Alex. Looked at the stranger.

The man leaned in and sucked on Michael's lower lip.

He snapped. Fury rushed through him like a hurricane. He jerked his head forward, felt the man's nose crush against his forehead. A swift kick to the groin sent the man sprawling and Michael was free.

"Michael!" Alex shouted, but Michael had had enough. Ignoring everything, ignoring logic and reason and safety and everything, he ran.
"Shit!" Alex swore. He broke into a run, not after Michael, not directly, but to Raoul and Tony and the goon writhing on the ground. "Tony!"

Tony, who was pressed against the wall, wide eyed, looked at him.

"Come on."

The kid nodded and pushed away from the wall. Before he could break into a run, however, Raoul grabbed him.

"Here," Raoul said. He pushed Tony at the man, speaking in Spanish too rapid of Alex to piece together.

The man rose. Blood poured from his nose and his eyes glinted madness. He spit back a torrent of angry words, hand shooting out and wresting the bag of drugs from Raoul.

Raoul pulled it away. Thrust Tony behind him. The boy hit the wall, head connecting with a sharp crack.

Oh, that was it.

Alex was at the wall and Raoul. He pulled the other man away, used his weight to topple him over. Before the giant even had time to fully comprehend what had happened, Alex wrapped his arm around Raoul's neck and squeezed. Pulled his head back, forcing it against Alex's chest, riding out the surprised struggles until...

Raoul went limp. Passed out. Alex lowered him into the dirt and released. "Am I going to have a problem with you, too?" he asked, wiping sweat from his face, looking at the other man.

Blood still gushed from his nose; if Alex had to guess, he'd say it were broken. Good on Michael.

"No. I have no argument with you," the man finally said. He bent down and picked up the bag of weed. Then he turned and walked off.

Alex turned to Tony, who was looking a little dazed. "Are you okay?"

Tony blinked, his eyes hazily focusing on Alex. "Si. I'm fine."

"Good. Come on." He took Tony's arm and pulled him away from the wall, running across the yard.

"Where did Michael go?" Tony asked while they ran.

"I don't know. Probably into the sewers."

"I know how to go there."

"First we need to go back to the cell. Take what we can. Anything we can carry, got it? We're not going back."

The cell had already been ransacked when they got to it, but Michael had left behind some things that Alex still thought they could use. He grabbed a sack from under the bed and stuff it with whatever was sharp, edible, or wearable. Tony did the same, concentrating on water, and they ran
off again. Tony led Alex to the bathrooms.

"Here."

A panel in the back was already askew, meaning either Michael had been careless, or they were going to have company.

Tony pulled the panel aside and dropped the bag of water. Then he shimmied into the hole. There was a thump. Then, "Okay. Come now!"

Alex tossed his bag in, then squeezed inside after the kid. As he fell, he tried to pulled the panel back over the hole. "Shit," he swore, seeing that he didn't get the whole thing over. "Tony, come here."

"What?"

He grabbed Tony by the waist and lifted him. "Pull the board in place. We don't want anyone knowing we're down here."

Tony's fingers scrapped at the board and he dragged it back into place. "Okay."

Alex lowered him back down, but tightened his grip when Tony swayed on his feet. "You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah." He panted a few times, then swayed again. Rested his forehead against Alex's chest. "Dizzy."

"You need water. Sit." Gently, he pushed Tony down to the grimy concrete. He knelt in front of Tony and pulled a bottle of water from the bag. "Here. You're probably dehydrated from the exercise. We can rest a few minutes before we go find Michael."

"What if he not down here?" Tony asked. He opened the water and took a long drink. Alex took the bottle when he was done, then took a drink himself. "You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah." He turned and sat next to Tony, looking around.

It was a sewer, not really remarkable. Smelled like shit and piss thanks to the river flowing down in the channel at the bottom. On either side were concrete walkways, just big enough for two people to walk abreast. "You ever been down here?"

Tony shook his head.

"Feeling better?"

"Yeah."

Alex passed him the bottle and urged him to finish. One he had, they packed the bottle again, rose, and began walking. "Michael!" Alex shouted. His voice echoed off the walls.

"Michael!" Tony called, hands cupped around his mouth. "Michael!" When all that greeted him was the bouncing of his own voice, he glanced at Alex. "You really think he here?"

"Yeah I do." He put his hand on the base of Tony's neck and squeezed gently.

Tony nodded, ducking his head. They continued to walk through the sewers, Alex trying to figure out where exactly they were under the prison. He was pretty sure they were currently walking
underneath the mess hall, judging by the increasingly pungent smell and the turn they'd taken. If he was right, they had maybe another dozen steps, then a left turn, and then they'd be nearing the edge of the yard.

"Alex?"

"What is it?"

"Did you kill Raoul?"

He shot a look at the kid, but Tony had his head ducked and was steadily looking at the ground. "No," Alex answered with another squeeze to Tony's neck. "No. Just knocked him unconscious. I can teach you how to do it sometime, if you like."

Tony looked up at him, eyes wide. "Really?"

"You need to learn to defend yourself. I can teach you. And Michael, come to think of it."

"If we find him."

"We will."

They turned the corner, and now Alex was certain they were under the yard. Unfortunately, at the end, where the fence would be...  

"Shit."

Alex let go of Tony and jogged to the end of the sewer. The walkway ended at a solid wall of concrete. The sewer continued on, the liquid and waste running through an opening just large enough for a man to fit through comfortably. Unfortunately, it was blocked by a metal grate.

"Come on," Alex said, turning away. "Michael must be somewhere else down here. Let's keep looking."

Tony let out a deep breath, but just turned and followed Alex. This time, when they made it to the mess hall, Alex turned to the left. They made their way under the cells, then to the visitor's yard when they came to another dead end.

"He not down here," Tony said with a heavy sigh. He flopped on the ground and let his head loll against the grimy wall. "He up there and T-Bag is going to find him first."

Alex handed him another bottle of water. "He is down here. T-Bag is not going to find him." Well. He was confident of the first part. The second was up in the air. He'd been keeping an eye on T-Bag right up until Michael had completely snapped which, in retrospect, had been the wrong way to go about it. T-Bag was more dangerous when Michael was on his own, not in the middle of the yard. But, Alex hadn't been expecting any of this, and hadn't reacted like he should.

Tony handed him back the bottle and sighed again. "It smell down here."

"No kidding." He pulled Tony to his feet. "Come on. We still have more to explore."

"Is more than the prison, si? I mean, bigger." He pointed to a curve in the hall that went in a different direction from where they'd come.

"I don't know. Maybe." They turned down the hall and continued to walk. Alex assumed they were nearing the administrative ward, were he and Michael had been dragged only days before. This part
of the building he wasn't sure about, but, if every passageway ended in a dead end, it wasn't as if they were going to get lost.

Three more turns and a slight downward slope of the passageway, and they were at another dead end. They were also at Michael.

"Michael!" Tony sprinted down the walkway and threw himself on Michael. "You okay!"

Michael lifted his head from his knees and rested it against Tony's. "Yeah, I'm okay." He lifted his eyes to look up at Alex. "Hey."

Alex dropped his bag on the ground. Looked him over. Michael was still wearing the torn shirt. There was a new bruise on his forehead from where he'd taken out his purchaser. He looked... defeated.

"You okay?"

He nodded. Shook his head. "There's no way out of here."

"Through the sewers," he said, crouching in front of Michael. "No way out through the sewers. That's all. I told you that they probably would have thought of it."

"I know. But I don't... I've screwed everything up."

"How?"

"I should have..." He licked his lips. "I should have.... We can't go back up there. Raoul will kill us."

"I can take care of Raoul."

"No, you can't. He's a giant. He's huge. He almost tore me apart."

"Alex make him.... go asleep," Tony said.

Michael frowned.

"I knocked him unconscious. There are ways to defend yourself against someone bigger than you," Alex said. "Before, it made sense to stay with Raoul. You were hurt, he gave us protection without asking too much from us. It was always going to be temporary, Michael. We'll just have to figure out where we can go that won't be in his way."

"Or T-Bag's."

"T-Bag is dead. Plain and simple."

"No!"

"Why the fuck not? He's a danger. He distracts you. Makes it hard for you to concentrate and we need to get out of here."

Michael closed his eyes and buried his face in Tony's hair. Too softly for Alex to make out, he mumbled something.

"What?"

"I don't want you to do something you'll regret," he whispered, pulling his mouth away.
He rolled his eyes. "I won't regret it. Out of every Fox River escapee I managed to kill, T-Bag is the one I wish I had." He pushed Michael away from the wall and squeezed his body into the space. Wrapping his arms around Michael's body, he rested his head on Michael's shoulder. "I was trained to do this kind of stuff, Michael. It was my job. Find the bad guys and lock them away. The rules have changed. He's locked away, but he's still a danger. And I've got you and Tony I need to think about in here. I need to protect you from him. And I'm going to."

Michael swallowed. Pressed himself against Alex. "I don't know if I'll be able to get us out of here."

"You will."

"It took me *months* to plan Fox River. Hours. Sleepless nights. A fucking tattoo so I could remember everything."

"I know," Alex said mildly. "I studied that fucking tattoo." He watched at Tony pulled away from Michael and ran his fingers over the blue-inked lines on that pale skin.

"Is pretty," Tony said softly. He walked his fingers up Michael's chest, then swept them over his collarbone.

"I'll never be able to do this," Michael said. His voice cracked.

Alex kissed Michael's temple. "Fox River had to be planned down to the last detail. You needed finesse to get out and away. This doesn't need that. You already know that if we caused a riot, there's every possibility that you could get us out."

"I won't do it."

"No, I know. But there is a way out of here. We're going to find it. We will."

Michael shook his head. He tried to lower it back to his knees, but Tony got in his way.

"Michael," he said, climbing onto his lap. He draped his arms on Michael's shoulders, fingers curling against Alex's chest. "You are very smart."

"Not smart enough. I need to... to study. To figure things out."

"Ever thought that you're good enough to improvise?" Alex asked, mouth next to Michael's ear. A shudder went through Michael's body.

Alex pressed his advantage. "You managed to adapt every time I threw you off. Every time I ruined your plan, you came up with something new. You can do this. It's not like you're working alone." He caught Michael's ear with his teeth and nipped lightly. As he did, he looked at Tony and raised an eyebrow.

Tony's cheeks darkened. Breathing faster, he leaned closer to Michael and kissed him.

Michael's whimpered. His hips shifted and he pressed against Alex, pulling his head away. "Don't."

"You're tense and upset," Alex said. "You need to relax."

"Maybe I'm having trouble figuring out how to get us out of here because all I can do is think about sex. I... Tony!" Michael's head fell against Alex's shoulder and he moaned. His hands went to Tony's slim hips, gripping.
"Feels good, sí?" whispered Tony. His hands moved to Michael's shoulders, gripping hard. He moved his hips over Michael's lap, grinding down.

"You don't... please, stop." Michael was panting, his hips pushing up into Tony even as he protested.

Tony stilled, eyes flicking to Alex.

Alex nodded at him to continue.

He grinned, then bent down to kiss Michael.

Michael whimpered. Kissed him back, hands framing Tony's thin face. His body was pressed hard against Alex, but his hips rolled against Tony, rubbing himself, grinding on the flesh pushed down on him. As Tony worked Michael's crotch, Alex licked and nibbled at his neck. Tasted sweat and dirt ground in but couldn't stop. He kissed up to Michael's ear and licked at the soft indent behind the lobe.

Michael jerked. His head fell against Alex's shoulder.

He bent down and kissed him. Captured those luscious lips, urging them to part. Slipping his tongue along the top one, sucking the bottom into his own mouth.

And then, another wet, messy pair of lips landed on theirs. Tony pushed his way into the kiss, kissing Michael, kissing Alex until it didn't matter who was kissing whom.

"Let go," Alex whispered. He dragged one hand down Michael's bare chest. Rolled his nipple between his fingers. "Just relax, just now. It's okay."

Michael inhaled sharply. Bit his lip, face twisted. Came with a deep grunt in his throat.

Poor Tony was still moving, though. His hardon was evident through his pants as he rubbed against Michael, seeking relief.

As Michael lay limp in his arms, Alex moved his hand from Michael's chest to Tony's fly. Quickly unbuttoned and unzipped them and pulled Tony's cock out. A few quick strokes and Tony was shuddering and coming against Michael's stomach.

Michael wrapped his arms around Tony and pulled him close. Kissed his hair. Laid back against Alex. "I'm going to hell," he said.

"We're in hell," Alex countered. He stroked Tony's back and Michael's arm. " Might as well enjoy it."

Michael snorted and kissed Alex. He didn't say anything, but as he turned his face back to rest against Tony's head, Alex saw a hint of a smile and the slightest tinge of a blush.

* * *

"So, we can't go back to the closet, we can't go to the same wing Raoul's in, and I don't particularly want to fuck you in the middle of a hallway," Alex said. "So. Where does that leave us?"

Michael rubbed his hands over his hair. "I don't know. There was that empty cell." He looked up at the ceiling, then down an offshoot, frowning.

Alex watched as Michael stopped and peered down the offshoot. His forehead wrinkled and a confused look came over his face. He studied the ceiling, then turned back to the section of the sewer
they were in. Muttering, Michael moved his hand in a gesture that looked very much like someone retracing their steps. Then he shook his head and dropped his hand.

"What?" Alex asked. He put his hand on Tony's neck and squeezed gently.

Michael shook his head again. "Nothing." He moved a few steps down the offshoot and stopped, doing the hand movements again.

"Michael, you look crazy. Now, I know you're not crazy, so you must be thinking something. So, tell me."

He looked over his shoulder at Alex. Frowned. "I can't figure out where this leads to."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, we're under administration, and that leads to where we were the first night. Go that way and turn left, you're on the yard. Go right, and you're under the showers we..." He blushed. "And, uh, if you went right and left and right, you'd be in the back set of cells. But here? No clue."

"You haven't had a chance to explore the whole prison. I mean, I didn't exactly get a good view of the place. We have no idea how big Sona is." Alex let his hand drop from Tony and crossed his arms over his chest.

"True." Michael looked further down the offshoot. Then, with a nod, he began walking down it.

"I didn't mean," Alex started, then he realized that he had no good reason to object. It was as good of an idea as any.

He and Tony followed Michael down the sewer. It didn't smell quite as rancid down this way, although that might also had been because he'd been down here almost two hours and his nose was numb. And, it wasn't like Sona smelled all that much better anyway; the sewer seemed more of a formality than anything. Or a sick joke.

"Huh," Michael said suddenly. He stopped when they came out onto another offshoot. Glanced both ways before choosing to go right. A few minutes later, they found a ladder leading back up to the floor above.

"Where's that lead?"

"If I'm right," said Michael, "it goes to a bathroom."

"Where, exactly?"

"I think it's another wing. Another part of the prison."

"And if you're wrong?"

Michael shrugged and began climbing the ladder.

Alex grabbed the waistband of his pants. Tugged. "What if you're wrong? What if that leads directly into guard central or something?"

He paused on the ladder and looked over his shoulder at Alex. A thoughtful look came over his face, then he shrugged. "If I'm climbing into a nest of guards, I'll probably be hit in the face with the butt of a rifle or something. Then, I'll probably be pulled out of the sewer, kicked around until there's so much blood and pain, all I can do is ride it out. Then, I guess they'll either keep me around as a
punching bag to further punish me, take me somewhere public as a kind of example to the others, or just dump me back with the rest of the cons. So, keeping all that in mind, you and Tony should probably go back and hide around the corner until I tell you it's clear. Or, pulled up to be killed."

He tugged. "Get down."

Michael wiggled out of his grasp and climbed up the rest of the rungs quickly and easily.

"Michael!" Alex couldn't help the lurch of fear his heart gave, even though he knew Michael was right, and he and Tony should hide, he jumped onto the ladder and climbed after.

Michael had the grating open and was halfway through. "It's another bathroom. A cellblock. Sounds empty." He squeezed the rest of the way through.

Alex was right after him. He turned back for Tony, but the boy was already scrambling through the hole by the time Alex glanced at him. "What do you see?" he asked Michael, who was looking through the door.

"Nothing. I mean, it's just an empty hall." He glanced back. "Why would they have all of us piled on each other when there's all this room over here? They could separate us out."

"It's less work." He came up next to Michael, sliding his hand over his back. "Throw us all in one place, we police ourselves. All they have to is sit back, make sure we're fed, watered, and the paperwork is processed. This ain't America, boy. The laws for this kind of thing aren't the same."

Michael gave him a half-smile. "I want my lawyer."

"If you can find a phone, go right ahead. Oh, wait. You need one with a license in this company. Ms. Donavan won't work."

Michael's face fell. He pulled away and began walking down the hall.

"What?"


Shit. "I didn't..."

"Save it. I don't care." He turned a corner and disappeared.

"Come on," Tony said. He slipped his hand into Alex's. Pulled, leading him after Michael.

Alex squeezed Tony's hand and pushed the discomfort of what had just happened away. It wasn't as if he cared about Michael or any of his family. This was all just a matter of convenience. The sex, the companionship. Nothing more.

Liar a voice in the back of his head taunted.

Shut up he hissed back.

Insanity? No, not here. Not at all.

The cells were all empty. No mattresses, no bunks. No, wait; there were a few, but they were rusted and falling apart and the mattresses were chewed-up and rat infested. Animal droppings littered the ground along with an inch thick of dirt.
"So." Michael moved into a cell and went to the window. "They don't even watch this side of the prison." He rested his forehead against the bars. "That guard tower is empty."

"You sure? I mean, just because it's not there now, doesn't mean... well, anything, really." He moved next to Michael and leaned against the wall, looking out.

The yard looked deserted. There was about thirty or so feet between the base of the prison and the fence. It was empty, the dirt marked only by animal tracks and rocks. No boot prints or tire tracks. Nothing but dirt and weeds and nothing.

"Someone might come back here. At some time. Just to... come."

Michael nodded. "Someone has. I can't tell how long ago. But there's a pile of cigarettes by the wall down there."

"So?"

"So. We wait. We watch. We see what goes on back here."

Alex glanced over at him. "We just stay here? Don't you think they'd notice that we weren't there, after awhile? I mean, you get visitors. Well. Lincoln. If they keep calling and you keep not coming..."

"Obviously we'll have to go back eventually. At least for short periods of time." Michael licked his lips, then shook his head. "Not today. Linc won't come."

"You think not?"

"Look out there. It's going to storm. While we were playing in the sewers, those clouds blew in. Can you feel in the air?"

Alex's lips twitched. "You're toes aching or something?"

That got a smile to curve those luscious for the first time since Alex's gaffe. "Broke my wrist when I was a sixteen." He winced. "Lincoln broke my wrist when I was sixteen. Accident. Anyway. Sometimes, when it's about to rain, it starts bugging me." He rolled his wrist; it gave a loud crack. "Of course, I feel like crap period. Maybe I've lost the ability to differentiate the pain. Maybe it's not going to rain."

The heavy clouds broke. Fat rain drops splattered on the dirt, kicking up dust in their wake.

"You are so very smart," Tony said admiringly.

Michael winced, then forced a smile. "Thanks." He turned and slid to the ground.

Ah, shit.

Alex sat next to him, glancing at Tony as he did. The boy was looked hurt, brow furrowed, mouth pressed in a pout.

"Look," Alex said as evenly as he could. "You have nothing to feel guilty about. I held you down. I encouraged Tony."

"What?" Tony plopped down in front of them. "I want sex with you."

Michael closed his eyes. "You're the same age as my nephew. I shouldn't have taken advantage of
"But... I like it. I want it. It make me feel good."

"You should be with someone your own age."

Tony snorted. "No one my own age want *me*. I youngest in here. Anyone near my age don't like men. Don't want sex with me. Only give it to others to survive. I like men. Really." He put his hand on Michael's knee. "I like you."

"But I took advantage of you."

"No!" Tony sat back and looked at Alex beseechingly.

Alex shook his head, then closed his eyes. "Think of it this way. When something bad happens to you... like a foster parent abusing you. Wouldn't you want the next foster parent to be nice to show you that not everyone would beat and abuse you?"

"It's not the same thing," Michael said weakly.

"Why not?" Alex opened his eyes and looked at Michael. Reached out and cupped Michael's cheek. "You've had years of using sex to keep people at a distance. To get them to do what you wanted. Years of keeping it meaningless, vaguely pleasant but ultimately empty. Now, you've finally had sex that fulfilled you, that you enjoyed, that made you forget everything. And you're falling in love."

Michael's mouth fell open. Those beautiful blue eyes widened. He pulled away. "You're... you... You're..." He snapped his mouth closed. Shook his head. "It's not the same."

"It is," Tony said. "I never get to be in charge. I never get to... get too... I never feel good. Is always bad and pain and hurt and then over. With you." Tony shrugged and smiled. "Is good. I know now. Not just hear sex is good. I know." He reached out tentatively, like reaching to pet an unfamiliar dog, and took Michael's hand. "Maybe on outside, this not happen. I just be like your nephew. Young and with boys my own age. But here, there only older men. And they hurt me. You don't. So I make the choice."

Michael was silent for a moment. He studied his and Tony's intertwined hands, one so thin and bony, the other elegant and graceful. Then, after an age had passed, he pulled Tony to his body.

The boy was taken off guard, and Alex watched as he tumbled, startled, into Michael's lap.

"You are so unexpectedly smart. No, that wasn't..." Michael cupped Tony's cheek and pulled him into a kiss. "I just mean that you're wiser than you should be. For being so young. And what you say makes a lot of sense. I just... I'll need some time to really... get comfortable with the idea."

Tony smiled. Draping his arms over Michael's shoulders, he leaned in and kissed him. "Do not worry. I will not bother too much." His smile turned impish. "Alex get jealous."

"I will not," Alex protested.

The kid just rolled his eyes before turning back and kissing Michael again. "Does water work here?"

"I'm not sure."

"I go see. Take a shower." His face lit up at the thought, and Alex couldn't help but pity him. It was hard enough for him to get a shower in this place; Tony, at the bottom of the totem pole and a heavy
draw for predators, must never get near one.

Alex nodded at the bags scattered around them. "There's soap in one of them."

"Si. I know." He opened one and dug around; a few minutes and one bag later, he emerged triumphant. "Now I hope water works." He pulled out a cleanish pair of jeans and a shirt and disappeared down the hall.

Michael sighed and leaned his head against the wall, eyes closed. The dim light cast shadows on his face, making the bruises seem to fade into his skin. His nose and forehead, though, was red.

"You got sunburned," Alex said.

"Shoulda remembered to put on my sunscreen this morning before hitting the Lido deck for my workout."

He snorted. Yawning, Alex grabbed one of the backpacks and pushed it against the wall. He laid down, noticing that he could see the rain falling through outside. The pattering of the rain was soothing, now that he wasn't out in it or near it. Set against the background of the trees, it was almost possible to forget where he was.

Except for the bars, of course.

Minutes passed. Michael yawned every few seconds, setting off an answering yawn in Alex. The past few months had been nothing but tension for the both of them, after all. Even with the pills, Alex hadn't slept well. These days... well. He'd been getting better sleep than he'd thought possible, but it wasn't perfect.

Michael yawned again, jaw cracking. He rolled his head to the side, then shifted, moving until his head was pillowed on Alex's stomach.

Naturally, the only place for Alex's hand then was in Michael's hair, combing through the shorn strands.

"I'm not falling in love with you."

Alex smiled. "Okay."

"Why did you say I was?"

"I was mistaken."

"No. You had a reason. Tell me."

He sighed. "You just... seem to be getting things confused. Sex and emotion, I mean. I guess, after last night, I was afraid that, maybe you were..."

"Falling in love with you," he finished. "Is that why you were acting like such a dick this morning?"

Good question. He wasn't sure, exactly, why he'd been in such a bad mood that morning. Just that, watching Raoul fawn all over Michael, fawn over *his* property, had pissed him off to no end.

Michael rolled onto his stomach. Rested his cheek on Alex's stomach and looked up at him. "If anything, I'd think you were falling in love with me. I mean, obviously Raoul set you off. Him touching me. Holding me. Feeding me. Hands all over me and..."
He snapped. In a fluid movement, he had Michael on his back, pinned to the floor by his wrists. "Look," he said in a clipped voice, "I wasn't jealous."

"Right," Michael replied, smug. He smirked up at Alex.

"I wasn't. I'm *not*. Just... You're mine."

"Uh-huh."

He squeezed Michael's wrists. "Stop it."

"I'm not doing anything. Just agreeing with you. That's all." His foot ran up the inside of Alex's leg.

"You're being an asshole. Just last night you were saying that you know me. Today, you're proving that you don't."

"Actually, I said I know you better than you know yourself," Michael pointed out. He raised his eyebrow.

"I..." His mouth snapped closed.

Michael craned his neck up and kissed Alex. "So. You think I'm falling in love with you. Why?"

He shrugged. "Because. You... you trust me."

"I have to."

"No. You should be able to work with me while still keeping a healthy dose of suspicion. You never know what I'm going to do, after all, and..."

"Alex."

"Right. We've had this conversation." He kissed Michael. Rested his forehead against Michael's. "So. Maybe... I was jealous."

Michael twitched. Wiggled one wrist from Alex's grip and lightly held him by the neck. "Maybe... Maybe I'm trusting you more than I should." He swallowed. "And, uh. Maybe I'm letting myself get things confused."

Alex sighed. Caressed Michael's face. "Yeah," he whispered. "You're not the only one."

* * *

Michael opened his eyes without having realized they were closed. The light was lower, dimmer than before, the bars throwing slanted shadows over them. Rain still beat a steady tattoo outside, thrumming steadily. There was a deeper thrum, too, right under his ear. Alex, his heart beating slowly. Strongly. His hand on Michael's back, fingers twitching every once in awhile.

And wetness on Michael's stomach. Tony, hair still damp from his shower, eyes closed. He was sprawled on a blanket that must have been in one of the bags, part of it shoved under Michael, the rest thrown haphazardly on the floor. His long limbs were askew, one arm twisted behind his back, one leg straight, the other bent. He looked extremely uncomfortable, but he was snoring softly, blissfully asleep.

Careful not to wake him, Michael reached out ran his fingers through the wet tangles in Tony's hair.
Regret twisted his stomach, but he pushed it aside. There was no room for that here. What was done was done, and if Michael should have been stronger... well. He hadn't been. That was that. And he couldn't say he hadn't enjoyed it. Nor could he say that, if push came to shove, he wouldn't do it again. He would never seek it out, not from Tony. That was a line he couldn't cross. But, as long as Tony was the one who made the first move--made most of the moves--Michael would go along with it. Because Tony was trapped here in hell, and he reminded Michael so much of himself, only smarter and wiser and so beautifully pure.

He sighed and twisted a wet lock of hair around his finger. Then, very gently, as to not to waken either Tony nor Alex, Michael detangled himself from the sleeping pile. Tony had put the wet soap on the window ledge. Michael took it and a cleanish pair of clothes and headed off to find the shower.

Rats were beginning to peek their heads out of the stones and the mattresses. Michael could hear them squeaking, their tiny claws on the floor. Disgusting and dangerous. Especially if they mistook a sleeping man for food. Being thrown across the room would fix that, but they'd have to deal with the bites.

He found the shower and stripped. The water was cold at first, but quickly warmed. Michael stepped under the spray, reveling in the water as it washed over him.

For the first time in weeks--months--he felt almost normal. He'd slept without having to keep an ear out for danger. He'd eaten. He'd even gone outside and played around in the sun (sort of). There was no one here threatening to rape or kill him. No Southern sociopaths, no childlike giants. No Company, no inmates. No one expecting him to save them. No one expecting anything of him.

For the first time in forever, he felt sort of free.

He yawned and stretched, feeling kinks in his back loosen and unknot. Felt himself begin to relax. Knew it was dangerous—they were going to have to go back to the prison proper, probably tonight, and he'd need his guard up—but couldn't help it. He was alone and the water felt good on his skin. He was still drowsy and there was a sense of peace pervading him. The world was slipping away.

The image of Alex floated up behind his eyelids. Michael smiled, picturing the other man. The piercing eyes and well defined features. The seemingly perfect hair that, even when dirty and lank, fell in perfect waves. And his body. Thin, lean, strong. The way he'd held Michael yesterday. First, holding him in place against the wall, pinned, then lifting him, pressing him, slamming him as he fucked Michael. It'd been....

Michael wasn't a small man. And he had strength enough for not working out. Alex overwhelmed him. Although, truthfully, whether that was due to actual physical strength or sheer presence was debatable.

And Michael was overwhelmed by him. Every fucking thing about the man made him feel completely... well, weak in the knees. If Michael had met a man like Alex before any of this had happened...

Well. His life would be different.

But he wasn't falling in love with Alex. He still didn't know where Alex had gotten that idea. Certainly, Michael didn't hate the man. Really, he never had. Disappointed by him when Michael learned that he killed Tweener. Devastated when he'd shot Aldo, but the rage at Alex stealing what
precious little time Michael had with his father drained. After all, when it came down to it, Aldo was the one who'd deprived the both of them of that time. He'd made the choice to leave Michael behind. While Michael wasn't exactly happy that his father was dead, he wasn't angry at Alex anymore.

Anger here was dangerous anyway. Alex was his ally. They needed to work together, so Michael had to put his anger aside.

The sex helped, too.

Of course, then there was Sara. But he didn't want to think about her. Not here.

He'd ruined her life. Just gone to Fox River with this plan and never thought about how it might effect other people. Might affect her.

He hadn't intended on falling in love with her. Or whatever it was he felt for her. And he hadn't meant for her to get involved with the escape. If only they hadn't replaced that pipe. If only they hadn't had to go through the psych ward. If only... if only...

"'If only, if only,' the woodpecker sighs, 'the bark on the trees was just a little bit softer,'" Michael whispered, turning away from the spray. The words were from a book he'd read to LJ years ago. Back before Lincoln had been accused of killing Steadman. Back before Michael had given up everything to get him back. And for what? To get thrown into another prison, worse than any on earth. And Lincoln was just... staying there, waiting for Michael to do something.

Everyone was waiting for Michael to do something. Alex wanted to get out. Michael had promised that he would. But he didn't know how. There was no plan.

But they couldn't stay. Somehow, he, Alex, and Tony were getting out of here. And if it meant they had to live in the jungle and walk to some country that wouldn't extradite them to either Panama or the US...

Well. Actually, Michael wouldn't mind being sent back to the US and imprisoned. He'd broken the law. Since Lincoln was safe, Michael was fine with serving his time.

Of course, if the Company still had any power, Linc might not be safe. Not completely. Nor he and Alex. Staying out might be their best option.

He didn't know. There were so many things, so many choices. So many ways to turn and no answers. No pattern, no plan. He didn't know how to do this.

But first things first. Getting out of the prison.

Michael opened his eyes and grabbed the soap. Rubbing it in lazy circles on his stomach, he thought about the problem of getting out.

The first was the zone that surrounded the prison before you got to the gate. There was no way they'd make it off the other wing; the guards would spot them right away. Out here, they might be able to make it to the fence, but, as far as Michael knew, it was electrified. He'd seen the signs when he'd been to see Lincoln the day before. Unless they somehow blew out the electricity, they'd get caught on the fence. Unless they tunneled under, and that would be noticed.

Unless they did it over here. Which meant they had to watch to make sure this side wasn't being monitored.

Of course, that also meant they had to make sure that A) their presence wasn't missed along the other
Then there was the jungle to contend with. Who knew what was in there. Patrols. Other criminals. Wild animals. Michael hadn't really thought they'd be staying in Panama, so he hadn't done the research on jungles surrounding prisons he apparently needed. Yet another thing he'd have to watch.

Of course, there was yet another option that had occurred to him while trawling through the sewers. They had access to the administrative wing. They could sneak in, hide away. Learn the schedule. Steal some uniforms. Then, one night while the guard was low, while no one was paying attention—if that ever happened—they could put on their stolen gear and sneak out.

It wasn't the best plan. The most polished or planned out. But. It still might work.

That still didn't account for what they'd do after. But that didn't matter right now. First, he had to come up with a feasible plan to get out of Sona. It's what he'd done with Fox River. He'd studied the plans, looked for the weakest point in their security. From there, he'd found the paths leading to the infirmary, and everything fell into the place.

Nothing was falling into place here. There'd been no time. Just... one disaster after the next. Anytime he was able to force the world into some kind of recognizable pattern, it was upended again. Thrown into chaos. And he didn't do well with chaos.

The hell of it was, Alex kept him focused. He was familiar, predictable, even if he was sometimes prone to outbursts. But, even those were predictable. Michael knew they were coming, and he could see them building. Prepare for them. But he acted in a manner Michael could understand, like folding dirty clothes that he'd have to wear again instead of throwing them on the ground.

It was easier to think with Alex around. With Alex watching his back.

Michael's cheeks warmed again as he thought of all the various ways Alex watched his back. Remembered the feel of Alex's skin against his own. His mouth. His hands.

His body was hot. Too hot, suddenly. All his blood was rushing south. His head spun.

He swallowed and turned his face back to the spray. Reached down and wrapped his soapy hand around his thickening cock. Braced his other hand on the wall.

If he truly loved her, he'd force Alex from his head and bring in Sara. There was no need to... to think about him right now. He was alone. He could let his mind go anywhere. To anyone. And Sara was so beautiful. Her smile and her eyes. That hair, which was so soft and such a beautiful color. And...

Blue, blue eyes. Hard body, working into him. Those hands and that strength. The way he kissed like he was claiming Michael, ever time.

No. No, no, no. It was wrong! Alex was a distraction, nothing more. Sara was... Sara was...

Sara was a dream.

His erection wilted and he followed, sliding to the floor. Pulling his legs to his body. He wrapped his arms around them. Pressed his forehead against his knees.

He loved her. But it was always a dream. Even if they had met outside of Fox River, they'd never have been able to make it work. He was too closed off to people close to him, too busy running around giving anything that he had to everyone else. The people on the streets. The kids with no
hope. They were the ones who demanded all of Michael's attention and care, because if he could maybe just save one (and one more, and another after that, and every other one out there) maybe, maybe he could justify his existence.

Sara was a humanitarian. She, like Michael, was a rescuer. But she knew when to stop. Michael couldn't. Drugs had been her addiction, and she'd overcome it. Saving people was his, and even though years of therapy, he'd never broken his.

She would have left him. Rightly so. It never would have worked.

And he'd had the audacity to think she'd give up her life for him. Had... had gotten her to, sort of. Okay, yes, the Company tried to kill her, but the blame for that ultimately came back to Michael. When all that was over, and she'd been exonerated (or whatever had happened; he'd forgotten to ask Lincoln), she'd come to Panama for him. To try and make a start. To....

To try and make everything that had happened mean something.

And he was in here. Hand around his cock, begging to be fucked by the man who'd killed his way through the escapees. Worse, he was begging to be fucked by the man who'd tried to kill him while giving up the possibility of the woman he was in love with because he was scared.

Realistic a voice in his mind whispered.

"Shut up," he hissed. He shivered, slowly becoming aware that the water had turned cold.

Standing, he rinsed the soap from his body and turned off the water. It was ridiculously hard to dry off in the humid air, and he finally had to pull clothes onto his damp skin. He knew that he'd be too hot again soon, but right now, the water and chill air had done the job of turning him cold. After weeks of nothing but heat and running, it should have been a relief, but he was always contrary. Always stupid.

Alex was awake when he got back. He was eating an orange that he'd peeled and dissected into pieces that were sitting next to him on the peel. In his lap was the book they'd found in Raoul's cell. Tony was still asleep.

Michael sat next to Alex and took an orange section. "I thought you couldn't read Spanish."

"I can't. But I'm bored." He looked over at Michael. "You work yourself into a guilt-fit while you were in the shower?"

"Pretty much."

"About what?"

"Sara."

"Not Tony? I'm surprised."

He shrugged. "That's a losing battle. I've decided how I'm going to handle it, and I feel better about it. Not perfect, but I'll deal."

Alex nodded. Ate an orange slice. "What about Sara?"

"I don't really want to talk about her."

He raised an eyebrow at Michael.
Michael sighed. Shrugged. "Let's just say... I may not have been very realistic when I thought she and I might be able to build some kind of life together." He shrugged. "I might have been figuring that all this would change me. Make me not need to save... everyone." He looked at Tony.

"First, you're not out with her yet. You might end up changing enough."

Michael snorted.

"She's a strong woman. Maybe she could..."

"Would Pam have been enough to make you stop the pills?"

He felt Alex stiffen next to him.

He held his breath.

Alex let out an abrupt breath. Shook his head. "It's different."

"Not to me."

He could practically feel Alex's eyes roll.

"Look. You're underestimating yourself. And, yes, I know that's your problem. Not that you don't know you can do anything you set your mind to, but because you don't see that it's worth anything. It is. You are. What you do, from setting up that school lunch program, to mentoring kids, to being there for your nephew when your brother wasn't, it matters, Michael. You matter. Maybe Sara is the one to make you realize that."

Tired, drained, Michael let his head rest against Alex's shoulder. "She thinks I'm already that person. The one who thinks he's worth something."

"Sometimes just believing in something is enough to make it happen. To make you believe."

"No."

Silence. Then Alex sighed. "You want to give up."

"That's not it. It's..."

"We need to stop having sex."

The words fell like an anvil. Hit Michael so hard he couldn't breathe.

Alex shifted. "It's just..."

"Fine," Michael managed, voice a whisper.

"Michael, you're..."

"I said fine." He pulled away from Alex. Moved so he was next to Tony. "We need to go back to the other block. I want to go around midnight or so. I think that might be about three or four hours away."

Alex sighed. "Okay." Michael could feel him looking, but he only said, "I'm going to take a shower."
"Okay." Michael lay down next to Tony and stared at the wall. Ignored Alex's footsteps as they retreated down the hall. Ignored the odd prickling behind his eyes. Ignored the pain in his throat, in his chest. And tried to think of a way out of this Goddamn place.
Chapter 11

Alex was going to murder him. Specifically, he was going to strangle the tattooed sonofabitch. Wait until they were alone—more alone than in a cell by themselves, but surrounded by cons, until Michael was sleeping. Alex would crawl on top of him, wrap his hands around that magnificent neck, then wring every last breath from his body.

That is, if he managed to survive that long.

Alex sighed and pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. His head ached and his neck was stiff and he couldn't stop shivering. And it wasn't even cold. In fact, it was hot. The air was heavy and humid and hung stagnant in the air. Sweat stood out on his forehead, dropped down his neck, his back. His hands shook and the muscles in his back twitched. He hadn't been able to hold down food all morning, and he felt like death warmed over.

Michael had suggested that he was having a flashback or another bout of withdrawal. Apparently, it had happened to Lincoln a few times. Or, there was a possibility that Alex had gotten a bug crawling through the sewers. In any case, Michael had ordered that he lie down, rest, and drink water.

And, then, proceeded to torture him.

It started slowly. First, he'd gone to the window and stood, looking out. He rested his cheek on his hand. Rolled it. Blinkied and moved until his face was perfectly lit by the light so his eyes glowed. Alex had no idea how he did it, especially since his eyes were so sensitive to the light. But he stood there, light reflecting from his face, making his eyes glow. Making him look like a god.

Time passed. Then Tony stood up.

"I going out."

"I am going out," Alex corrected absently, studying Michael. Then he frowned. "Wait. No, you're not. You stick close to us."

Tony rolled his eyes. "I bored. I *am* bored. I go find my friends. Get food. Get gossip." He rolled his eyes again. "I be fine"

"Tony, you really should stay," Michael said, still looking out the window. "It's safer."

"We in prison. Is not safe here." He leaned back over Alex and kissed him on the cheek. "I be back later." After kissing Michael, he ducked out of the cell, dropping the sheet Michael had hung over the opening behind him.

Alex thought about going after the kid. Even made a movement to pull off the blankets. Then, another shiver racked his body and his head pounded and he decided Tony could take care of himself. Probably.

So, he settled back against the wall and continued on with his new favorite hobby: watching Michael.

"What are you doing?"

Michael's shoulders lifted a fraction. "Watching the guards. On the off chance we aren't able to break out from the empty side of the prison, it can't hurt to know the routine here."
"Need help?"

"Right. You've already caught dysentery or something from crawling through the sewers. You should probably let yourself recover."

"I thought you said it was withdrawal."

Michael shrugged. Glanced at him, then back outside. "This is boring."

Alex almost choked on his tongue. Michael, bored? While planning a breakout? Not very likely.

"It's hot today," Michael remarked. And then...

He stripped off his shirt. Stripped it off, folded it, and dropped it onto the pile on a makeshift shelf they'd built the night before.

Ah, Christ.

Alex's mouth was dry. He couldn't keep his eyes off Michael, off that tattoo. At his lean torso as he stretched, sunlight playing off his skin, sweat damp and shiny. He watched as a bead of sweat rolled down from Michael's neck, over his nipple, down his side and forced himself to stay where he was instead of moving to follow that bead with his tongue.

Michael rolled his neck, popped something in his back, then dropped to his knees. He reached for the bags shoved against the wall.

"What are you doing?"

Without looking up, Michael opened the bag and dumped its contents on the floor. "I'm going to sort the rest of the stuff. See what we have. Start formulating a plan." He leaned forward, settling onto all fours across from Alex. They were separated only by the pile of crap. Michael carefully shifted his weight to one hand and began picking through the stuff, putting it into neat piles.

Alex couldn't even begin to guess at the categories. All he could do was watch Michael. Watch the play of muscle under his skin. How the light danced off his back, skin gleaming. The way he rocked back and forth slowly as he sorted, sucking on his lower lip.

He shifted and drew the blankets around him tighter. "So. Any ideas yet?"

Michael tilted his head, drawing his right ear to his left shoulder. "Maybe. We're going to need to break through the wall somehow. I want to go back over tonight and see how fragile the wall and the floor are." He shifted his shoulders. "I'll also check out some other areas, see if there's any other possible exit."

"I should probably get some sleep. Sounds like it's going to be a... busy... night," he said.

Michael was flexing his back, head and ass in the air.

Alex frowned suddenly, realizing what was going on. The little shit was trying to seduce him. Screw that.

He leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes. "Did you ever get that pen? To draw the layout of the prison?"

"I think there's one in one of the bags." There was a shifting, soft scraping sound. "I need to find
Alex's resolve weakened. He cracked open his eyes.

Michael had shifted so his back was to Alex. He was currently in some kind of yoga pose. His legs were tucked under him, but the majority of his weight rested on his arms. His ass hovered just above his heels, swaying, and his back was this perfect arch of blue ink and creamy skin.

God, he wanted to jump Michael. Cover his body with his own. Yank down his jeans and take him, hard and fast. Punish him for doing this, for fighting him, for not seeing reason. For not seeing why Alex had to call off their arrangement, for his sake. For both their sakes.

He was torn between telling Michael to cut it out, closing his eyes and ignoring him, or watching the performance while pretending to ignore him.

Just when he came to something near a decision (watching and pretending to ignore Michael seemed good), everything changed.

"Hey." The sheet was pulled aside and a man stuck his head in.

Michael was immediately on his feet, shirt in hand. "Hi," he replied warily, pulling his shirt on. He put his foot on something on the floor and kicked it back to Alex.

Alex untangled himself from his blanket. Grabbed the shiv Michael had kicked to him and stood. "Who are you?"

"Felipe. You're, uh, Michael and Alex, right?" He stepped into the cell, but stayed at the door. His hands rested casually at his sides, but his eyes were bright. Alert. Wary.

"We are." He made sure he was standing just a step in front of Michael. Even if he was sick, he was still in charge. Michael was still his to protect.

Felipe nodded. "I'm in the cell next to you. There." He pointed. "We're pretty quiet here. No gangs or stuff like that. Drugs. Guy I share with has, uh, cocaine and marijuana and heroin. Takes money or you can strike a deal."

"No," Michael said. He looped his fingers through Alex's belt buckle and tugged.

Alex swallowed. Closed his eyes to steady himself a moment, before looking at Felipe again. "Thank you for the information."

"I'm not here to push anything. Guy across the hall makes these meat things and sells them, same deal."

"He makes meat things?" Michael said.

Felipe nodded. "Yeah. He pays a guard to get the meat, to look the other way when he cooks it out on the yard, and when he sells it. Gives them a cut of his profits."

"He makes profit?" repeated Alex skeptically.

"Si. But if you do want drugs..."

"Thanks," Michael said, a hard edge to his voice. "We'll keep that in mind."

"Good." He edge back out into the hall.
"Wait," Alex said. He could feel Michael stiffen behind him, but pushed on. "Is there any particular reason this cell was empty? I mean, people are sleeping wherever they can find space, six, seven to a cell in some places, and this one..."

Felipe frowned. "You killed the guy in here."

"I did?"

"No. He did. Like, the first day you were here," he said, pointing at Michael. "Everyone scavenged his stuff when you didn't show up, but you earned the cell." He shrugged. "So, congratulations."

"Thanks." Alex moved forward, pausing only when Michael clung to his belt loop. But he pulled away and went to Felipe. "Nice meeting you."

The other man took the hint. "You too. Later, man." He was out of the cell before Alex had to push him out.

Alex dropped the sheet. "Don't," he said to Michael as he turned back.

Too late. Michael was already in the corner of the cell, legs pulled to his chest, head resting against his knees.

He sighed. "Michael. You did what you had to do. That man would have killed you."

Michael shook his head.

Alex sat next to him. Immediately, Michael lay down, head resting in Alex's lap, face pressed against his stomach. His body trembled.

"He would have raped you. Brutally, without caring if you were hurting. You wouldn't be taken care of, you wouldn't be able to manipulate him. The mindset here is different than out there, and you were just learning the rules. He would have broken you into tiny pieces, infected you with God knows what kind of disease and eventually abandoned you. Under that kind of treatment, you wouldn't stay beautiful, Michael. You'd lose your value and be tossed aside. Lower than trash." He stroked Michael's hair. "You saved yourself from that. Don't do this to yourself."

Michael rolled onto his back. His eyes were red. "It was a completely freak shot. I mean, I just... jumped back. Swung my arm and it was a killing shot. And then he was dead. Spurting blood and it was all my fault."

"It happens."

"I've never murdered anyone."

He sighed. "You still haven't. You killed someone in self-defense. That doesn't make it murder. You didn't mean to do it."

"That doesn't make it all right."

"It's never going to feel all right. It's never going to be easy." He traced his finger along Michael's hairline. "It's a different world here. A different life. We can't cling to things like the idea that all killing is wrong and unnecessary. We need to survive. That takes precedent over everything else. It's not easy. But if you want to live, you have to accept what you're going to have to do to survive."

He sniffed. "Can I..."
"No," he interrupted sharply. "You have to survive. There's no other option."

"Right." He sniffed again. Sighed. "If I promise not to fall in love with you, will you sleep with me again?"

"Michael..."

Michael sat up. Pressed his lips to Alex's. Sweetly. Lingering. Tongue, lightly touching Alex's lips, one hand behind Alex's neck, holding.

Alex was breathless when Michael pulled away. His heart was racing, limbs light, and he was hard as hell. He looked down into Michael's huge eyes that beseeched him, begged.

He worked moisture into his dry throat. "Michael..."


Michael closed his eyes. Took deep breath. "Come with me?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

* * *

The closer they get to the visitor's yard, the tighter Michael's chest gets. He can't breathe and his feet are led. The air is heavy. Walking through it is like trying to push through molasses. He's sick and tired and just wants to go back to the cell and curl into the corner to wait for the world to go away.

He doesn't want to see Lincoln. Doesn't want him here. And he's afraid...

"Michael." Alex took his hand. Squeezed. "Breathe."

He shook his head.

There's a light slap across his face, not enough to hurt, but the impact startles him. He blinks and looks at Alex.

Alex looks awful. There are huge circles under his eyes. He's pale and sweaty and his hair sticks to his forehead. But he still looks a million times stronger than Michael, more balanced.

More gorgeous, too, but in here that wasn't a bad thing. He had the looks and the strength, the ferocity, to back it up.

And he didn't fall apart after killing...

Michael pushed the thought away.

"He's your brother, you know. You shouldn't be working yourself into a fit over visiting him."

Michael gave him a wan smile. "I just sort of wish.... I want him to just leave. He borrowed money to send me to college, I broke him out of jail. Aren't we even?"

Alex laughed. "You love your brother. Go talk to him."

He still hesitated, looking at the door that led to the visitor's yard. What if Sara...

But he couldn't say that to Alex. He thought he made some progress back in the cell. Even though
he'd annoyed Alex by his blatant attempt to seduce him, he still felt Alex's hot gaze on his skin. And then the kiss...

"You have to face her some time," Alex said softly.

He always read Michael's mind. It was eerie.

"She might not be there."

"Then stop being a baby and go face the people that love you."

He couldn't help the look he gave Alex. The longing, painful, yearning look that slipped out, that he hadn't meant, hadn't wanted to feel. But he gave it, looking at Alex's face like he hadn't already committed it to memory. Then, body bubbling into a simmering lava-pit, he made his escape through the door to face his visitors.

Visitor. His knees practically went weak when he saw that Lincoln was at the fence alone.

"Hey," Michael said. He stopped at the fence and hooked his fingers around the links.

Lincoln ran a critical gaze over Michael. "You look better."

"It's a little better. I guess." He touched the bruise on his forehead self-consciously. "I, uh. Got this head butting a guy. Made an escape."

"An escape?"

"From the guy who'd... it's complicated. Alex, Tony, and I have our own cell now. Probably no one will be bothering us now. Except, I don't know. T-Bag."


"It's fine, Linc. Really."

"I'm insisting that they get you out of here. You're an American citizen, you don't deserve..."

"So's T-Bag," he interrupted mildly. "And unless you get Tony and Alex out, I'm not leaving."

"Look, when all is said and done, Tony and Alex aren't my concern. I sorta feel bad for this kid, but Alex? I don't give a shit about. You are my concern. You're my brother, and I'd do anything for you."

Michael looked down so Lincoln couldn't see him roll his eyes. Still studying his feet, he said, "Don't you think we're even? I mean, I broke you out of jail to make up for being such an ass. You don't owe me anything."

The fence shook at Lincoln pulled away. Looking up through his eyelashes, he watched the dust swirl at Lincoln's feet as he stormed away, kicking at the ground. His fists were clenched at his sides, back so straight, it was like a pole had been shoved through it.

Michael turned and began walking back toward the prison.

"Don't you dare go anywhere!" Lincoln shouted.

Michael froze in place. His stomach contracted at Lincoln's tone. He knew that tone. He hated that tone.
"Get your ass back here right now."

Crap.

He forced himself to turn. Walked slowly back to the fence, dragging his feet as he did.

"Look at me, Michael." Then, when Michael didn't obey fast enough, Lincoln snapped, "Look at me!"

He raised his eyes. His eyes darted everywhere but Lincoln's face, and he hoped that Lincoln wouldn't noticed.

But Linc just stood there, glaring, arms crossed over his chest. He stood and waited and Michael had forgotten how goddamn patient the other man could be when he wanted.

Finally, Michael looked up. Met Lincoln's angry eyes. Bit his lip.

"Do not," Lincoln said, voice even and slow, "try and manipulate me in any way, shape, or form. I know all your tricks, Mikey. Don't pull them on me."

He nodded mutely.

"It's not about being even. You're my brother, end of story. Okay?"

He nodded again.

Lincoln studied him another moment. Then he nodded. "Okay. So." He let out a breath. Stepped close to the fence again and put his hands on it. "I know you're upset and scared and fighting just to survive. And, God, Mikey, I just want to help you survive. Don't kill yourself trying to save everyone. Save yourself."

"You know I can't," Michael whispered, looking down. "Especially since I care about them. Both of them."

"But... Mahone hunted us."

"It was his job."

"He would have killed us. Still might. He's not good. A dirty cop."

"I don't care." He looked back up at Lincoln. "He's in my head."

Lincoln frowned. "You said that. Before. After we tried to break LJ out and he was there. You..."

He broke off. Shook his head. "So, he's smart."

"It's not just that. Not just that he's smart. He tentatively took hold of the fence again. "It's not like I'm an angel, either." Words got stuck in his throat. A confession of his latest crime. They crowded up, choked him.

He couldn't. Didn't want Lincoln to look at him with disappointment. Didn't want Lincoln to blame himself.

So, Michael swallowed the words. Forced them away. "Um. So, yesterday we found there's another side of the prison. Abandoned. It's.... There's still water and all, but no people, no guards. We might be able to make an escape from there."
"I think it's too dangerous, Michael. Just let me..."

"So, we're going to try. I'm making a plan," he continued, not listening to Lincoln's protestations. "I'll let you know, but the thing, we need money." He looked at Lincoln. "Not just for escape, but people sell things here. I thought they just traded whatever, but money."

"Yeah, of course." Lincoln pulled his wallet from his back pocket. Shoved a wad of bills through the fence to Michael. "I'll bring more."

"Do you have more?"

He nodded. "Some. And Sara... But, uh, my lawyer wired me some."

Michael stuffed the money into his pocket. Ran a hand over his head. "Is the, uh, government going to reimburse you? Wrongful imprisonment or anything? Because they owe you something, I would think."

Lincoln shrugged. "Well, they're still going through testimony and uncovering evidence about the Company. They can do some, but they need me there, too. And until you're safe..."

"Please, don't..."

"Michael," Lincoln admonished.

Michael fell silent.

Lincoln sighed. "I talked to LJ last night."

"How is he?"

"Good. Really happy, which is nice. Jane's got him seeing a psychologist who's working with their group. And he's joined a summer basketball league and is volunteering at the local library. So he's real good. I, uh, I didn't tell him about you. Didn't want him to worry. But I told him you said hi."

"Thanks."

"Look. Sara..."

"No."

"Sent a note." He pulled an envelope from his pocket. Shoved it through the fence when Michael didn't reach for it.

It fell to the ground.

Linc sighed. "Don't be an idiot, Mikey."

"I ruined her life."

"She made her choices."

He looked up. "She chose for her father to be murdered? To be tortured? Arrested? She chose..." Michael shook his head. "She didn't know what she was choosing. I didn't tell her. I twisted her around until she did like I asked, just like I always do."

"Michael..."
"I'm no good, Linc. Just... just tell her to leave me alone." He picked up the letter, then turned and walked away.

"You are not a bad guy, Michael. You've just allowed yourself to be convinced. I never should have let that happen."

He turned. "It's not your fault."

Lincoln smiled sadly. "Yeah, it is. I should have taken better care of you. I should have been better."

"You were..." Michael trailed off, not sure what to say. After a moment, he went with, "You were the best you could be."

"I wasn't even that." He shrugged sadly. "I love you, Michael. I'll be back tomorrow."

Michael nodded, throat closing. He waved halfheartedly, then made his escape back into the prison.

Alex stepped away from the wall as Michael stepped through.

Michael didn't know what to do. He felt lost, confused, dizzy. Completely cut off from everything he knew.

He held out the envelope.

After a moment, Alex took it. Opened.

"Dear Michael," he read. "Lincoln tells me that you don't want to see me. Somehow, I'm not surprised. I know that by now you're blaming yourself for everything that's happened to me. I want you to know that I forgive you. I forgive you for not telling me about the others who were escaping. For inadvertently getting me into this mess. But know that I'm out of it. I've been exonerated, my record wiped clean. And now I'm here of my own free will. You gave up your life for me. I'm not just going to walk away from that. Please let me see you. I love you. Sara."

Alex stopped reading. Folded the letter and handed it back to Michael. When Michael didn't take it, Alex tucked it into the front pocket of Michael's jeans.

"It isn't real," Michael said.

"Why not?"

"She doesn't know me. She knows the person I allowed her to see. He's not real."

Alex ran his fingers down Michael's arm. "I've been undercover. I've heard stories from other men who've gone undercover. And the thing we all agree on is that you can't become a new person. You invent one based on an aspect of yourself. It might be exaggerated, but it's still you. A part of you." He took Michael's hand. Ran his thumb over his knuckles. "What she met was real. A real part of you."

"But just a part. Not the whole."

"So. Give her a chance to fall in love with the whole."

He was so damn tired. Tired of playing parts, of having to constantly be on his toes, of everyone expecting him to be brilliant. To come up with something new, to save them, to fix everything.

To be someone he didn't want to be.
And then, there was Alex. Who didn't expect it, just knew that Michael was capable of it. Who wanted Michael to get him out, but it was different. He didn't know why, but it was. Who saw Michael for what he was, who thought like him. Who was in Michael's head all the time.

Michael sighed. Looked up at Alex, feeling raw and open. "I don't want to." Then, he turned and walked away, feeling just a bit lighter because he'd finally done something real when it came to Sara.

* * *

"Is Alex going to be okay?" Tony called from down the hall. He was perched on his toes at the window, looking out into the no man's land between the prison and the fence. They'd been there almost an hour, watching to see if any of the towers near the abandoned wing were guarded at night. So far, there'd been nothing.

Michael glanced at Tony, then back outside. "What do you mean?"

"He was not well today. And you are sad. Is he dying?"

"No. He's not dying." Michael couldn't help the smile, even if it faded quickly. He rubbed his chin against his hands, which rested cool stone of the window ledge. "Just sick. Either from withdrawal or just prison." At least he hoped.

He sighed. Rolled his neck and scanned the landscape.

It was unchanged from yesterday. The same weeds, same debris. Same pile of stale cigarettes near the wall. No signs anyone had been anywhere near this side.

But, Michael was still uneasy. The jungle loomed just beyond the fence, dark and ominous. And inside…

A scratch of nails sounded behind him. Michael turned, picking up the stub of candle he had next to him on the ledge. In the faint light, he saw a rat scampering along the wall. He shuddered. Moved to turn. Stopped.

"Tony, you have any food left?"

"Uh… yeah. Tortilla."

"Give it over."

Tony jogged over, tortilla in hand. Michael took it, tore a piece off, and tossed it into No Man's Land.

"You shouldn't waste food."

Michael shook his head. "I'm not wasting it. I'm… experimenting."

"With what?"

"Just… wait."

Tony settled next to him, body pressed close. Michael allowed his arm to drop around the small figure, holding him. It wasn't sexual, it wasn't a come on. It was comfort. And after today, after the letter from Sara and Alex reluctance to touch him, Michael needed comfort. And poor Tony was so starved for affection. He leaned into every caress, sighed at every touch.
And Michael… needed touch. Couldn't help dropping his cheek to Tony's hair. Rubbing, feeling the strands curl and slid against his cheek. The boy's hair was a little grimy--it'd been hot again today, and Tony had been enjoying his freedom of being Alex's property by joining in on a soccer game, but Michael didn't care. It was texture that Michael craved. The experience of it. And, more than that, he just… needed to feel someone else's skin right now. To keep him from sinking into his own.

Tony stiffened. "Look." He nodded out the window.

Michael leaned forward. A rat was creeping slowly across the dirt. It stopped. Looked around furtively. Then darted to the tortilla, picked it up with its teeth, and scampered back to the prison.

"Okay. So. We wait about ten minutes, then do it again."

Dark eyes looked back at him. "Why?"

"I want to see if they patrol at all over here. And how closely. We'll have to do this for a day or so. Different times, different nights. Check and see. Maybe they come by once a night. We need to know when. Otherwise, if we go out this way, we'll get caught."

Tony turned to look at him a few moments. Then he squeezed his eyes shut, fell against Michael, and groaned.

He laughed. "Bored?"

"Si."

Michael glanced out the window as he put his arms around Tony. Rubbed his back. "Well. Maybe you don't have to do it, not for long. Alex should be well enough to come over and keep watch with me tomorrow. Or he can do it alone so you and I can explore more."

"We should explore now. Do this tomorrow."

He thought about it. Rubbed his chin against the back of Tony's head. "You're right. We can do this tomorrow. Take shifts, so it's not quite as boring. Right now, we can explore."

Tony bounced on his toes and turned in his arms, giving Michael a huge grin. "Let's go." He kissed Michael on the corner of his mouth, then pulled away. "Come."

Tony's joy was infectious. He pulled Michael down the hall by both hands, laughing. Michael couldn't help but respond, almost tripping over his feet as he fought to keep up. It was so easy to get swept up with Tony's youth, at the playful child that came out in private moments. Like the rainstorm and the mud fight. Racing each other in the yard under Alex's supervision.

Running through the halls of the empty prison, chasing the moonlight as it streamed through the windows. No rhyme or reason to do it but to feel your body moving and remember that you're alive.

There were three levels to Sona. The two above ground stretched was roughly the size of two football fields laid end to end and four of them across. Each level twisted and turned seemingly at random, but as Michael and Tony walked them, he realized it was to give extra room for closets and toilets. The twists created spaces tucked neatly into corners. Odd, since it also gave more places to hide, which you'd think a prison wouldn't want. But Sona seemed like it was on a completely other planet, and Michael was tired of trying to figure out what the designer had had in mind.

Cells also lined the wall that faced no man's land; on the wall adjacent to the administrative wing were a few more toilets and a couple closets. If his count was correct, there were one hundred fifty
cells total on this side. Which made three hundred all together. Which would be just more than enough for everyone to fit in comfortably if they opened both sides of the prison. The fact they hadn't still puzzled Michael.

It probably had something to do with money. It always came down to that.

"Michael," Tony called, startling Michael out of his calculations.

He turned to find Tony standing by a door he'd assumed was a closet. However, open and lit by the faint light of the candle stub, Michael saw the stairs.

"Huh." He reached his pocket and pulled out another candle stub. "Let's take a look, shall we?"

Tony grinned at him and touched the flame from his candle to Michael's. It sparkled, and a wisp of smoke rose before the flame took strength. "Think it's haunted?"

"I don't believe in ghosts. Not anymore." Still. He put his hand on Tony's shoulder and tightened his grip, not wanting to let go. Just in case.

The candles only lit a small circle around them, leaving the rest of everything in darkness. Fifteen stairs took them down. The air was musty and flat.

"Food!" Tony rushed across the room to the boxes stacked against the wall. Setting the candle on one, he pulled open the top of another. "Michael!"

Michael came alongside him. Inside were prepackaged meals with government stamps on the side. Another box revealed bottled water and, yet another, to Tony's great delight, were bars of chocolate.

"Okay, a storeroom. But why? For what?"

"Maybe they never cleared it out," Tony suggested, mouth full of chocolate. "Maybe there's one on the other side, too. In case there's an emergency."

He nodded. "A storm or something?"

"Or a riot. There was a few months ago. They couldn't control it, so they shut down the prison. Locked us inside, guards outside. Waited until the fighting was done."

"How did you eat?"

Tony pointed at the meals. "I didn't know where they came from. First, we ate the food that was left in the kitchens. Then someone found those. I got one."

"One?"

He nodded and took another big bite of his candy. "One whole one. I got some that were thrown away." He shrugged. "Too much fighting. Anger. I hid. No one was willing to trade anything, much less sex. It was be killed or raped or hide." He shrugged. "I mostly managed to hide."

Heart in his throat, Michael set his candle down. Grabbed Tony and hugged him hard. He couldn't talk. Couldn't process words. His arms trembled but he held on, held onto the kid eating a candy bar, talking about being raped and trading his body and starving, eating leftovers so casually. Like it didn't matter. Like it was just part of life.

Tony put his arms around Michael. Snuggled into the embrace. For once, didn't try to take it further, make it more than it was. Just rested his head over Michael too-rapidly beating heart and held on.
Fingers stroked Michael's back, moving slowly, nails catching on the fabric.

Michael swallowed. Forced the lump in his throat away. Blinked the wetness that had formed. "Um. Maybe we should get back." He kissed Tony on the forehead. Pulled away. Stopped.

"What?"

"Someone was digging here." Michael went to the wall. It was all dirt, loosely packed. It crumbled when he dug his fingers into it. "It's all… loose."

Tony came up beside him and started pulling at the dirt with him. Clods and rock fell in a shower. Dust coated their face as the wall fell away, scattering at their feet. Burying their shoes and it still fell.

Time slipped away as they dug. Pulled back earth, revealing a tunnel. It wasn't very deep, maybe about a foot or so, but it was a beginning. And Michael could already see why it had been abandoned. And how they could use it to their advantage.

"Okay, stop," he said, grabbing onto Tony's hands. "It's too unstable here."

"What do you mean?"

He nodded up at the ceiling. Reached and touched it. "It's going to fall. There's nothing to prop it up. But, if we continue digging, bracing it properly, I think we might be able to get out."

"Out?" The word was breathed with such hope, Michael's throat closed again.

He looked at Tony, who was gazing at him with longing and wistfulness.

"Yeah." He cleared his throat. "Yeah. Maybe. I can't promise anything. But we can try."

Tony nodded. "I know. Understand." He wiped some dirt off his soil-blackened face. "We start tonight?"

"No. We need Alex. And we need to get something to brace it with. So. Tomorrow." He reached out and ran his hand through Tony's hair. It was filled with dirt. "We need to shower. They'll get suspicious otherwise."

"The soap is upstairs. Come on."

There was no laughter going back up. Tony was subdued, but not like Michael. For Tony, it was just that playtime is over. The teenage energy--the one kept him up until late at night, that got him up in the morning before Michael and Alex could rouse themselves, that allowed him to play outside in the heat and still run around until after midnight with Michael, chasing shadows--was finally waning. And the thought of freedom was maybe making him more tentative, not wanting to be too loud for fear it'd disappear. But it was just quietness. Sleepiness stealing over his body.

Not a wave of despair crushing over him. Not tears pressing behind his eyes and clawing at his throat because, Christ, Michael didn't understand how Tony kept his sanity. He'd been kept in a closet for a few months and gone crazy. Tony, by comparison, was perfect. Normal.

It got worse in the shower. Because you have to shower naked, and Tony is a skinny, sixteen year old kid with scars and ribs poking out through his skin. And he's gained weight since they met, and that just made Michael feel even more depressed. He didn't understand how someone as small and innocent as Tony had survived this place. Not just survived, but… kept himself so… so…
"You all right?" Tony asked, hands in his hair, lathering soap in the dark curls.


Tony stepped closer and allowed himself to be turned around so his back was to Michael's front. He sighed when Michael sank his hands into Tony's hair and began massaging his scalp, working the soap in deeper.

The kid really needed a haircut. His hair was getting long and was hard to keep clean. Michael didn't want to think of what must have taken residence in it as he scrubbed out dirt and dust. And God knew what else.

Michael winced and tossed something to the ground. He really needed to shave his own head. And try to talk Alex into it. Unless maybe Lincoln could smuggle in some shampoo with lice killer or something.

Three rinses and lathers later, Tony's hair was finally clean enough for Michael. He combed his fingers through the wet strands, then tilted Tony's head back so he could plant a kiss on his forehead. "There. Clean, sort of. Do you think we might be able to get a hold of some scissors or something? Give you a trim?"

Tony shrugged. "If not scissors, a knife. Why?"

"Might be easier to keep clean."

He rolled his eyes and turned around. "I like this way, better. You washing my hair." He slid his arms around Michael's waist. Moved closer, pressing his slim, wet body against Michael's. "We can do this every night, no worries."

Michael smiled down at Tony. Rubbed his back, his hand sliding up and down easily, shivers running up Michael's arm. "I guess. I enjoy being able to stay a little clean."

"Si." Tony stood on his toes and brought his mouth to Michael's.

Michael felt his brain switch off, overwhelmed with sensations. Warm water pounding against his skin, his face. Wet, wet lips against his own, skin sliding against skin. Tongue in his mouth, more wet, full, slippery. Hands along his spine, stroking, feeling. Burning and steaming as water washed against it. Hot and cool and shivery and he couldn't stop. Didn't want to, just wanted more. Wanted to feel slick lips against his own, slippery hands on his skin. Couldn't think with a million things at once pounding at him: water and skin and kisses and temperature and touch and, God, he'd never been touched enough, was perpetually in a state of longing for someone to lay hands to his body and here it was offered freely, nothing expected of him except to kiss back and feel and…

"Alex," Michael breathed as he kissed down the column of neck beneath him. Trailed back up to the mouth and sucked on swollen, full lips.

And then…

And then the warm body was pulling away. Lukewarm drops of water sprinkled against Michael, growing colder. He blinked, dazed. Reached out.

Hands caught his. Pulled him from the shower. Tony smiling at him, bittersweet. Sad and wise and how was he so impossibly old.

"Tony?"
"Is getting cold," he said, in English, which was another shock after they'd been speaking Spanish all night. "We go back."

He swallowed. Blinked. Wiped his face, still feeling half asleep and confused. "Um. Uh, okay. Yeah. Let's go."

They dressed and gathered their belongings. Michael couldn't help the hand he kept on Tony's shoulder as they walked back through the sewers, still needing touch. Before they climbed back into their wing, he stopped Tony. Pulled him around.

"Tony, I'm... I'm proud of you," he said, awkwardly. "I mean, after all you've been through, you're not afraid to say no to me."

Tony smiled again, that same sad smile from before. "I know you," he said in Spanish. "You'd never hurt me. Not like that." He kissed Michael on the cheek, then turned and started climbing the ladder.

A sigh drifted down as Tony crawled through the hole. Another sigh, and then Michael heard him say, "Not like that."

* * *

Alex woke the next morning to find Tony curled on one side of him, snoring, and Michael, stiff as a board, staring at the ceiling on the other. Unusual. Tony usually slept next to Michael. Well. Curled up against his side, using Michael like a human teddy bear, drooling on his shoulder. But Michael, not him.

Also, Michael was usually asleep when Alex woke up. And after he'd been crawling through the other side of the prison all night, he needed the sleep more than Alex did.

He swallowed, trying to work moisture into his throat. "How'd it go last night?"

"Good. Fine. We need you tonight, though. Lots to do." He sat up and leaned against the wall. "How do you feel?"

Alex shrugged and sat up as well. "Okay, I guess. Better." He leaned over Michael to snag a bottle of water off the floor. "I'll know better once I've eaten. Do you know when breakfast is?"

Michael checked his wrist, which was devoid of a watch, then shrugged, making a face. "Soon, I think. But, here. We sort of hit the mother lode last night." He handed Alex a chocolate bar.

The growl that he made when he snatched the candy from Michael was embarrassing, but he couldn't help it. It was an honest to God candy bar. Chocolate. After days of fried crap and soggy crap, it was ambrosia.

"You don't have to gobble it. There's a lot more where it came from."

Alex raised an eyebrow at him, chewing.

"We found a storeroom or something," he said, voice low. "Under the first level is another one. Not as big, maybe about six cells put together. There's food, those packaged meals they eat in the army, water, and candy bars. Enough to survive for quite awhile. We just need something to carry them in."

"And a way out." He took another sip of water.
Michael grinned at him. Leaned closer. "Someone already started tunneling out of there. They had to stop because they weren't bracing it properly, but I know how to do it. We can get out."

"By digging?"

He nodded.

Alex sighed. Closed his eyes. "We're going to need something to dig with. Raoul have any spoons in his stash?"

"Some. We might be able to scramble up some shovels and stuff. They didn't clear anything out of that other side."

"You really think we can just dig our way out of here? It's a little… cinematic."

"What? You don't like movies?"

He opened his eyes and gave Michael a lopsided smile. "I have no desire to play Red to your Dufresne."

"I have no desire to be Andy Dufrense." He leaned in and kissed Alex. "Too dangerous. That's why I have you, right?" He moved in again.

Alex pulled away. "Michael."

"Alex, please." There was a note of desperation in Michael's voice, an undercurrent that hadn't been there before. Shaky and unhinged. His eyes were wide, sort of wild.

He still pulled away. Took another bite of his candy bar, finishing it off. "What's wrong?"


Alex watched him, frowning. Something was wrong, and Michael was the king of secrets when he wanted to be.

That was something Alex hadn't thought about before. As long as he fucked Michael, gave Michael what he wanted, he was happy. Relaxed. Open and more willing to share.

Cutting him off might keep them both safe from one another in the long run. Keep Michael from thinking he was falling in love with Alex, from thinking that his future with Sara was over.

Keep Alex from getting too used to feeling Michael's body against his and those sweet moans from ringing in his ears. From…

In the long run, it'd be safer. But in the short run, it put Michael on the defensive. Made it too easy for him to shut down, not share what he was thinking. Or what was wrong.

He rubbed his eyes. His head hurt. "Did something happen last night?"

"What do you mean?" Michael was across the cell now, digging through a bag and pulling out spoons.

"You seem a little distant. And Tony was cuddling me instead of you."

A furrow appeared on Michael's forehead. "Yeah. I don't know. He just crawled over to you when
we came back last night. Didn't say why."

"Did you get in a fight?"

"No. He was a little bored at first, but once we started exploring it was fine. And he was happy when we found the candy."

"I don't blame him." Alex licked his fingers, searching for any hint of chocolate. "What about after that?"

Michael's cheeks turned red. He shrugged. "Nothing. We showered."

"Michael, Michael, Michael. Did you and our dear, sweet boy play around in the shower?" He grinned, anticipating the usual joy of needling the other man.

Michael merely blushed harder and shrugged. "You should go outside today. Get some fresh air. Sun."

The alarm for breakfast went off. Next to him, Tony groaned and rolled over.

"No get up," he moaned, pulling the thin sheet over his head.

Alex laughed. Rubbed Tony's back. "You want us to get you breakfast?"

"Chocolate."

"Maybe later. We'll get something healthy."

There was a snort under the blanket.

He laughed again, then leaned over and placed a kiss on the back of Tony's exposed neck. "Okay, so we'll get you something greasy, fried and only vaguely resembling edible food."

Tony rolled onto his back and gave Alex a sleepy smile. "You better?"

"Yeah. I'm better." He stroked his hand over Tony's hair, then ran his thumb across his forehead. "Okay. You going to stay and sleep?"

"Si. I tired."

"I am tired," he corrected.

Brown eyes rolled. "I am tired," he repeated. Then he rolled back onto his side and curled into a ball.

"So, we're on our own for breakfast," said Alex, turning back to Michael.

Who was giving him a look that seared Alex through. He couldn't quite decipher it: part hunger, part jealousy, part longing and all tinged with that frantic desperation that had been part of him all morning. His face was pale, yet strangely flushed, like he was overheated, and his hands were clenched tightly against his thighs.

What the hell?

"Let's join the throng," Alex suggested. He pulled his shoes on, then crossed the cell to Michael, who hadn't moved except to turn his head away from Alex.
When Alex brushed his fingers over Michael's neck, the other man inhaled sharply.

"You coming?"

"Yeah," Michael said, voice strangled. He pushed himself to his feet and fell a half-step behind Alex, trailing him.

"Michael! Alex," Felipe greeted them. Another man was with him, his cellmate presumably.

Michael hesitated behind him, step faltering. When Alex glanced back, he saw Felipe had clapped his hand on Michael's shoulder.

"Felipe," Alex said mildly. He wrapped his hand around Michael's wrist and gave a slight tug.

Felipe got the message and immediately lifted his hand off Michael's shoulder. "You feeling better today, Alex? You don't look sick like you did yesterday."

"Yes. I must have had the twenty-four hour Sona bug."

The other man gave him an confused look. Apparently, while he spoke English, some expressions weren't as well known. Alex just shrugged and shook it off.

"Anyway, this is Fernando. He doesn't speak English good, but he wants you to know that he's open to trade whatever for his drugs. Well, not whatever, but…" He glanced at Michael.

"No." Alex turned and began dragging Michael down the hall.

"Wait. Wait! Not just him. He'll take the kid, instead. Either one."

Alex rounded on Felipe. Backed him against the wall, in his face. "Touch the kid, touch Michael, and I'll slice off your dick and feed it to you. Got it?"

Felipe nodded. "Si. Si, we got it."

He pulled away, but Felipe grabbed him by the shirt. "We'll take whatever. Food, money, soap. Everyone knows Raoul had everything, and you guys took a bunch. And Michael has someone visiting him. He can bring in stuff from the outside."

"We don't want drugs."

The other man smirked. "I know a junkie when I see him, man. Maybe you're on a clean kick right now, but a few more days like yesterday, and you'll want something to tide you over. Just want to let you know, we're open to doing business with you."

Alex kneed him in the groin. "I'd get that looked at. Come on." He grabbed Michael's wrist again and stalked off.

Michael followed behind, slowly twisting his wrist in Alex's grip. Alex let him, opening his hand enough to allow movement, feeling skin against the palm of his hand.

And then, Michael opened his Goddamn mouth and ruined the moment.

"You know, since you're not bothering to take me, you might as well start pimping me out. Get some use out of me."

He rounded on Michael in an instant. Pushed him through a crowd of men. Michael turned away
from the punch, moving with it. Stumbled back and hit the wall.

There were a few laughs and a couple of catcalls, but the men around them didn't rally or allow themselves to be drawn into a riot. Michael and Alex were recognized now, and the sight of someone disciplining his property wasn't exactly unusual around here.

Michael was smirking at him as Alex shoved him into the wall. Blood dripped from the corner of his mouth, a puffy bruise forming where Alex's fist had made contact.

"What the fuck is up with you?" Alex demanded in a hiss.

"I don't know what you mean, Alex." And there was that fucking impersonal tone Michael did so well. Those veiled eyes, the masked face. Except… Except…

His pupils were blown and there were tremors running under his skin.

Alex forced himself to open his hand so he didn't punch Michael again. Instead, he put it around Michael's throat. Squeezed lightly.

Michael closed his eyes. Shuddered.

"What. The fuck. Is going on with you?"

"Nothing."

"I swear to God, if you say that one more time, I'm…"

"You'll what?" Michael's eyes snapped open. "You'll make me sleep in the corner? You'll ignore me? You'll do something else that makes us both miserable for our own good to prevent me from falling in love with you? What, Alex? What are you going to do?"

He clenched his jaw. "You have got to get over this. We had a couple of good fucks and now…"

"It's more than that and you know it." Michael fist Alex's shirt. Shoved, turning them so he had Alex pinned to the wall, arm heavy across his chest. "It's more than that," he whispered, breath hot on Alex's skin. "It started long before we even spoke. In the cemetery. In the warehouse. On the phone. It's more than physical and it always has been. And you know what I think?"

"No, Michael, I…"

Michael bit his ear, shutting him up. "I think that you're the one using Sara as an excuse. You want me to hang everything on her, to be devoted to something that's never going to happen so you can pretend that you're not falling in love with me."

With that, Michael shoved Alex away from him.

Alex stumbled back, falling into someone. When he looked back up, Michael was gone.

He shook his head. Rubbed at his temple, headache pounding even harder.

"Well," a voice drawled in his ear.

Alex leapt away from the voice, revulsion crawling over his skin. He turned to find T-Bag, grinning at him like a Cheshire Cat.

"Wasn't that interesting? Seems your boy is a bit frustrated, sexual wise." He licked his lips. "I
wonder which of us is gonna take care of that problem first."

"T-Bag," he said, stepping forward as menacingly as he could. "Don't you dare…"

His reflexes were slow, but he caught T-Bag's wrist just before the sharp glass shard slid into his stomach. As it was, the tip punctured the skin and slid along his stomach, tearing open flesh, as he fought T-Bag's arm.

Alex gasped in pain. Backhanded T-Bag across the face with his free hand.

He fell away from Alex, glass shard falling to the floor. Alex picked it up first, then delivered a swift kick to T-Bag's knees. "Stay away from Michael."

He got a sharks-grin in return. "I don't take orders, especially not from you. And believe me, the way you're denying that boy, got him all tied up in knots? He'll be coming to me, not the other way around." He licked his lips. Looked down Alex's torso. "I warned him. Warned him that your experience with your pants around your ankles, Guillermo's cock in your ass would put you off, but he didn't listen. Guess he will now. Boy needs a man to take care of him, not a used up pussy." With that, he pushed himself to his feet and hobbled off.

Alex just watched him, feeling his shirt growing damp with blood.

Well. Shit.
Chapter 12

Michael couldn't breathe.

He pushed through people walking to the mess blindly, seeking air, seeking… something. He didn't even know at this point. Everything was wrong. It was so, so wrong and he didn't know what to do. How to fix it.

He didn't even understand exactly what was wrong or when it had gone so wrong. Just that it was.

All night, sleep eluded him. He and Tony had returned from the empty wing. Michael had felt as if his skin were moving, a prickling sensation all up and down his body. Heat pooled in his groin, flooded through him as he laid on the mattress next to Alex. Tony had avoided his touch, avoided him. He was obviously upset about something, and Michael didn't know what was wrong. How to fix it.

Not that his brain was working. It was clouded by lust. By the memory of Tony's water-slick skin under his. The soft mouth against, tongue in his mouth, against his.

Water had always been one of Michael's weaknesses. He'd seduced a lot of people, slept with them to keep them happy. The times he'd enjoyed best were when they'd both been wet, in a shower or pool. There was just something about the feel of wet, wet skin against his own, so many different sensations added onto the experience. He could lose himself in it.

Tony pulling away, while heartening in the abstract, was frustrating in the concrete. Worse, the person Michael really wanted would hardly even touch him.

He knew he overreacted about their fight, but, hell, that was their relationship. They fought and came to a truce, an understanding, and then fought again. He and Alex were too alike and too different and while in the real world they might be able to make it work, here there were two options: fuck and fight.

Alex had taken one option away. And Michael knew he was right about the reason. There was only one reason Alex wouldn't sleep with him anymore. Why he kept throwing Sara at his face. If Michael was falling for Alex, then the reverse was true.

Michael stumbled outside. The heavy, humid air was a slap against his face. He inhaled, soupy oxygen sliding into his lungs wetly. It was hardly any relief, but it was air and it didn't smell as sharply of piss as it did inside. In the center of the yard was a man cooking something over a metal trash can. He went over and, after a brief discussion with the man before trading a chocolate bar for the meat thing that was being cooked.

It was actually a lot better than the crap they were handing out in the mess. Michael had finished it before he found a seat under something that wished it was a tree and was valiantly casting a faint shadow on the ground.

He sighed. Let his head rest against the wanna be tree. Wished he knew what to do. This obsession with Alex was getting him nowhere. This was why he didn't do relationships. Didn't let himself get emotionally involved. When he did, he obsessed. Got distracted, unfocused. Sara had distracted him in prison somewhat, but it'd been manageable. There, it was just his head, just his emotions. This… Alex had everything. He had Michael completely enthralled, hopelessly addicted, and then…

Just cut him off.
Maybe it was revenge for not letting him do drugs. Effective. Michael was still right, and this punishment was completely unjustified. But, it was effective.

He just wish he knew what he'd done to make Tony angry at him. Or whatever had happened that made Tony pull away. Okay, yes, he was sixteen years old and Michael knew he had absolutely no right to touch one hair on Tony's head. Except in a non-sexual, cuddly way because Tony needed that. But he had no right to demand or except or even want sex from him.

And yet, having him pull away after getting Michael twisted into knots was kind of hard to take.

He closed his eyes, feeling a headache pressing at his forehead. He pulled his knees to his chest and pressed his head against them.

"Scofield. Vist..." a voice over the loudspeaker garbled, dying halfway through the word.

Assuming Lincoln had come early that day, Michael pushed himself to his feet and trudged to the visitor's yard. He really wasn't up to seeing Lincoln right now. He felt like crap, what with his skin being too small and his heart beating too fast and this... this hunger burning in his belly that had nothing to do with food.

He was so twisted around, so lost in his mind, that he was almost to the fence before the face he was seeing on the other side of the chain links registered.

Everything stopped: his breath, his mind, his heart. Everything. Except his feet, his traitorous feet, which forced him forward, stumbling in the dirt. He tripped. Caught himself on the fence.

Words rushed into his throat and became stuck. Too many and he couldn't breathe, couldn't think. He just shook his head, holding onto the fence, traffic jam of words in his mouth and something pressing behind his eyes and... No. No.

"Michael, I'm sorry," Sara said. Her voice was low, even. Hands half raised, palms out at her chest. "I'm sorry. I know you don't want me here, and I was going to honor your wishes, but something's happened and I had to come."

He got a breath in. Sharp. Loud. Painful. He swayed unsteadily on his feet.

"Okay, Michael, can you sit for me? Please? Just sit, okay. Down here." She lowered herself into a sitting position in front of the gate, eyes on him. "Just sit down, no problem. Everything is fine, we're just sitting." Her movements were slow and combined with the cadence of her voice, Michael felt himself respond. Felt his heart start again. Air come more easily.

He sat. Fell, the impact on the ground harder than he expected, jolting his brain in his skull. "What's wrong?"

"It's okay," Sara said. She offered him a smile. "Yesterday after Lincoln saw you, he went to the American Embassy again. They want to help, they do, but there's a problem. Lincoln's in the country illegally, and even though he's been exonerated back home, that doesn't change the fact that he's here without a passport or permission."

"Lincoln..."

"He's fine. He's still there and they said they'll try to work it out without him having to leave. In light of your arrest and everything. But it's going to take a few days, and I didn't want you to feel abandoned."
Michael shook his head. He couldn't look at her.

Sara sighed. "I brought some stuff for you. The guard has the bag. Toothbrushes, toothpaste. Soap, towels. I brought a safety razor, but they took it out. I wasn't sure what else you might need."

"Um." He cleared his throat. Tugged at his fingers. "Um, maybe liniment or something? We've all got a lot of bruises and the mattresses are really thin."

"Okay." Relief colored her voices, like just the fact he was speaking in complete sentences to her was a victory of some kind. "Okay, I'll see what I can do. Maybe some lotion or something? Your hands look rough."

He glanced at them. They were rough. Fingers red and raw from clawing at the walls. The backs of his hands scraped, skin torn off, scratches everywhere else.

"Sure. Whatever." He rubbed the back of his neck, then tugged the index finger of his right hand. "You paying them?"

"Like twenty bucks. It's nothing. Really."

A pause. Michael scratched at the inside of his wrist. Cute poison. The formula for the corrosive that ate through the pipe under the infirmary.

Sara Tancredi. The doctor he'd flirted with while in said infirmary. Partly because he needed to for his plan, partly out of his habit of flirting with everyone in order to more easily manipulate them when needed, and partly because, once he started, he found her genuinely attractive. And after the escape, when Bellick had told him of her overdose, he'd called to assure her that it had been real. And it had. But now…

"Michael. Michael, are you okay?"

He shook his head. Dragged his fingers up his arm, pain burning.

"I'm sorry you ended up in here. And if I could trade places with you, I would. I can. I…"

"No." He licked his lips. "Consider it a parting gift."

"Michael, please. I…"

"I'm sleeping with Alexander Mahone."

Another silence.

"I'm. I'm sorry?"

He glanced up at her. Looked away before he could meet her eyes. Focused on her knee. "I'm sleeping with Alex." Licked his lips. "Or, I was, until he decided I was falling in love with him and now he won't sleep with me. But that doesn't stop him from touching me or looking at me. Oh, he'll do that, but the minute I try to reciprocate, he's all, 'Oh, Michael, it's too dangerous,' or whatever."

"Oh. So. You're… what? Bisexual?"

"No."

She laughed, but it wasn't a happy laugh. One of those laughs people give when they can't quite
believe what they're hearing. "No?"

He shook his head. Dug his fingers into his arm. "No. Yes. I don't know." Another glance up, then he focused on her shoulder. "I'm not gay. I'm not straight. I don't think about it because usually, I just sleep with people to get them to back off. Or if I want something from them. But you and Alex and… I don't know." He pressed his fingers into his eyes.

"Okay. It's fine, Michael. It's fine. I can't even begin to imagine what you're going through. The stress you're under. So, if you've turned to Mahone for comfort, I can't really say anything." She put her hand on the fence. "What do you mean, he thinks it's dangerous?"

"Because I said I didn't want to be with you. Try to make it work after… And he's convinced that it's because I'm falling in love with him."

"Are you?"

"No. I don't know. I don't know anything except I want out, I want not to be raped by T-Bag or Raoul or anyone else, and I want Alex."

"Michael, are you all right? Because you look like hell. You look like you've been hurt really badly, and I have to know if you're okay."

He closed his eyes. Let out a long breath. "Yeah. Yeah, I think I am." He forced himself to look up at her. Still couldn't meet her eyes, but it was closer. "It was rough at first. But Alex and I have our own cell now. A reputation. He and I fight sometimes, but he wouldn't hurt me."

"This is the same man who wanted to kill you."

A smile curled his lips. "Yeah, well. It wasn't personal."

She laughed. "I know Lincoln was rather adamant that he wouldn't help Alex get out, but, well. I don't like the look of this place. And I do trust your judgment."

"I can't leave Tony."

"The boy? Does he have a last name?"

Michael swore. "I'll find out." He swallowed. "We may, uh. Have a way to, uh. Help ourselves. Out."

Sara nodded. "Well. Don't get caught. And keep us informed."

"Are you angry with me?"

"Michael, look at me. Please."

He closed his eyes. Clenched his jaw, then forced himself to meet her eyes.

They shone with compassion and love and understanding. Sara gave him a small, sad smile and shook her head. "I'm not angry with you. I love you. But what you're going through is something I can't fully understand. It's going to change you. Already has. I just want you to survive. And if sleeping with Mahone helps you do that… if falling in love with him helps you, then it's okay. I can't say I'm not disappointed, but…" She shrugged. Pushed hair from her face. "I guess that, what with everything that's happened, my feelings have changed somewhat, too."

Michael reached out and put his hand on the fence. "I'm sorry, Sara."
"Don't be sorry." She threaded her fingers through the links, through his fingers. "You saved my life. You sacrificed your freedom for me, and I will never forget that." She squeezed his fingers. "Survive this, Michael. Don't worry about me or Lincoln or anyone out here. Worry about yourself and Alex and Tony. Get through this, okay?"

"Okay."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

* * *

"Tony. Tony, get up!" Alex stumbled into the cell, hand clutched against his side. It felt like it was burning, fire crawling up over his body until the ends of his hair smoked. "Tony!" He kicked the mattress.

Tony rolled onto his back. Opened his eyes. When he saw Alex, he leapt to his feet, somehow managing it with one, fluid move. Like a cat.

Not that Alex was noticing.

"Sit." Tony's thin, bony hands were on Alex's shoulders, pushing him down.

Down was easy. It was doable. He landed on the mattress with a thud, wincing.

"What happen?" Tony went to one of the bags and dragged it nearer. Then he knelt at Alex's side and tugged at his shirt.

"T-Bag." Alex lifted his arms, grunting as he did. He let Tony strip off his shirt, then leaned against the strangely moist wall. "Got me with a… glass shard. It's in my back pocket. Tried to stab me with it."

Tony stuck his lower lips out. Shook his head. "Why?"

"Michael. He and I had a fight."

"You and Michael?" He had a rag and bottle of water out and was carefully sponging off the blood streak across Alex's stomach.

He nodded. "Yeah. Something's up with him. Michael. He's… wired. He's not doing drugs, is he?"

Tony just snorted.

"Yeah. Yeah, I didn't think so." Alex sighed and closed his eyes. "Anyway, T-Bag saw us fight and I think he sees it as an in to get to Michael or something."

"We cannot let."

"I know." He winched, shifting as Tony touched a deep and painful part of the wound. "Did something happen last night? With you and Michael?"

He watched Tony's face carefully, even as the boy avoided his eyes. Tony's cheeks grew dark pink and he chewed on his lip.

"Tony?"
"Nothing. We kiss. Is all."

He winced as Tony scrubbed off some hardened blood. "That's all? Then why is Michael acting like… like… I don't even know what he's acting like. Except insane."

"Okay. You clean. Is still bleeding."

"Let's tear a shirt and wrap that around my waist. As a bandage. Here." He pulled the glass shard from his back pocket. "We can use this."

Tony frowned, taking it. Wiped the blood off on his jeans, then pulled a shirt from the bag. Together, they ripped it apart, creating long strips.

"You're hiding something. I know the two of you took a shower. Did you fool around?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why you want to know?"

Alex shrugged. "I'm trying to figure out what's wrong with Michael." He grabbed the makeshift bandage and started wrapping it around his waist.

"Michael… Michael miss you. He want you."

"I can't give him what he needs."

Tony frowned. Shook his head. "You are what he needs."

He finished tying off the bandage. Took Tony by his too-thin wrists. "Tony. I can't be with Michael. It's too much for us, okay? For him. But he cares about you. If you want to be with him…"

"I no want to be with him if he call me Alex," Tony said, brow furrowed.

"What?"

"We kiss, okay? In the shower. Because I like him. Want him. But he only want you. Only want me when you there. And he call me Alex. I want him to call me Tony." He looked up, tears in his eyes.

Ah, shit. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

"Tony. I… Christ. I didn't know. I'm sorry."

Tony sniffed. Wiped his eyes. "Is okay. Really. New thing, right? Someone not wanting me. Maybe is good. You both protect me, and I like, only… only I like him and he just like you."

Alex pulled Tony to him. Tony resisted only a moment before he collapsed against Alex. More tears leaked from his eyes, silent. Quiet shudders and barely audible gasps for air. A boy who'd learned the hard way that tears would only put him in even more danger. Who'd learned to hide his misery. To grow up way too fast.

"Tony, please understand that Michael is conflicted. So am I. You're sixteen years old. No, you're not a child anymore, but despite what you've gone through, you're still so… innocent somehow. And we don't want to tarnish that."
Tony sniffed. "Why can you just... say truth? You want Michael. He want you. And that all."

"That's not it."

"Yes, it is." Tony pulled away. Wiped his eyes. "That how it is, right? People love each other. One other person. Want just that person. They all you can think about. Just say that."

"Tony..."

"I am kid, right? Maybe... maybe I just be your kid. You and Michael. Okay, fine. But stop making things..." He waved his hands in the air, searching for the right word, frustration written on his face.


Tony's hands dropped. He looked at Alex, a tear dropping from his lower lashes, falling on his trembling chin. "Yes. Stop making it complicated." Then he turned and fled the cell.

Crap. Shit. This was a mess. Alex could only hope that he and Michael-- well, he more than Michael, since Alex was the one who'd literally pushed Tony onto Michael--hadn't messed the kid up too badly. It was one thing to be raped or to sell your body; it was another to have your mind fucked with.

He rubbed his face, his hand shaking. Tony would be fine. He would. Alex would talk with Michael about it, they'd come up with a plan. They'd treat Tony differently. Like their kid, if that was really what Tony wanted. It was strangely easy to be affectionate with Tony; they just had to keep everything platonic. Fatherly. The kid was, well. Like a kid. He'd just make sure he'd keep that in mind from now on.

Alex dug through their pile of clothes and found a shirt. There was nothing clean anymore, but this one was dry and didn't smell too badly. He wondered if they could maybe wash them or something, using the water over at the other side. They could even leave their clothes to dry there, although how much they would dry in the humid air was questionable.

Feeling as if he were a hundred years old, Alex left the cell. His side still burned and he wanted nothing more than to take something and lie down, but, unfortunately, that wasn't an option. You didn't give an addict food for his addiction, and he'd spent all yesterday in bed. Michael was right; Alex needed air and sunshine. Or at least to get away from the depressingly dim cells.

He wondered where T-Bag was. Where Michael was. If Michael was safe and why Alex hadn't stabbed T-Bag with his own shank. He was really fucking sick of that guy and even though Michael didn't want him to kill the scumbag, well. If it opportunity presented itself, Alex wasn't going to let it pass.

He found himself wandering near the entrance to the visitor's yard. At some point, Lincoln was bound to visit Michael. Alex could wait here, in the sun, and wait for him.

All fucking day. Because his life was just that pathetic.

The door leading to the visitor's yard opened. Michael stepped through. A guard stopped him and handed him a bag. Then, as Alex watched, the guard reached out and touched Michael's cheek. Leaned closer and said something.

Michael... Michael closed his eyes. Swayed towards the guard. Wet his lips, soft pink tongue swiping over his full lower lip. Then, he opened his eyes. Looked hazily at the guard. Smiled as he shook his head, then walked away.
Alex waited until Michael was almost to him before saying anything. "Tell me. Is it that you're horny, or do you just need to be touched?"

He blinked. Eyes focused on Alex. "What?"

"The guard." Then he shook his head. "Never mind. What's in the bag?" 

Michael looked at him. The near frantic energy from that morning was gone, leaving Michael looking exhausted and drained. There were dark circles under his eyes and his hands trembled slightly. He looked like crap.

"Oh. Uh. Supplies. Hygienic supplies and stuff."

Alex took the bag. Looked inside. "Lincoln thought to bring toothbrushes for all of us?" As soon as the words left his mouth, he knew. Even still, he looked up.

The look on Michael's face was all he needed.

"Sara came."

Michael swallowed. Nodded. "Lincoln's stuck at the embassy. She didn't say, but they might… might send him back to the States. And he probably won't get back here. So. She brought this."

"Ah." He closed the bag. Rocked back on his heels. "How is she?"

He shrugged.

"Did you talk to her?"

"Do you mean, did she declare her undying love for me and make me realize what an idiot I've been and tell her I love her back?" Michael asked flatly, eyes rolling.

"Considering how effusively emotional you two are, that must have been quite a scene."

Michael just rolled his eyes

"What happened?"

"I told her we were sleeping together."

Alex's stomach twisted. Sweat broke out on the back of his neck. "You, ah. You lied, you mean."

Michael looked at him. Cocked his head. Smiled.

Ah, shit.

"No, I didn't lie," he said, voice an octave lower. "I told her that we were having sex. That you cut me off and now I felt like I was going crazy." He moved closer, doing that slinky walk.

Alex back up, moved away, but Michael just kept coming closer. His back hit the wall, and then Michael was there. Inches away, hot breath on Alex's face, body heat radiating out.

"I told her how I couldn't think about anything except your hands on me. Your mouth." Those penetrating eyes focused on Alex's mouth for so long, Alex could practically feel the weight. 

"Michael…"
"I told her how you stopped sleeping with me because you were afraid I was falling in love with you. And I told her how I didn't care."

"Michael…"

Michael kissed him. Hands on the wall on either side of Alex's head. Body still inches apart so the only parts that were touching were their mouths and… and, Jesus Christ.

His knees went weak. Stomach burst into butterflies. Heart fluttered. Alex reached out, fingers scrabbling at Michael's hips and he… clung.

"Do you know what she told me, Alex?" Michael whispered, face close, eyes locked in Alex's.

Alex shook his head, hopelessly caught in those beautiful eyes.

"She told me to survive. Not to worry about anything else. Not to worry about her. Just… just take what I need in here to stay sane."

"She's a giving woman."

"Shut up." And then Michael made him shut up.

Alex gave up. It wasn't worth it. It'd been days since he'd last taken any drugs and three days since he'd had any Michael. He was tired of fighting. Fighting Michael and, more, fighting himself.

So, he kissed Michael back. Pulled Michael against him, gripping him by the waist. Tongue in Michael's mouth, fire racing along his spine.

Michael groaned. Slid his hands around Alex's torso.

"Shit!" Alex grunted, ripping his mouth away. "Don't."

"What's that?"

"T-Bag stabbed me. Just a scratch, but it hurts." He caught Michael's hand and ran his thumb over the inside of his wrist. "It just happened, so maybe we can save this for later. When it's not as fresh."

Michael sighed. Rested his forehead against Alex's. "Did you go after him?"

"Where's the trust?" He found Michael's other hand and threaded their fingers. "He came after me. The man's an animal."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because he can. I was distracted, by you, I might add. He rushed me and I just managed to stop him. Now you need to watch out. Because he saw what kind of state you were in and thinks he might use it to his advantage."

"And what state is that?"

"So horny that being touched on the cheek by a guard almost made you orgasm." Alex kissed Michael, then pulled away. "Come. Let's go talk."

Michael whined, high-pitch, in his throat.

He laughed. Kissed Michael again. "Sorry, babe. My side feels like it's been torn open with a glass
shard. And we have things to talk about."

He whined again, but let Alex lead him. Hand in hand, they walked back into the prison. Through the hall and then into the yard.

Tony was off in the corner with a group of boys. Well, relatively speaking; they were younger than the average inmate, but not quite as young as Tony. Alex would put them at about nineteen to twenty-three. They were huddled together playing marbles.

Alex and Michael found a shaded corner. Alex sat first, then pulled Michael next to him. Put a hand on his neck and squeezed, feeling the tension begin to bleed out.

"So. I wasn't far off the mark when I said you were horny."

"You wouldn't sleep with me," Michael replied.

He grinned. "Yeah, but this was different. Did you sleep at all last night?"

"No. Couldn't."

"Because you were sexually frustrated."

"No."

"Yes." Alex looked at him. Smiled, lopsided. "You and Tony were in the shower, fooling around. And then he stopped. Do you know why?"

Michael shrugged. "I don't know. He didn't want it, maybe. I mean, he thinks he does, but when it comes down to it, I'm a lot older than he is."

"There is less difference in age between the two of you than there is between the two of us."

"That's not true. We're closer in age than he and I."

"Ah, close enough. It's still enough. Besides, if he were in his twenties…"

"He's not." Michael lay his head on Alex's shoulder. Closed his eyes. "So. I take it you know what happened?"

He pressed a kiss against the top of Michael's head. "You said my name."

Silence. Then, "What?"

"You kissed him. And you said my name."

Michael eyes crashed shut. His entire face screwed up in pain. And, knowing Michael, he probably felt physical pain at the idea of hurting someone else's feelings. "Oh, crap. Oh, man, I didn't… Oh…"

"Calm down, Michael." His hand slipped down to rub Michael's back. "It's okay."

"No. It's really not. I can't believe…"

"I know. But it's okay. It'll be fine. Look. Tony and I talked, and I think what we need to do is just… go back to what you were doing before. Just being… platonic with him. Hands off."
"Gee. Why didn't I ever think of that?" Michael said dryly.

Alex could see a glint of tears in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Michael. You were right. I'm sorry. But it'll be okay."

"How?"

He sighed. Rubbed Michael's back again and rested his head against the wall. "We'll get him out. Find a way to make his life better. Maybe, I don't know. Give him to Lincoln. Let that Neanderthal finish raising him and LJ together."

Michael snorted. Yawned, then shifted, stretching out so his head was resting in Alex's lap. "First, let me say how refreshing it is that my brother now rates within the homo genus of the species instead of gorilla. Second... actually, that's not entirely a bad idea. Except Lincoln's Spanish isn't that great."

"Neither is his English. But Tony's vocabulary has gotten better."


So are you, Alex thought, rubbing Michael's back. As he did, he could see Michael growing more and more calm, his breathing slowing and muscles relaxing. As wound up as he'd been from his aborted make-out session with Tony, in the end, all he needed was to be touch. To have flesh on flesh, the warmth of another human being against him. Contact. Attention. The reminder that he was human.

He kept it to himself, though. Just said, "Well. I'm sure Tony doesn't mind the affection. Just that we don't confuse him anymore. Offer one thing one moment, then say the wrong name the next."

"You'll never let me forget that, will you?" Michael mumbled, half-asleep.

He smiled. Ran his hand down Michael's spine. Pressed it into the small of his back. "Actually, I will. But if you say his name while you're with me, I'll kill you."

"Trust me. When you're fucking me, I'll never forget that."

"No. You better not. I'll make sure of it."
"Panama," Michael muttered under his breath as he chipped at the hard packed dirt with the short handled shovel he'd found. Clods flew out at him, sticking to his sweat slicked forehead and crumbling down his neck and shirt. "Why did I have to choose Panama? Oh, sure, it looked good on paper. Lots of sunshine. The beach. Good food." He hacked at the wall of dirt again. Spit out the dirt that flew into his mouth. "Forgot to mention it was hell on earth. Stupid heat."

"Should have read the guide book more closer," Tony said from outside the tunnel they'd managed in the few hours of work. "Your fault."

"Yeah," Michael sighed. He lowered the shovel and wiped his forehead. "My fault." He lowered his head and coughed. Every muscle in his back ached and his arms were trembling. He was hot and it hurt to breathe and all he wanted to do was crawl into bed and sleep forever.

Except he couldn't. His bed was a mattress on the floor. He was surrounded by hundreds of dangerous men who would kill him or rape him if he let his guard down.

Plus, he'd had sex with a sixteen year old kid, then, soon after, made out with him in the shower, only to call out the name of his other lover. He didn't deserve sleep.

He coughed again. Wiped his mouth, then backed out of the hole. Tunnel, really. When they'd come down tonight, and Michael had examined the wall again, he'd realized something. The room they were in wasn't the last room in the prison, not above ground. They had two more cell lengths before they hit no man's land. Which meant that there was support above them. All they needed to do was dig from the ceiling down to a point they could hoist themselves up and they'd be fine. The walls were hard packed enough to form a tunnel around them, and the ceiling wouldn't cave in as long as they didn't disturb the supports that had to be buried in the dirt somewhere.

Once they hit no man's land, they'd need bracing, but until then, they were fine. They just needed to dig.

They'd snuck out around midnight. Michael still insisted that someone keep watch over the jungle, just in case. Since it was mind numbingly boring work, they took half hour shifts. Well, he and Alex did. When it'd been Tony's turn to stand watch, the boy had given them both a pout and an honest-to-God teenage whine.

Michael was only too willing to give Tony whatever he wanted, so he'd been stuck at the window for a little over an hour, watching. Throwing bits of food out to lure rats into the open and seeing
what happened.

Nothing ever did.

His feet touched the floor. Every muscle screamed in protest as he straightened, and he bit back a groan, rubbing his back. "I think that maybe that's enough for tonight. What do you think?"

Tony yawned and nodded. "Yeah, okay. We get the dirt out?"

"Sure."

Together, they scrapped the dirt out of the tunnel and onto a sheet they'd found in another cell. Once it was loaded, they dragged that into the cell next door and tossed it onto the growing pile.

"How long does this take?" Tony asked, scratching dirt out of his hair. Clumps fell out, sprinkling over his shoulders and raining to the floor.

"The digging? I have no idea. I think that maybe tomorrow all three of us can dig."

Tony's face lit up. "No looking out window?"

"Why should you care? You got to avoid that part of the rotation."

He shrugged. "It make Alex cranky. You, too." He scratched his head again. "I go take shower. Meet you later."

"Wait." He reached out and put his hand on Tony's shoulder. Then, with a wince, he snatched it back. Tugged on his fingers. "We haven't… talked. About what happened." He'd been trying to find ways to bring it up all night, but there never seemed to be an opportune moment. Tony had been acting as if nothing had happened since he'd come back from playing with his friends. And Michael had been too busy beating himself up over it back on the other side that it wasn't until they were working that he felt ready to apologize.
And yet, consistently failed to work up the nerve.

Tony sighed. Rubbed his forehead. "Is okay, Michael."

"No, it's not." He looked down, unable to look at the boy anymore. "I never should have… And I didn't realize… I never wanted…." He squeezed his eyes shut. "I am so sorry, Tony."

"It's okay," he said, switching to Spanish. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"Yes, I did. I never should have had sex with you. You're too young. I took advantage of you, used you, hurt you. I'm no better…" He stopped when Tony stepped closer to him and kissed him.

"Michael, you were upset. I climbed on you. Rubbed. Made you come. You said no before, but I wanted you so badly. Because I don't know how to look at you."

"Tony…"

Tony covered Michael's mouth with his hand. "Everyone here wants something from me. Wants something from everyone. I'm small and young and easy. I trade myself for things, so I have a reputation. People who are nice to me are nice because they want what I'll give them. Except you. You're just nice to me. For no reason. And you're so handsome. I don't know what… what to do. What you want from me."

He pulled Tony's hand away. "I don't want anything, Tony. I just want you… to be safe. And… I don't know. Feel safe and cared for and just… be a kid. As much as you can be."

Tony nodded. "Yes. I know. Now. But it's been a long time since anyone just wanted… wanted something good for me. For no reason but it's good for me. So, even though you said you didn't want sex, I didn't believe you. I though you must really want me, you were just… waiting."

"Tony, you're a beautiful young man. But you're a kid, and… and even though I'm attracted to you, kind of…"

"You love Alex." Tony shrug. "You want him. Not me. And it's good. It's fine. So, I… I'm not mad at you. I just need to learn how to act around you now."

Michael nodded, stomach twisting at the mention of Alex's name. He ignored it, set it aside for now, and reached out to run his thumb down Tony's dirty face. "I'm not going to stop taking care of you. Or giving you affection, because you need it. Deserve it. But I just mean it as… as a friend. A brother."
"A father?"

"If that's what you want."

Tony bit his lip, thinking.

"Are we going to be okay?" Michael asked, lump in his throat.

He got a beatific smile in return. "Yes, Michael. We're okay." He stood on his toes and kissed Michael's cheek. "I go shower," he said in English. "You go to Alex."

"You're going to shower."

"I going to shower," he corrected himself, rolling his eyes.

Michael pressed a kiss to Tony's temple. "If I find so much as one clump of dirt or bug in your hair, we're shaving your head tomorrow."

"Si, Mami." Tony grinned at him, then turned around and scampered away.

Michael smiled, watching him go. Tony was a smart kid. Not just smart, but perceptive. And introspective, which wasn't something that one would expect to find from a kid in this hell hole of a prison. And, yet, here he was.

Tony didn't just know about the ins and outs of Sona. He knew the ins and outs of himself. That was a rare quality to find anywhere. And the fact that he knew why he'd gone after Michael, even when Michael had tried to dissuade him, was interesting.

And thought provoking.

He coughed and turned, rubbing at his eyes as he started walking to where Alex stood watch. His eyes felt gritty from the dirt and from being so tired. And now his head was spinning.

Damn stupid kid.

Up on his level, Alex was standing next to the window. He wasn't looking out of it anymore, not that Michael blamed him. At this point, it hardly mattered. Instead, Alex was leaning against the wall, one foot propped against it, smoking one of the cigarettes that Tony had won in a game of marbles that afternoon.

In his other life, Michael had always been firmly anti-cigarette. Part of it stemmed from a foster sibling who'd snuck cigarettes and burned Michael with them any time Michael breathed too loudly. Another part was the foster mother who'd had to give Michael up once she'd been diagnoses with lung cancer and felt she was too sick to care of Michael properly, no matter how much he'd begged to stay. Lincoln had smoked for awhile, too, after getting custody of Michael, and there were a couple times where Linc's cigarettes won out over food. Plus, Michael just didn't like them.

But that was in his other life. In this life, Alex had managed to turn cigarettes into something erotic and appealing. Just like everything else.

"We done for the night?" Alex said in lieu of greeting.

"Yeah. Was there anything?"

Alex shook his head. Took another drag on his cigarette. "I guess they're fairly confident that no one can get over here. And, even if someone did, there's no way out." He tapped some ash onto the
"How's progress on the tunnel?"

"Good. I figure tomorrow all three of us can work on it. Get more done." He settled next to Alex, leaving a small space between them. He could feel the heat radiating from Alex's body, smell the spicy tang of his sweat. It made his stomach tighten and heart pound.

"Do you really think this is going to work? I mean, really?"

Michael sighed. "I don't know. But it's the best I can think of right now. So."

"So." He took a final drag on his cigarette before dropping it to the floor and grinding it with his heel. "Where's the kid?"

"Shower." He tugged on the index finger of his right hand. "He's a smart kid."

"Yes. He is."

"We talked. He said some things that made me think." He began tapping his fingers against the wall. "About why he came after me, even after I turned him down."

"Being beautiful isn't enough of a reason?"

Michael felt his cheeks heat. He looked down and drummed his fingers against his thigh. "He said that he didn't know how to respond to me. How deal with someone who's nice to him, who's affectionate to him without demanding anything of him. He mistook me being kind to him for… interest."

Alex sighed. "Michael…"

"This isn't about you."

Silence. Alex shifted, his clothes rustling against the wall. "Sara?"

Michael nodded. Gazed steadfastly at the floor. "I hadn't been with anyone since Lincoln was arrested. And… and I hadn't been with anyone for almost two years before that. Just this one guy who'd contracted with the company. And that was just because he wouldn't leave me alone, kept coming by my office to see how the project was going. Pretending to see how it was going. He just wouldn’t leave me alone, and it was driving me crazy."

"So you fucked him."

"Yeah. A few times before he finally cooled. He was actually kind of sweet when he broke up with me. Anyway." He tugged at his lower lip with his teeth. "Anyway, then I ran into Veronica, and she was so familiar and pretty and caring. And I needed that. We almost… but then Lincoln called."

"And then Sara."

He nodded. "What if… what if I'm not in love with her? If I never was? She was kind to me. We have a lot in common, and even if I hadn't been trying to… to butter her up, we probably would have clicked. But what if it was never that I wanted her, but that I was so… starved that I just… let myself believe…"

"Michael. You're thirty, Tony's sixteen. You're attracted to her. Genuinely. And she is to you. It's not the same situation."

"How do you know? I mean, how can you be sure? Because I'm sure that Tony is sure that he feels
something for me. That his feelings are real."

"But you never felt the same way back. What happened in the sewers was a fluke. You were upset and overwhelmed. You weren't in control."

"I shouldn't…"

Alex's hand closed around Michael's wrist. "You do what I say. It was my decision, and I knew better than you what you needed." He squeezed, then let Michael go. "That being said, you care for Tony. A lot. But your feelings aren't amorous. Sara's, toward you, were. You didn't misinterpret."

"Yeah, but… It was so much harder than I expected. Prison. It was so cold. Bellick hated me on sight. I couldn't sleep the first few night because my mind was working so hard. T-Bag. The riots." He licked his lips. "And there, every day, was Sara. This… this sea of beauty and calm in all that. What if I just wanted to feel something so I could get away from all the darkness?"

"You're exhausting," Alex sighed.

"I know." He felt his shoulders tightened. He wrapped his arms around his stomach. "I know, but my feelings for her have changed, and I can't stop thinking…"

And then, Alex was in front of him. Pressed against him, forehead resting against Michael's. Hands on either side of Michael's face. "Here's my theory, Michael. It might be a little out there, but bear with me. Maybe, just maybe, you only knew Sara for a short time. And in that short time, you were attracted to her, enjoyed flirting with her, and enjoyed her flirting back. You felt something for her. But, when all is said and done, you've only known her for a short time, and in that time, you were planning a breakout. Your mind was always elsewhere, never fully committed. And now that you're here, and again, your mind is elsewhere. So, you find that the fragile bond you created with her at Fox River and while you were running just isn't enough to survive." He ran his thumb down Michael's jaw. Traced his lips. "Maybe she was right. Maybe right now, you need to concentrate on survival. And, maybe when we get out…"

"Don't." He grasped Alex's shirt. Kissed him, feeling desperate. Lost.

"You're not worried about this?" Alex asked. "Us?" He slid one hand down Michael's cheek. His chest. Rested his hand on Michael's hip and massaged. "I show you a little bit of affection, and you fall in love."

"Why do you insist that I'm in love with you?" Michael asked. His hands were underneath Alex's shirt and he couldn't stop rubbing up and over his chest. "I never said I was. You're the one who first brought it up. And you're the one who ran away from… from this. If you didn't feel something for me…"

"I'm not in love with you."

"And I'm not in love with you." The words tasted sort of flat on his mouth. Rang with the same hollow tinge as Alex's had.

Alex's lips twitched. "So. That's settled then." His hand trailed down Michael's stomach. Tugged at his fly, button and zipper coming undone.

Michael leaned his head back, baring his neck. He rolled his hips into Alex's hand, wiggling slightly as Alex pulled down his underwear, freeing Michael's cock. "It's settled. Neither of us is in love with the other."
"No." He put his hands on Michael's shoulders. Pushed gently.

He went down willingly. Knelt on the hard, grimy floor with his pants sliding down his hips and cock hanging out. Looked up at Alex through his eyelashes as he leaned forward. Delicately took the button of Alex's fly in his teeth and undid it.

Alex groaned. His fingers threaded through Michael's hair as Michael used his teeth on the zipper as well. He leaned in and pressed his face against Alex's crotch, rubbed against the hard bulge underneath. Normally, he'd continue by wetting the cloth and tormenting Alex by teasing him through his underwear, but hygiene was sort of an issue here. So, he slipped his fingers underneath the waistband of Alex's underwear and tugged it and his jeans down.

Michael sat back on his ankles. Wrapped his fingers around Alex and lifted, gazing at the understand. At the vein that throbbed underneath. Slid them down and caressed at his ball sac, feeling, probing, manipulating and studying.

"Jesus Christ, Michael. You planning on doing anything?"

Michael looked up at Alex with a wicked grin. "Patience."

Alex growled at him. Tugged at his head.

Michael allowed himself to be manipulated. Opened his mouth, relaxed his throat. When he'd been in junior high school, he'd spent months learning how to swallow bananas down whole for no other reason than to see if he could do it. His last year in high school, he'd discovered this talent had other applications as well. And there was nothing like the look on a man's face when you deep throated him not only with complete ease, but when he wasn't expecting it.

Alex was no different. When Michael swallowed him to the root, nose buried in his pubic hair, his mouth fell open. Then, his eyes squeezed and he fell forward, bracing himself on the wall as Michael swallowed. Sucked and pushed his tongue at the underside of Alex's cock. He twitched and bucked, trying to thrust, but Michael held him back, one hand on Alex's hip.

He loved this. Forgotten what it was like to hold control over another man like this. To feel him pulsing in his mouth, taste his essence on his tongue. To feel filled up and stuffed and... and whole.

Finally, he pulled back, saliva and precome coating his lips. He gasped for air, his hand working at Alex's cock. Stroking, tugging. Then he leaned back in and took him in again, sucking part way. Hard, cheeks hollowing, throat working. His hand twisted around the part his mouth didn't take in. When he pulled back, he laved at the head, twirling his tongue around the ridge before tonguing at the sensitive hole.

"Michael," Alex gritted. He dropped on hand to Michael's head. Pushed him. When Michael took him in again, he held Michael's head in place. Thrust his hips.

Michael groaned, eyes rolling back. He opened his mouth wider and gripped Alex's hips, a jolt of heat going through him.

Taking the cue, Alex put both his hands on either side of Michael's head. Gripped tightly, almost painfully. Thrust, hard and fast, fucking Michael's mouth. The head of his cock hit the back of Michael's mouth, stroking his soft palate. Thrust, pushing Michael back, almost snapping his head. Moved with no regard to Michael's comfort, to his feelings. Just fucked him, used him and Michael...

Michael's blood pulsed and cock throbbed. His skin tingled. His hips jerked and twisted of their own
accord, his own cock painfully hard. He removed one hand from Alex's hips and immediately had to
grab back on when the force of Alex's thrust pushed him back. But he just held tighter with one hand
and lowered the other to his dick. Took hold and stroked, fast and brutal, in time with Alex.

Alex was grunting as he worked. Hands tight in Michael's hair. Breath coming faster and faster.
Michael could feel Alex getting closer to his climax, hear that wheeze in the back of his throat, the
tension in his body. He worked harder on his cock, wanting to get there together, reach that moment
with Alex, feel that connection and…

"Shit," Alex swore. He pulled out of Michael's mouth. Fell against the wall, one hand against it, the
other around his cock as he came, warm bursts of semen hitting Michael's face. He closed his eyes,
feeling the sticky strands coating his eyelashes. Tasted it on his lips and, with that, he was coming,
trembling, losing himself. The world spun around him and he was falling forward.

And Alex was there, catching him, kissing him. Tasting himself on Michael's mouth, on his lips.
Tasting and biting and kissing and claiming and Michael… clung and hung on while the world
continued to spin.

Sometime later, Michael find himself in Alex's arms. They were propped against the wall, both their
pants done up and adjusted. Alex was breathing evenly into Michael's hair, relaxed but not asleep.

Michael yawned. "What… I…"

"You fell asleep," Alex said, voice rough, as if he hadn't spoken in awhile.

"How long?"

"Not long. Maybe fifteen minutes." He kissed the top of Michael's head. "Tony took some of the
clothes to wash. We should go soon, though."

"Yeah." He didn't move. Neither did Alex.

Alex sighed. Rubbed Michael's arm. "The thing is," he said after a few moments. "The thing is, there
were never many choices for us in the first place. We were either going to end up killing each other
or… or end up like this." He kissed the top of Michael's head. "Maybe that's why you aren't worried
about anything that may or may not be cropping up here. I mean. Not that, well." He shrugged.
"But."

"I know you better than I've known anyone," Michael said. "Better than Sara." He looked up at
Alex, meeting his eyes. "It's not confusing whatever this is for whatever it's not. It's knowing exactly
what it is without understanding it."

Alex's mouth crooked into a smile. "Yeah," he said. "Exactly."

* * *

Pink fingers of dawn were just reaching through the bars of the cell when Alex opened his eyes. He
wasn't sure what had woken him. They'd only crawled back to the cell a few hours before to settle
in. Alex was exhausted from standing watch and digging. They'd agree to lay in as long as they
could, no longer having to fight the crowd for scraps of food with their stash on the other side. They
could catch up on sleep.

His head spun with drowsiness. When no danger presented itself, he closed his eyes again. Allowed
himself to relax, drift off to sleep.
At the scraping sound, his eyes popped open again.

Tony had pulled one of the mattresses to the other side of the cell when they'd gotten in that morning. "Privacy," he'd said with a shy little smile.

Whether he meant privacy for himself of Alex and Michael, Alex hadn't been sure. Neither he nor Michael had said anything, merely nodded and allowed him his space.

Which, now, apparently, he was giving up. Tony was dragging his mattress back to Alex and Michael's. His lips were pressed together in a tight line, brow furrowed. He almost looked frightened.

He moved beyond Alex's view, pulling the mattress behind Michael. A moment later, he heard a sigh and a yawn. Tony settling down to sleep again.

Probably a nightmare. Or a change of heart. Nothing to worry about.

Alex yawned. Shifted, cracking his spine, and closed his eyes again. Michael was breathing behind him, warm and steady. He'd been spooned up behind Alex earlier, peaceful and sated from earlier. Alex wouldn't have minded fooling around some more, but there hadn't been time and it seemed awkward doing anything in front of the kid.

"Alex?"

He opened his eyes again. "Yes, Tony?"

"Michael is really hot."

He opened his mouth to comment, when he realized that Tony wasn't talking about Michael's looks. And that the man behind him was radiating heat like a furnace.

Shit.

He sat up. On the other side of Michael, Tony was sitting up too. He was looking down worriedly at Michael.

"Michael?" Alex put his hand on Michael's forehead.

Shit.

"Michael? Michael, wake up." He shook Michael. Again. And another time. "Get water, Tony. Fill the bucket with it. We need to cool him down."

"Si." Tony was up and running.

Alex straddled Michael's body. Took him by the shoulders. Shook. "Michael!"

Michael inhaled sharply. Squeezed his eyes tightly before cracking them open. "Wha?"

"You with me? No, keep your eyes open. Look at me." Michael's eyes slid shut again, so Alex shook him. "Michael. I need you to stay awake, okay?"

"Tired." His breathing was raspy and he gave a kind of dry cough.

"You need water." Alex carefully maneuvered him to the wall and propped him against it. "Stay awake. I'll be back in a second."
His heart was pounding in his ears as he went to the corner to their stash. He pushed aside clothes, candy bars, and MREs until he grabbed a couple bottles of water.

"Here." His hands were shaking as he cracked open the lid. Water splashed out.

He knelt next to Michael. "Michael, you need to drink. Here."

Michael was unresponsive. Panting and wracked with shivers. Alex shook him again, waiting until he saw the cloudy blue beneath the long dark lashes.

"What?" Michael whined.

"Drink." He cradled Michael's head in the palm of his hand and tilted the bottle back.

He'd drifted off again in the mere seconds it'd taken to start pouring the water. Some dribbled out over his chin, but then Michael opened his eyes again and began drinking. He drank about half the bottle before he started coughing, dry, steady coughs that had him turning his head, face twisted.

"Alex," he moaned in a wrenching whisper when he had his breath back.

"I know. Just relax." He shifted next to Michael and pulled him down against his shoulder. Kissed him on top of his head, then rested his cheek against the softly bristled hair. "Tony's gone to get some water. We're going to cool you down."

"Cold." He was shivering, little tremors running through his body. Teeth chattering.


Michael nodded weakly. Together, they struggled to get him up and get more water down him.

He was so hot. How had he not noticed before? How had he slept beside this inferno without noticing at all?

God. He was supposed to be protecting Michael. That was their deal. For God's sake, how had he let this happen?

"Got water," Tony gasped, skidding back into the room. A bunch spilled out, wetting his legs and the floor. He dropped it gently in front of the bed.

"Careful," Alex scolded. "Get some rags. Shirts or something."

"Si." He darted off to the corner, then came back with his hands full of tee shirts.

"Are you in pain?" Alex asked. He dunked one of the shirts in the bucket. "You can lie back down."

Michael gave a little nod of his head and gently settled back onto the mattress. "I don't know. I'm sore."

He laid the shirt over Michael's forehead, keeping it off his eyes. "Sore from digging, or sore like you're sick?"

"Just sore," he said with another breathy little moan. When he closed his eyes, a tear slid from the corner. He still shivered, little jerks and trembles.

"Okay, Michael. Just go back to sleep. I'll wake you in a few hours, just to make sure we can wake
you. Just relax and sleep." He reached for another shirt, only to have Tony hand him an already soaked one. This one he placed under Michael's neck.

Michael nodded. He seemed to drift off almost right away.

"Two more, Tony. We'll wrap them around his wrists."

"Por qué?" Tony's voice was shaky and filled with tears.

"Por... why? To cool him down. Pulse points. We'll cover him, too, but nothing on his feet. We just need to get him cool." He shook his head. "Fuck. We need more. Medicine. Better facilities. Something. This is ridiculous."

"Is he die?"

"No, he's not dying. He won't die." He wrapped Michael's left wrist, then turned to Tony. Framed his face between his hands. "He's going to be okay, Tony. He's just sick. Maybe the other day, it wasn't withdrawal. I mean me. When I was sick? Maybe I had something, and now he has it."

"He sicker."

"People react differently. I don’t know why it's hit him harder, but that doesn't mean anything. Okay? So calm down. Deep breaths." He took in a long, slow inhaled, showing Tony what he wanted.

After a moment, Tony followed.

The breathing helped clear Alex's mind, too. Slowed his pounding heart, let him get into a space where he could think.

"Okay," he finally said. "It's early. He's sleeping, we need to sleep, too. When the alarm goes off, I'll wake him, see what happens. How he is. We just need to keep him hydrated and cool."

Tony nodded. Sat, twisting his hands, bony fingers cracking.

"Come on. Let's get some rest." He moved to the other mattress and stretched out. Beckoned for Tony.

The boy crawled over to him and gingerly lay himself down. Alex spooned up behind him, wrapped his arms around the thin body. Kissed his cheek and whispered calming nonsense words into his ears until Tony's breathing evened out.

Sleep didn't come for Alex. He drifted some, but his entire being was focused on Michael. On the heat he was giving off. The dry, painful little coughs. Uncomfortable little moans.

And there was nothing he could do. Try to rest himself. Sit up every couple minutes and sponge Michael off. Try to gauge his temperature. And worry.

What was going to happen if they couldn't get the fever down? If Michael got any worse? Would the guards even care? As far as Alex knew, this place didn't have an infirmary. But there had to be something. Surely they wouldn't want some kind of epidemic sweeping through. Or if someone was truly, seriously injured, they must have to do something.

He hoped.

The morning alarm went off. Alex rose and dropped the sheet to block their door. Then he went
back to the bed, where Tony was stirring and Michael was sleeping as if…

No. He wasn't going to finish that thought.

"Michael?" He shook Michael gently. Then a little harder.

It took a bit, but Michael finally opened his eyes. "Alex?" He coughed. Squeezed his eyes shut. "Hurts."

"What hurts?"

"Eyes." He coughed again and scrunched his face. "Head."

"I'll see about putting something over the window later. Right now, let's get some more water in you."

"Water?" He licked his lips, which looked dry and cracked.

"Yeah. Come on." He eased his arm underneath Michael's shoulders and helped him up. The shirt on his head fell off, and Alex tossed it back into the bucket. "God. I don't think your fever's come down at all. Here." He got another bottle of water down Michael. "Can we take your shirt off?"

"What's going on?" Michael, still leaning heavily against Alex, looked up at him.

"You're sick. Do you remember waking up earlier?"

He shook his head.

Alex sighed. Grabbed the hem of Michael's shirt and helped ease it over his head. Michael gasped as he raised his arms.

"Hurts?"

"Yeah." His voice was tight with pain. "But… I dug. Yesterday. Right?"

"You did. So that could be it. Here, lay down on your stomach. I'll try to rub some of the stiffness out."

Michael turned his head to look at Alex, wincing as he did. "I'm going to fall asleep again."

"That's fine. You're more awake than you were earlier. Last time, you were barely coherent. This is okay." He leaned forward and kissed Michael lightly on the lips. "Sleep all you need. We need you healthy."

He got a wan sort of smile in return, then Michael settled down on his stomach. Alex straddled him and began kneading the tight muscles on his back. He could feel how tight Michael was, how knotted his muscles had become. Not that he was surprised. Michael took the weight of the world on him. Yesterday had been particularly stressful for him, what with Alex stupidly continuing his sex embargo and Michael being wound up from Tony breaking it off in the shower. It'd only gotten worse once he'd found out what he'd called Tony.

And that was just the personal stuff. There was also all the prison crap that Michael let get to him. Things that bugged Michael on a deeply personal level, things that he wasn't able to block out. The anger, the despair. Guys fighting, guys fucking. Guys getting raped or smacked around. The landscape that should, by now, be blending into the background, and just… wasn't for him.
Which, Alex realized belatedly, may be why Michael was tearing himself apart over his guilt about Sara, about Tony, even Alex. Because if he focused on that, the stuff that mattered, then the rest of the stuff might fade, ever so slightly.

Maybe.

He kept massaging Michael long after he'd drifted back to sleep. Long enough for the mob heading to breakfast to turn into a trickle as men tried to decide if they wanted to be miserably hot inside or outside. The air was the usual hot and humid, so heavy that Alex could practically feel it pressing him down.

His wrists and hands began to ache. He stopped his massage and reached into the bucket for the shirt he'd tossed in. He lay it over Michael's back. Set about rewetting the shirts around his wrists, then the back of his neck.

"I'm hot," Tony whined, rolling onto his back.

Alex rolled his eyes at the pitiful look Tony was giving him. "Take off your shirt."

Tony sat up and did as he was instructed.

Alex dipped the shirt into the bucket, wetting it, then handed it back. "Anything else I can do for you? Need me to fan you off?"

Tony's mouth quirked, but he shook his head. "I think I sick."

"You're not sick." Alex sighed and climbed onto the mattress next to Tony.

"No, I is. I is hot and sore and tired." He flopped dramatically into Alex's lap, all wet tee shirt and gangly limbs. "I no feel okay."

Alex closed his eyes. "Do you want a massage?"

"I want Michael to be okay."

"He'll be fine, Tony. I promise."

"What if he not? What if he die?"

"He's not going to die."

Tony sniffed. "What if I die?" he asked in a small voice.

Alex put his hand on the back of Tony's neck. Squeezed it gently, comfortingly. "You're not going to die. I'll take care of you both, I promise."

He sniffed again, but didn't say anything.

If he wanted to be taken care of, babied, that was fine. Alex really didn't care. The kid was worried and upset. He cared about Alex, yes, but Michael was the center of his universe. If Alex was sick, that was one thing; if Michael was...

Then Tony would be stuck with Alex.

Alex didn't know if Tony's sudden bought of hypochondria was him testing Alex, fear, or just being a teenager. Whatever it was, Tony wanted something, and Alex was able to give it to him. So, he
settled as comfortably as he could on the mattress and started to rub Tony's back.

"You know I have a son?" he said after some time had passed. "A little boy. Cameron. He lives back in the States with his mom." He sighed and ran his hand up into Tony's hair. Combed through the tangles. "I miss him so much."

"How old?"

"He's six. Beautiful. Big brown eyes and dark brown hair like his mom. And a huge smile. A big laugh."

"Why you leave him? To chase Michael?"

"Partly. But, mostly because… I killed a man. A bad man, but I wasn't supposed to. I was supposed to arrest him, but I lost my temper. Killed him in cold blood. Then I got scared and buried him in my backyard." He trailed his nails down Tony's spine, lightly.

Tony arched under him, very much like a cat.

"I was frightened of being caught. But worse, I was scared I'd turn on Pam and Cameron, next. My father… growing up, my father had abused me. Beaten me. I'd always been able to control my anger, but, suddenly." He sighed. Closed his eyes. "I had to get them out of the house and away from me." He sighed again.

"Pam es tu esposa?"

"My wife, yes. Well. My ex-wife. We got a divorce soon after. She was so hurt. Never understood. And I kept… after the Company called me and told me they knew what I'd done… after they hurt my son and I decided to fuck them all, I kept calling her. Telling her things would be okay. That we could be together again. And now…" His throat closed.

Tony rolled onto his side. Face pillowed on Alex's thigh, he looked up at him. "You love Pam?"

He nodded.

"You love Michael now. Michael, too."

He closed his eyes. Shook his head. "I don't… I don't know, Tony. I just want to survive. Michael helps with that. You help with that."

"You love him."

"Tony…"

The loudspeaker crackled. "Mi…Sc… Fi…d. Visi…or."

Tony sat up. Looked at Alex, eyes wide.

Alex gazed back, then looked at Michael, who was dead to the world. "I'll go."

"What if T-Bag come?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I'll be fast. Stay." He stood and left quickly.

The guard at the visitors gate gave him a look when Alex appeared, but just shrugged and let him through.
He didn't know if it was better or worse that Sara stood on the other side of the gate instead of Lincoln. As he got closer, he decided it was better. Sara was reasonable. Intelligent. She'd understand Alex's necessity in Michael's life right now. If she wanted to kill him, she'd wait, where Lincoln would just tear through the gate and smash him into pieces. Sara was better.

God. He hoped.

"Agent Mahone," Sara greeted him, voice stiff.

"Dr. Tancredi." He licked his bottom lip. "You should call me Alex. I'm not exactly an agent anymore."

She nodded. "Okay. Alex." She glanced over his shoulder. "Where's Michael?"

His heart twisted painfully in his chest. "He's sick. He has a fever. I don't know... God, Doctor, he's so hot. I've been trying to cool him down, but I don't think it's working."

"Alex, calm down. Okay? Just calm down. When did you notice the fever?"

"Sometime this morning. I don't know. Um. Like three or four hours ago. Tony noticed it first. I was sleeping, I didn't... I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay. You did notice. So. He's a running a fever."

"When I tried to wake him up, he wouldn't. He kept drifting back to sleep. He was incoherent, just... He's better now. When I woke up earlier, he carried on a conversation. But doesn't seem to have cooled any."

"Well, the temperature went up as the sun rose. You don't have a thermometer, so don't jump to conclusions. It could have just been the temperature. What else? Any soreness or coughing or..."

"He's coughing a little."

"Productive?"

"No. Dry. He had a headache and the light was hurting his eyes. And he's sore, but I'm not sure if it's because we were, you know." He glanced up at the tower. Lowered his voice. "Digging, or because he's sick."

Sara nodded. Tilted her head. "Anywhere specific that he said he's sore?"

Alex shook his head. "His arms. His back was all knotted up, but I think that was stress. His neck."

"His neck?"

"Yeah."

"Is it stiff?"

"I think so."

"Does it hurt more when he turns from side to side or up and down?"

A cold pit formed in Alex's stomach. He shook his head. "I'm not sure."

"Ask. We need to find out." She let out a long breath. "Does this place have an infirmary?"
"Not that I know of. It's hard to even track down the guards. This place…"

"I know." She ran her hand through her hair. Gathered it on to the top of her head and tugged. "I bribed the guard again, sent in some bandages and alcohol pads. You can wipe him down with the pads, but it won't be enough to really do him any good. I'll see if I can get you some Tylenol."

"Sara." He curled his fingers around the fence. Looked at her. "Do you think it's…"

"It could be viral. Viral meningitis is a lot less dangerous than bacterial. He could get over it on his own. There's no reason to assume the worse. And there's no reason to assume… Have you been sick?"

"Couple days ago I didn't feel well. Tired, dizzy. I thought it was withdrawal coming back around on me."

"It could have been. Did you have a fever?"

Alex shook his head. "I don't think so." He cracked his jaw. "Sara…"

"Alex."

The tone in her voice commanded his attention.

She was looking at him, serious, stern. "You can't worry about the worst. You need to concentrate on keeping Michael cool, keeping him hydrated, and staying calm. You know that if you start to worry, it'll only make Michael anxious. He needs rest, and he won't get it if you're thinking the worse."

Alex closed his eyes. Took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. She was right. Completely. Michael was looking to him to keep him grounded. Keep him calm. Alex didn't have the luxury of worrying.

When he felt centered again, Alex opened his eyes.

"Thank you," Sara said quietly.

God, she was beautiful. Smart. And she understood Michael.

He tightened his hand on the fence. "Sara, I'm sorry."

A crooked smile crossed her face. "For what? For being what Michael needs when he needs it?"

"What he said to you… What he's thinking… I never meant…"

"It doesn't matter." She shrugged. "It doesn't matter if you didn't mean it. It's what it is." She licked her bottom lip and shrugged again. "Back at Fox River, I was what he needed. Something outside the plan, outside Lincoln. When he was on the run, when I joined him, it wasn't the same. Partly because of you. You got in his head. Maybe if this hadn't happened, he and I could have made it work. Maybe we couldn't have. I don't know. But the reality is, you're in there with him, and Michael desperately needs you. And I want him to survive."

He lowered his head. Closed his eyes. "I'm in over my head. With him, I mean."

She laughed. Stepped to the fence and put her hand over his. "I know the feeling. I've been there. And Michael does that to people."

Alex looked back up at her. "What do I do?"
"Go back. Check his neck, try to get him to give you a better description of his symptoms. I'll come back this afternoon. I'll see if I can browbeat someone into getting me or another doctor in there."

"What do I say about Lincoln?"

"The truth. It'll be another day or so until the situation is resolved. Until then, you're both stuck with me."

He smiled. "You know I'm glad. To be stuck with you. Instead of… well. You know."

She returned it. Both their smiles were honest, if infinitely weary and troubled. "I do. And, under the circumstances, I am, too."
Chapter 14

The next day, Michael was worse. He only woke for short periods of time, and even then, he wasn’t fully conscious. Just enough to shuffle to the restroom, leaning heavily on Alex, and to sip little bits of water. He didn’t seem to know where he was or who Alex was. He didn’t seem to know anything at all.

To make matters worse, Tony had awoken with a headache and fever. He was cranky, snapping at Alex, swatting his hands away. When the breakfast bell rang, he’d gone out, only to come back fifteen minutes later empty handed. He’d gone to the corner, curled into a ball, and fallen into a deep sleep. He hadn’t woken since.

Alex didn’t know what to do. Out of sheer desperation, he’d gone to a guard. The guard had been unimpressed. “Inmates get sick. Shouldn’t commit crimes if they want better healthcare.”

“You could be facing an epidemic here,” Alex said, frustrated. “Tony was fine yesterday. Now he’s sick. Who knows who else will get sick. With something like this, it could be you.”

The guard shrugged. “This stuff never spreads to the guards. But, fine. I’ll get an aspirin.”

“They need a doctor.”

“Next Tuesday, doctor come.”

“Next Tuesday, they both could be dead.”

The guard shrugged again.

Sara wasn’t any more help. “I’m trying,” she said when she and Alex met at the fence. “I’ve talked to the people at the American Embassy. I’m trying to get in contact with a dozen different civil rights groups. I’ve got an appointment with the warden for tomorrow. I’m doing what I can, Alex.”

“I’m sure you are,” he said. “But it’s not enough. He’s getting worse.” Alex rubbed his eyes. He felt lost. Hopeless. If Michael died, he had no idea how he was going to survive. “Look. Call the FBI. Ask for Richard Sullins or Felicia Lang. Tell them it’s about me. Tell them.... tell them I really need a favor, and I’ll do anything.”

Sara nodded. “Is there one you trust over the other?”

“Felicia.” Alex shook his head. Rubbed the back of his neck. “Felicia I think will help. Sullins has more power, though. More authority.”

“Well, then. It’ll be up to her to convince him. You have her number?”

Alex nodded and rattled it off from memory.

Before she left, Sara grabbed the fence. Reached in for his hand. “Take care of yourself.”

He gave her a facsimile of a smile. “I’ll try.”

He past six obviously ill inmates on his way back to the cell. One was puking up his guts on the hot, dusty dirt. Another was huddled in a corner, face hidden, moaning about the light. The others were
listless, glassy eyed, sweating, and pale.

“Tony,” Alex said when he got back. He crouched beside the boy. Shook him. “Time for some water. Wake up.”

Nothing.

“Tony.” He shook harder.

Tony’s head lolled to the side. His body flopped as if he had no muscles.

He knew. Even without checking for a pulse or listening for his breath, Alex knew. Tony was gone.

He swallowed back the sour tang of defeat. His eyes remained ruthlessly dry. He couldn’t give in. Couldn’t care. Couldn’t... or else he’d go insane.

Michael was breathing. Raspy, shallow breaths. Alex wet him down. Forced water into him. Held him. Michael’s body was an inferno and Alex was sweating profusely with the contact.

He didn’t care. Michael was the only thing he had left to hold on to.

“Your boy’s got it, too, huh?” the hated drawl greeted him, drawing Alex out of the stupor he’d sunken in to.

Alex blinked. Looked at T-Bag, who was standing in the doorway, lounging against the bars. He looked, of course, perfectly healthy.

“This thing is spreading like wildfire. Everywhere you look, men is going down. Seen it happen before. Some dirty foreigner gets thrown into prison, next thing you know, bam! Neck pain, stiffness, fever. And everyone gets lined up for their meningitis shot.” T-Bag clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. Shook his head. “Not here. Lots of vermin have to die before they gonna do anything about it.”

“Go away, T-Bag.”

“You might as well let me have him. He won’t even know.”

Alex set Michael down and slid from behind him. Fists clenched, he stalked to the other man. “You’re inoculated, so what? You want me to kill you with my bare hands?”

He got that snake-like grin in return. “Boy. I cannot wait until the population consists of you, me, and a handful of others. We will have our fun then.” He licked his lips, glanced over at Michael, then turned and left.

Alex went back to bed.

Lunch came and went. Dinner. A couple more men died, judging by the shouts. A riot started somewhere, spread. Alex didn’t join. Stayed in the cell, using a spare mattress to barricade the door. Tony’s body lay moldering in the corner.

And still he hung on to Michael.

Until, finally, Michael stirred. “Lincoln?”

“Lincoln. Where is he? Did they... did they get the chair working? I tried... to stop...”

“You did. Michael, Lincoln’s fine. He’s alive. You got him out. He’s fine.”

Michael squeezed his eyes shut. His face crumpled in despair. “Lin.”

“Michael, it’s Alex. Babe, come on. Look at me.” He tapped Michael’s face. “Open your eyes, dammit!”

Michael opened his eyes. Blinked blurrily at Alex. “Alex,” he muttered. “Like... like you’re in my mind.” He inhaled sharply, pain on his face. Trembled violently.

Then, he was still.

“Michael. Michael!” He shook the other man. “Michael!” Hit him. Bit him. Shook and punched and screamed and curse until all he could do was hold the other man and sob.

* * *

Alex sat up, heart pounding. Sweat beaded at his temples, rolled down his face. His stomach twisted and, for a truly terrifying moment, he was afraid he was going to throw up.

The dream clung to him like a shadow. Michael, dead. Tony, dead. Everyone dead and help arriving too late.

Michael lay on the bed. The moonlight flooded through the window, illuminating his face. Pale and still.

Heart in his throat, Alex reached out. Placed his hand on Michael's chest.

His heart beat steadily under Alex's hand. Air filled his lung, in and out. Slowly and surely.

Thank God.

Alex let out a sigh. Ran his hand up to Michael's forehead. Felt.

The fever had gone down. Maybe. If touch was to be believed. Alex had stopped trusting it hours ago. Whenever he felt Michael's forehead, he always seemed to be burning up. Burning hotter. He was convinced it was well above dangerous, but then Michael had woken and been coherent for awhile.

Of course, he'd gone to sleep soon after, but... but that was okay. Sleep was what he needed.

Alex hated this place. With every fiber of his being. After Sara had returned with more supplies, Alex had flat out told the guard he'd gotten the bag from that he suspected Michael had meningitis. Instead of doing something to stop an epidemic from sweeping through the prison, he'd gotten a shrug and a vague promise to get a doctor in the next day.

If Michael really did have meningitis, half the prison could be dead the next day. Sonofabitch spread fast. Of course, Alex was fairly sure Michael didn't have it. He was just dropping disease names, hoping to get someone in. Anyone.

Michael stirred. Moaned softly. His eyes fluttered.

"Michael?"

"Yeah?"
"You awake?"

He exhaled. Yawned. "Maybe." His face scrunched up. He rubbed his forehead. "My head hurts."

"Sorry."

Michael opened his eyes. Licked his lips. "I have to pee."

Alex sat up and held out an arm. "Come on."

He helped Michael sit up, then to his feet. Michael wavered for a moment, hand clamped hard on Alex's shoulder.

"You're not going to make it to the bathroom," Alex said. "We put a bucket in the corner, just in case."

Michael's nose wrinkled. "Don't make me do that, Alex. Please."

He said nothing. Allowed Michael to take a few shuffling steps toward the cell doors. Stop. Wince.

"Fine. Bucket."

Alex allowed himself the luxury of a small, smug smile. This time, he wrapped his arm around Michael's waist. Took as much of Michael's weight as he could, even though it wasn't as if he'd hurt his ankles. He was just tired and achy.

Michael's cheeks turned crimson as Alex steadied him in front of the bucket. Even though it was nothing he hadn't seen, Alex looked away as Michael relieved himself. Hummed softly.

"Okay," Michael finally said. "I'm done."

"That wasn't so bad, was it?"

There was no response. Together, they shuffled back to the bed, Michael groaning as he sat back down.

"Where's Tony?"

"Digging. I wasn't sure how safe it would be, but he insisted. He said he didn't want to sit here and worry, that he wanted to do something. So, he went." Alex stuck his hand in the food back and pulled out an orange. He began to peel it.

Michael closed his eyes and leaned against the wall. "He should be okay. He won't get so deep that the ceiling will cave on him. I don't think. And I don't think anyone's figure out that we're going over there. So." He sighed. "I mean, he won't be in any more danger that he would be over here. I mean, when he's not with us."

"Probably not." He handed Michael an orange slice. "You feeling any better?"

Michael shrugged a shoulder. "Don't know. I don't feel as shivery as I did. Maybe my fever's gone done. I feel like crap, though." He opened his eyes. "No one else has caught whatever I have, have they?"

"Not that I know of. I'm keeping my eye on Tony, though.

"Is it from crawling in the sewers?"
"I don't know, Michael. I told one of the guards you had meningitis, trying to see if we could get a doctor in. He said maybe tomorrow. Sara's trying, too. Offering her services. If she talks to the right people, maybe she'll be able to make something happen."

Michael wrinkled his nose. Accepted another orange slice. "This is a mess."

"It was never not one."

"I know." He finished the orange. Rubbed his head. "My head hurts."

"You said that. You took Tylenol earlier. Not sure how much earlier, though. The sun was just going down." He looked at his wrist, even though he knew there was no watch. Just a force of habit that he couldn't get rid of. "Sara gave us four. Want to take the rest? I'm sure you'll be fine."

Michael took another orange slice. Chewed it, then nodded. "Okay."

Alex dug in the bag for the medicine. Passed it over to Michael.

Michael took it and gulped down half a bottle of water with it. Then, after wiping the back of his mouth, he gulped down the rest. "I feel disgusting. Wish I could take a shower."

"Good luck. I'm not carrying you."

"I know." He sighed. Moved so he could lean against Alex, head resting on Alex's shoulder. "When I was a kid, when I'd get sick, Mom would draw me these baths. We had a great bathtub. Deep, long. She'd fill it up with warm bubble water, bring in music. I'd stay in there until the water got cold, just relaxing. Feeling all my muscles unknotted until I felt better. Not great, but so much better." He sighed.

Alex slipped his arm around Michael. "I wish I could draw you a bath. Wouldn't be the same, though."

"I know." Michael snuggled closer. "It's been a long since I had that. Lincoln tried a few times, but he never got it right. None of my foster parents could be bothered. If I was sick, I had to stay in bed, that was that. They'd bring in the TV, but that wasn't what I wanted. When I was sick, I was sick, you know? I couldn't concentrate on anything."

He kissed the top of Michael's head. "Tell you what. The moment we get out of here, I will draw you the warmest, deepest, most bubbled bath you've ever had. I'll even get in there with you, make sure you don't fall asleep."

Michael smiled. "I think I like that." He found Alex's hand. Threaded their fingers.

Alex squeezed Michael's hand. "You should eat something else. We've got an MRE that says chicken and dumplings on it. Might be kind of like chicken soup."

"Might be similar to food, too."

"Ah, they're not that bad. Better than the crap this place is giving us." Alex got up and went to their stash of MREs. As he walked back, something occurred to him. "You think you might have picked up something from the food?"

Blurry, red-rimmed eyes looked at him. "Maybe. Except I'm not vomiting and I don't have diarrhea. And you guys have been eating the same stuff and aren't sick."
"Tony's probably used to it by now. I was sick the other day." He ripped open the package and set up the flameless heater. "Maybe it just hit you harder. You've been under a lot of stress."

"Really? I hadn't noticed." He was shivering again, rubbing his arms and his hands together. "I can't be sick. We need to get out of here."

"Maybe you getting sick will be our ticket out."

Michael didn't even crack a smile. He looked desolate. Hopeless.

Alex swallowed his sigh. Leaving the MRE where it was, he crawled over to Michael. Straddled his legs and took Michael's face in his hands. "Don't do this to yourself," he said. He leaned forward. Kissed Michael lightly once. Again. Rested their foreheads together. "Whatever you're thinking, stop it. You're not helping yourself."

"I feel like crap. I feel like I'm dying."

"You aren't dying."

"Come on, Alex. The chances of…"

"You engineered one of the greatest prison breaks in history. You evaded federal agents and a company so connected, they got a president into the White House without much trouble. You out thought me. You did all that, and this is not how you're going to end. You are not going to die in some Panamanian prison, Michael. You hear me?"

Michael sniffed.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yeah," he whispered. "I hear you."

"Good." Alex kissed him again. "You're going to eat. Then, I'm going to give you a sponge bath, and you're going to go back to sleep. Tomorrow, when you wake up, you'll feel better. There will be a doctor who will give you some pills, and you'll get even better. And, in a couple days, you'll be back to digging. Got it?"

"Got it."

He pressed their lips together one more time before pulling away. The meal was ready, so he lifted it from the heater and handed it to Michael.

Michael was giving him a kind of goofy smile.

"What?"

"A sponge bath?"

Alex grinned. Licked his lips and ran his eyes over Michael's body. "Just call me Nurse Mahone. Eat."

Michael obeyed.

* * *

Being sick had its perks. Oh, he felt like something stuck to the bottom of a shoe, and he just wanted to curl into a ball and die (which he probably would any moment now). But, on the other hand, Alex
was being nice to him. Not just nice. Attentive.

Michael kind of liked that.

He'd managed to eat most of the main meal of the MRE and a few bites of a side before his stomach had cramped up. By that time, Alex had heated water using the flameless heater and had set up a kind of bath.

And now, he was bathing Michael.

Michael sat on some sheets Alex had spread on the floor. He was stripped to his boxers, shivering, even though he knew he wasn't really cold. He felt cold, though. That sick kind of cold that started as heat deep inside before bubbling to the surface and causing you to break out in goose bumps. Where you felt hot and cold and twisted up until you didn't know what you should be feeling. Skin on fire, ice just beneath.

Alex was taking care of the fire, though. He was sitting, pressed against Michael, his bare chest to Michael's bath. Sara had brought washcloths, thick, clean. Alex had wet one and lathered it with soap. He drew the cloth up Michael's arm. Over his shoulder and his neck. Scrubbed at the sweat and grime that had collected during the day. Down his chest, circling his nipples.

Michael shivered. Let his head fall back on Alex's shoulder.

"Feel good?" Alex asked, lips brushing Michael's ear.

"Yeah."

Alex rewet the cloth. Squeezed out the soap, then traced the same path. "How you feeling?"

"Sore."

"Anywhere specific?"

"Back. Arms."

Alex kissed his neck. "How's your neck?"

"It's fine. It hasn't hurt since I woke up."

"And your head?"

Michael wrinkled his nose.

Alex laughed. Kissed Michael's mouth softly. "I know an excellent way to relieve headaches." The cloth slide lower. Wet the top of Michael's underwear.

He sighed. Felt himself relaxing against Alex. Melting.

"You going to stay awake for me?"

He made a noise in his throat. "Do whatever you want. I'm good for it."

"Mmmmm," Alex murmured. He scrubbed across Michael's stomach. "I could do all sorts of things to your body. All kinds. Conscious or un."

"Go right ahead. It's yours."
"You are such a whore."

"Just for you," he said, even though that wasn't true. Hadn't been true in the past, at any rate. When he'd used his body as a commodity, just one more tool in his arsenal to get what he wanted.

Now it was different. Now he knew.

Alex kissed Michael's neck. Brought the washcloth up to wash under Michael's arm. "Hmm," he said.

"What?"

"You have a rash. Hard to see, but it's there." Alex tossed the washcloth back into the bucket. "Turn around."

Michael groans, but pulls away from Alex. Turns.

"There. All across your stomach. And your back. And your arms. Didn't notice it before because of the tattoo."

"Sorry."

Alex shot him a smoldering look. "If you ever get rid of the tattoo, I will hunt you down and tear out your liver."

"My liver?"

"Or, I'll take out your heart. With a spoon."

Michael smiled. "I knew you only wanted me for my tattoo."

Alex crawled to Michael. Kissed him. Deep, licking at his lips until Michael opened them. Massaging and stroking and… and different than before. Because Michael was too tired to have sex and he wasn't even getting hard, but he couldn't stop kissing Alex. Couldn't stop his hands from clawing at Alex's shirt, holding him. Stop his feet from stroking up and down Alex's legs.

Maybe it was because he was sick. Or maybe he was just tired of pretending. But right here, right now with Alex's mouth on his and Alex's hands stroking him, Michael could admit it: he was falling in love with this man.

"Alex!" Tony's breathless voice came. "Oh! Sorry. I come back."

Alex pulled away from Michael. It felt as if they were being torn apart, and it hurt. Michael couldn't stop the whimper, nor the shudders that broke out over his body as a fresh route of overheated coldness swept over him.

"No, Tony, it's fine. We were just… It's fine. You okay?"

Tony stood just inside the cell door, the sheet behind him. A furious blush darkened his features. He looked down at his feet. "I okay. Michael, you okay?"

"Yeah." He cleared his throat and sat up. "I'm… better than I was. I was just trying to clean up a bit." He crawled shakily back onto the sheet. Pulled the washcloth from the bucket and started washing.
"Oh. I see," Tony said with a wide, knowing smirk.

"Shut it, kid." Alex had risen to his feet. He went to Tony and cuffed him lightly on the head. "What's that?"

Tony held up a black, iron bar. "This fall off. Of a cell. Window. I look out, just to see. Feed a rat, make sure no one watching. Different window, ground floor. I hold onto bar so I can see, pull myself with it. And it break off."

Michael's mouth fell open. "Are you kidding me?"

"No. See?" He waved it towards Michael.

"No, I know. I mean, I see it. Just… I never thought to check the windows. It didn't even occur to me." He shook his head. Rolled his eyes. "If we can get out the window, then we don't need to dig. The problem isn't getting out of the building, then. All we'd have to do is figure out how to get out of No Man's Land, which is a lot easier. Digging… let's face it, it was going to take forever to dig. If we can climb out, we can go as soon as we take out the fence."

"How do we do that?" Alex asked. He squeezed Tony's shoulder, then went back to Michael.

He shook his head, momentarily distracted when Alex took him by the wrist and began studying his arm. "I'm not sure. Um, if I can figure out how to blow the power, that might do it. But I don't know if the fence is on the same system without testing. And it's not something we should try without testing first."

Alex was looking at Michael's neck, now. Down his back, apparently studying the rash. Now that some of the grime had been washed away, Michael could tell the difference between the prickling of sweat and dirt and the itch of the rash.

"How you blow power?" Tony asked, obviously confused by the phrase.

"Blowing the power means to make it shut off from the source," Michael said. Then, still unsure if it was coming across, he translated into Spanish. "And I'm not sure. If we can get some a metal that won't conduct the electricity, I can use it to disrupt the power circuit. Then we can see if it affects the fence."

"Uh-uh. And when they find your disruptor and restore the power, we'll still be in here."

"Well. If something goes down once, it's more likely to a second time. Especially if we use an animal or something. Kill a rat, make the lines looked chewed, at least the second time. The first, it'll just look like a breaker failure or something. The second, a force of nature. And we'll be out then."

Alex sighed. Ran his hand down Michael's back, nails scratching lightly. Michael tried not to arch into it; it felt good.

"How are you going to find it?"

He shrugged. "Sewers?"

He sighed again. Stretched his neck, then shrugged. "We'll look into it once you feel better. There's no rush."

"Unless…"
"Stop it," Alex snapped. "Now. Tony, you need to sleep. Go to bed. Michael, you done with your bath?"

Michael ducked his head, a shiver wracking him. "Yeah. I think so. I'm itchy now. Thanks."

"You're blaming me?" Alex got the cloth again. After squeezing the last of the soap from it, he wet it and began to drag it down Michael's back. "I can't tell if it's a heat rash or something else." He scrubbed down Michael's arm, taking the last of the soap scum from it. "It looks like a heat rash, but… is it on your legs?"

Michael looked, but he couldn't tell.

"We'll look again once the sun is up. Okay." He took a final swipe, then tossed the cloth into the bucket. "I'll get you a clean shirt…"

Michael laughed.

"Cleanish shirt, and then it's back to bed."

"Yes, Mommy," Michael said meekly. As Alex went to the clothes, he crawled back to the bed. Tony was curled on the mattress he was now sharing with Alex so Michael could have more room to be miserable. It sucked. "How you feeling?" he asked as he lay back down.

Tony opened his eyes. "I fine. Not sick. You better?"

"I think so." He shivered.

"Here you go." Alex knelt next to Michael. Helped him on with the shirt. Between Michael's sore muscles from digging and just being sore from the sickness, it wasn't easy. But, they got the shirt on and Michael back in bed. Comfortable.

Sort of.

"What?" Michael said when Alex moved away. "No good-night kiss?"

"Bitch, bitch, bitch." Alex leaned back over. Kissed him, long and lingering.

Michael grabbed his hand. "Don't go too far."

Alex rolled his eyes, but a soft, amused expression was on his face. He stretched out in the space between Michael and Tony's bodies. Kissed the top of Michael's head and then closed his eyes. Their heads were resting together, fingers interlaced.

His skin prickled and burned. Shivers wracked his body every couple minutes as his blood boiled and froze. Despite the fact he'd been sleeping all day, he was exhausted. Almost too exhausted to sleep. But, lying next to Alex, feeling his warmth and listening to him breath, Michael found himself drifting away.

He was so incredibly fucked.
Chapter 15

Alex woke with at the breakfast bell. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, watching as the morning rush of cons stumbled their way through the hall. Then, he yawned and lay back down. He spooned up behind Michael and pressed his face against the back of his neck.

Michael was still burning up. His breathing was rapid, shallow and pulse had increased again.

With a soft groan, Alex pulled away. He stumbled around the cell until he found the bucket of water he’d used for Michael's sponge bath. Dipped a tee shirt in it, and came back to the bed. He wiped Michael's face with it before draping the wet shirt over him. Then, exhausted from everything, Alex lay back down and closed his eyes.

The next thing he knew, a loud alarm unlike anything he'd heard since arriving was blaring. Men were shouting, running through the halls.

Tony was on his feet in one movement. Eyes wide, panicked breathing.

"What is it?" Alex asked, shouting to be heard over the noise.

"Count! They come in with guns. Clear us all out. Into the yard. Fast!"

The ancient sound system crackled. A stern voice shouted something in Spanish over it, fading in and out.

Tony pointed at the ceiling. "They say two minutes." He looked down at Michael. "He not even awake."

"How bad is it if we don't get out?"

"Bad. They beat you and drag you out. Make example."

Of course. Dammit.

"Come on. You'll have to help me get him out." Alex went over to Michael. Shook him. "Michael. Babe, wake up."

Michael moaned softly. Squeezed his eyes shut tight, rubbing them and then scrubbing at his face. "What's that noise?" he asked, wincing as the light hit his eyes.

"Alarm. We need to go out the yard for count."

"Count? Since when do they do count?" His face scrunched up as Tony and Alex helped him to his feet. He leaned heavily against Alex, looking exhausted.

"Since today. Come on."

"They do it when need us all in one place," Tony said, trying to help support Michael. He was a little too short and a little too thin to do much good. "Not often, just sometime. Riots, too many fights."

"What prompted it now?"

Tony just shrugged.
They moved slowly. Michael was clearly trying his best, but he'd barely moved in over a day. He was stiff and sore and tired. Just walking was exhausting him.

By the time they were halfway down the cell block, it was completely devoid of people. They were the last ones, and Alex really hoped they made it out in time. He wrapped his arm around Michael tighter. Dragged him faster, forcing Michael to move, push through the exhaustion and just get out there.

"Tony," Alex said. "Go ahead of us. Don't…"

"We almost there," Tony snapped back. He was moving fast, pulling Michael along.

"I don't want…"

"I not leave." His face screwed up and he gripped Michael tighter.

"Sorry," Michael gasped. "I shouldn't…"

"Don't," Alex snapped. "We don't have time for you to fall over yourself apologizing for being sick."

"Right."

One turn. Down the hall. A right. And there it was. A few more steps and they emerged from the dimness of the cell block to the blinding light of the day. They were all out there. Kneeling in the dirt in ragged rows, hands behind their head. Raoul and Arturo, T-Bag and Luis and Santos and … everyone. Around them were guards, assault rifles at the ready, pacing the rows and glaring.

Raoul was near the end of the row they were closest to. He looked awful. He had the same pale, glassy-eyed look Michael had been sporting. He was awake, but looked confused. He was coughing, too, and looked miserable.

Well. Now they knew where Michael had gotten it.

"You! Gringos! Here," one of them shouted, pointing at the ground.

Michael managed to muster up some strength, because, suddenly, he wasn't leaning on Alex quite so much. They made the last few feet. Alex tried to help Michael down, but he just dropped. Winced as his knees cracked against the hard packed dirt.

Alex and Tony exchanged looks before taking position on either side of Michael. They both assumed the correct position. Michael looked like he was wilting. He shivered violently under the sun, hands on his neck, arms drooping at his sides. His eyes were narrow slits and sweat beaded on his pasty pale forehead.

One of the guards turned his head and shouted to someone. A moment later, a man walked over. Slow, measured steps of boots in the dust. Boots that led up to military fatigues and then to a weathered face. A bald head surrounded by grizzled grey hair. Narrowed eyes with deep wrinkles around.

The warden. It seemed like years since he'd processed their paperwork. He looked down at them with a sort of frustration on his face.

"So," he said. "You are the one who is causing all this problems."
Michael's head lolled to one side, and he squinted up at the man. "Sorry," he rasped.

The man's lips twitched. He shook his head. "First, you disrupt order by coming in, fighting. Killing. We separate you from your lover. Then, you become valuable property men fight over, and find him again." He kicked dirt in Alex's direction. "Now? The American Embassy is knocking on our door. Civil rights groups are flying in from out of country, ready for a fight. All because of one sick little gringo."

Alex clenched his teeth, trying to restrain himself from lunging at the man. Rage bubbled beneath the surface, and he wanted nothing more than to wring this man's neck. He allowed his prison to run like this, to hand out food that was barely edible, to encourage an atmosphere of violence and stress, and then, when someone got seriously ill, blamed them?

The man glanced at his guards. "Bring him and the two others. Anyone else showing sickness will be quarantined on the upper level until we know what it is. Set up a sick room."

"Si, Senor," one said. He turned to the rest and shouted orders.

A couple of the larger guards came over and pulled Michael to his feet. Alex winced in sympathy as Michael's face screwed up, teeth sinking into his lower lip. He moved towards them, but was stopped by a rifle shoved into his face.

"On your feet," the man behind the rifle barked.

He rose, eyes on the rifle. Submitted to being cuffed, then shoved. He stumbled, but quickly got his footing.

They made their way to the front gate, then out into No Man's Land. They shuffled across the dry dirt, kicking up clouds of dust.

The march to the guard's office was interminable. It was early, but the sun was already blazing through thick, humid air. Sweat stood out on Alex's skin and refused to evaporate. The cuffs bit at his wrists, but he barely noticed for the hard knot of anxiety in his stomach.

Years seemed to pass before they stepped inside the slightly cooler air of the guard building. Fans decorated every surface, whirling furiously. The air smelled like dust, bleach, coffee, and just the faintest whiff of shit. The complete opposite of the prison.

They were led to a small room with no windows. The air inside was stale, but cool. There were a few chairs, a table, and a cot with a bare mattress. Michael was tossed onto the cot while Alex and Tony given the chairs.

As soon as he was lying down, Michael rolled onto his side. Pulled his legs to his body and squeezed his eyes shut. Beads of sweat rolled down the side of his face. His breathing was rapid and shallow, and Alex was worried that this was going to set him back in whatever recovery he may have been making.

The man in charge stood over the cot. He glanced at a guard and barked something in Spanish. The guard nodded, saluted, and left.

"I never caught your name before," Alex said.

"My name is General Zavala. I am in charge of this prison."

"Really? Well, bang-up job you're doing."
The general smiled thinly. "You have a problem with the way the prison is run? Perhaps you and your American friends who've been causing so much trouble can get funding to run the prison to your satisfaction."

Alex rolled his eyes. "I want to make sure my friend's okay." He started rising to his feet.

All the rifles in the room were suddenly trained on him.

He froze. Looked at the General.

The other man studied him a moment, then nodded. "At ease," he told his men.

The rifles lowered.

Alex went to the bed. His hands were cuffed in front of him, which was inconvenient in that it gave him limited movement, but it was better than having his hands behind him. He knelt down next to the cot and put his hand on Michael's shoulder.

"Hey. You all right?"

Michael opened his eyes a crack. "Fine. My eyes hurt."

"Is it your eyes or your head?"

"I don't know anymore." He closed his eyes again.

The door opened. Alex looked up to see Sara walk in. She was carrying a suitcase in one hand and a sports bag in the other. With her was a man who just screamed "government lackey" and Alex assumed he was from the embassy. He was carrying a bag as well. They were surrounded by guards, guns out, and both had a pinched expression on their faces.

Sara met Alex's eyes and gave him a small smile. Her face was pale and there were bags under her eyes. Apparently, she'd gotten just as much sleep as he had.

"Hi, Alex," she said, setting the sports bag on the end of the cot. Her voice was calm, soothing, as if they weren't surrounded by armed guards. Of course, she was probably used to it.

"Hi, Sara. Thanks for coming."

Her smile deepened and she nodded. "This is Simon Caldwell. He works at the American Embassy and was able to negotiate with the General here."

"Mr. Caldwell," Alex said with a nod.

He received a nod back before Caldwell began speaking quietly to Zavala.

Sara pulled an empty chair to the opposite side of the cot. Pulled the sport's bag nearer to her. "Hey, Michael. How are you feeling this morning?" She touched him gently on the arm before turning her attention to the bag, unzipping it and pulling things out.

Michael rolled onto his back. "Why are you here?"

"Because you need a doctor and there isn't one available to the prison. Not like you need. General Zavala was generous enough to let me come in and check you out." She pulled a thermometer from the bag and slipped a cover over it. "Open up."
Michael squinched his face, but accepted the thermometer.

Sara reached out and put her hand on Michael's cheek. "Jesus. You really are hot."

"Mmmphmmmm."

"Don't talk." She reached back into her bag. This time she produced a stethoscope and a blood pressure cuff. "Have you been coughing anything up?" she asked as she put the cuff around Michael's arm.

He shook his head.

"Alex said you were coughing, though. So it's just a dry cough?"

He nodded.

"Vomiting, diarrhea?"

Another negative shake.

She place the stethoscope at the crook of Michael's elbow and began pumping. "How about your stomach. Does it hurt at all?"

This got a nod.

"Sharp pain?"

No.

"Kind of dull and persistent?"

Yes.

She nodded and made a noise in her throat. Checked the gage on the cuff and shook her head. "Your blood pressure is high, but it's always a little high with you. But your pulse is racing, too. Michael, you need to calm down." She smiled at him and stroked his head. "Just relax, okay? I know you're not happy that I'm here, but it's where I want to be. As your doctor. I'm not expecting or asking anything else from you. Do you understand?"

Michael closed his eyes and nodded.

"All right, then. Just take some slow, deep breaths. Relax." She demonstrated, squeezing his hand.

Michael opened his eyes again. They skittered from her to Alex.

Alex tilted his head and followed Sara's example. The deep breaths calmed him as well. Across the room, he could see Tony doing the same.

"Much better," Sara said. "Just breathe, Michael. Relax. There's nothing to get yourself all worked up about." She pulled the thermometer out.

Michael coughed dryly. "You might feel differently if you were in there."

She stroked his head. "Maybe. But you have to remember not to take everything so personally. To block some of it out." She looked at the thermometer. "Jesus," she swore under her breath. "General, I need a bucket of water, preferably with ice, and a few cloths. And a fan if possible."
Zavala gestured to three of his men. They saluted and left.

"Sit up, Michael. We need to get your clothes off."

He covered his face and rolled away. "Please, don't."

"You have a hundred and three fever. We need to cool you down," Sara said, her voice calm and even. She had her hands under his shirt and tugged upwards. "Can you sit up?"

Michael tried to push himself up, but it was clear he was too shaky.

Alex slid behind him and helped to support him. "You cooperate with everything she says," Alex whispered in Michael's ear. "You got that?"

He squeezed his eyes, but nodded.

"Good." Alex kissed Michael's temple, then helped him remove his shirt. "You know, he's probably dehydrated. He's been sleeping so much, I haven't been able to get a whole lot of water into him."

She was looking at him with curiosity blended with amusement and a tinge of sadness. At his words, though, she kind of shakes herself. "Right. I am... I brought water and Gatorade for all of you. It's in the suitcase. Can you... Okay, look." She tossed Michael's shirt on the end of the bed and turned to the general. "You need to uncuff Alex. Michael is comfortable around him. I need his help. And I need all your men outside."

"These men are dangerous criminals," Zavala said.

"One of these men has a dangerously high fever. The other is an FBI agent. He's not going to do anything." She looked at Alex.

He shook his head. "My main concern is Michael," he said. "I swear, I'm not going to do anything."

The general considered, head tilted to one side. After a moment, he nodded.

A guard came forward. Unlocked the cuffs on Alex's wrists. As he rubbed them, he said, "What about Tony?" When Zavala just raised an eyebrow, he said, "He's sixteen years old."

Zavala rolled his eyes, but waved his hand. After the cuffs came off Tony, he said, "Anything else?"

Sara shook her head. "That's good for now." She looked back at Caldwell. "Can you start unpacking the food? I'm not sure if Michael can eat, but Tony and Alex look like they're starving."

Alex gave her a half smile. "You thought of everything, didn't you?"

"I tried." She picked the blood pressure cuff and stethoscope up. "Alex. I think Michael would be more comfortable if you finished undressing him. Just to his underwear."

"All right."

"Thanks." She turned and went to Tony, sinking down onto the chair next to him. "Hey, Tony. I'm Sara."

A furious blush raced up his cheeks. "Hello," he whispered.

Sara smiled. Pulled the thermometer from her pocket and slipped a new cover on it. "I just want to take your temperature and stuff. Make sure you're okay."
"Okay."

Alex turned back to Michael, who had fallen into a doze. He touched the sleeping man's cheek.

Michael started. Opened his eyes.

"Hey. You hanging in there?"

Michael licked his lips, which were cracked and dry. "Yeah. Just... this is kind of like a nightmare. Sort of."

"It could be worse. She could be your wife."

He laughed, but it dissolved into a flurry of harsh coughs. Alex stroked his back and looked back at the embassy man, who was pulling food and drink from the bag.

"Can you hand me one of the Gatorades?" he asked.

"Huh? Oh, yeah." He passed a red liquid filled bottle. "You're the FBI agent, right? There was an agent calling about you the other day. Said he might fly down."

"Did he leave his name?"

"Um... Sully or Sullins or something?"

His stomach twisted. "Sullins. Great." He turned back to Michael and helped him drink some of the sport's drink. "Let's get your pants off."

Michael lifted his hips and wiggled slightly. A blush stained his cheeks, but his mouth was downturn. Embarrassment at the situation rather than any kind of pleasure or anticipation. Alex promised himself that as soon as Michael is feeling better, he'll put that blush there honestly. Or whatever it's called when one screws someone into a beaming blush like he had before.

The door opened. Guards come in lugging a huge tub of water. Small pieces of ice floated on the top, sloshing over as they set it down.

"Gracias," Zavala said. "Now you can go outside."

"That's a lot bigger than I thought it would be," Sara said. She had her stethoscope around her neck and was standing next to Tony. One hand was on his bony shoulder as he chugged a bottle of Gatorade. The other hand held a foil wrapped something. "You know what? I think he can fit in that."

Alex eyed it, then eyed Michael. "Maybe. It'll be a tight fit."

"The more we can wet him down, the faster he'll cool," she pointed out. She handed the sandwich to Tony and went to the bed. "Michael? Come on. Let's get you in."

He groaned slightly, but sat up. When he got to his feet, he swayed, so Alex crawled over the cot to steady him.

"When was the last time you ate?" Sara asked as she and Alex helped Michael into the water.

From the way Michael hissed, shivers wracking his body, Alex guessed that the water was actually cold. He stuck his hand inside and shivered himself; not exactly ice cold, but cold enough to tingle. To Michael, it must be freezing.
Michael rubbed his face, clearing a streak of dirt and sweat across his forehead. "Um. I think I ate something this morning."

"He had some… food last night. Not a lot." It hadn't been a lot, although it'd been healthier than whatever they served in the so-called mess hall. However, it wouldn't be prudent to let the General know about their stash of rations, so he had to be vague.

"Are you feeling hungry?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I just feel weak and tired."

"It could be hunger. It could be the fever."

"I could be dying."

Alex pinched Michael's arm. "Stop that." He fished a cloth from the tub and began squeezing water over Michael's back and head.

Sara came over to the tub carrying a small plastic container and a spoon. "I didn't want to bring anything hot, because Alex said you were running a fever. Simon recommended this cucumber soup, which is cold. I had some last night. It's really good." She sat on the chair in front of Michael. Dipped the spoon into the soup.

"It's one of my favorite dishes," Caldwell said. He was standing across the room, next to the General, pressed against the wall. He looked everywhere but Michael when he spoke.

Alex snorted and rolled his eyes. He wasn't sure if Caldwell's discomfort stemmed from homophobia or what, but it wasn't helping the situation any. Michael could see him from the tub and was reacting to Caldwell's embarrassment by becoming embarrassed himself. His shoulders tightened and he kept hunching over.

"I can feed myself," Michael said, resting his chin on his knees.

"Doubt that," Sara replied calmly. "Your hands are shaking. Maybe after you've eaten some." She held the spoon out to Michael, offering the soup.

"Hey, Caldwell. Why don’t you go see where that fan is or something," Alex suggested.

"Oh, sure. Um, General?"

Zavala shook his head. "I told my men to bring it. It is on its way."

Caldwell visibly deflated at that news.

This seemed to clue Zavala in. Surprisingly, he shrugged and said, "But, Mr. Caldwell is welcome to look." He moved to the door and opened it.

"I'll be right back," Caldwell promised, practically fleeing the room.

Alex met Sara's eyes and rolled his own. He got a nod and a half-smile in return.

"You seem oddly unconcerned about the chances of an epidemic going through your prison," Sara remarked as she continued to feed Michael.

Zavala shrugged. "Every few months some sickness or another goes around. Sometimes, prisoners die. Sometimes, a lot of prisoners die. The government doesn't really care. This is where they send
the criminals who will never be released anyway."

Sara's cheeks turned red. Her eyes flared. "That is a sixteen year old boy. What could he have possibly done to earn him a life sentence?"

He gave another shrug. "Not having connections." He looked at Tony, head tilting to one side. Said something in Spanish.

Tony swallowed a huge bite of the empanada he was eating. Ducked his head as he said, "Robé algún dinero. Y un coche."

His eyes narrowed. "¿Cómo te llamas?"

"Tony. Anthony Morales Cruz."

Zavala nodded. "I'll leave you to your healing, Doctor, if you trust these men."

Sara looked surprised. She nodded. "I'll be fine."

"Knock on the door if you need anything. The fan will be here shortly." With that, he left, closing and locking the door behind him.

"Well, that was unexpected. What did he ask you?" Sara asked Tony.

He shrugged and came across the room, sitting gingerly on the cot. "What I in for."

"He doesn't know?"

"I never seen him before."

"What about when you were processed?" Alex asked. He rewet the cloth and draped it on Michael's neck. The smell of the food was beginning to make his head spin. It'd been awhile since he'd eaten, so he went to the bag with the food and dug something out. He just grabbed the first object he found and unwrapped it. He was almost finished with it before the taste hit him: meat and vegetables, all fresh and sprinkled with some kind of spices. It was delicious.

"I not processed. They bring me in and that is all," Tony said. He slid off the cot, took the cloth from Michael's neck, and began squeezing water over his chest.

"Where's Lincoln?" Michael asked. He took the spoon from Sara and began feeding himself.

"He's at the hotel. We got his paperwork cleared up, but it didn't seem prudent to bring him to the prison. Besides, he needs rest. He hasn't been sleeping well."

"Poor baby," Alex drawled.

"I'm sorry, Alex, would you rather he be here? In a prison with his sick baby brother, a warden who is content to let Michael die because that's what happens here, and, let's not forget, in a small interrogation room with the man who killed his father and is currently sleeping with aforementioned baby brother," she said acidly.

During her tirade, Alex could feel his face heat. The food he was eating turned to a soggy lump in his stomach and he could no longer meet her eyes. "Um. No, I guess... I guess it's better he's not here." He rubbed his hands together. Reached for Michael's bottle of Gatorade and rolled it in his hand. "Sorry."
She closed her eyes and let out a slow breath. "Me, too."

There was an awkward silence. Michael's head was bowed, cheek resting on his knee, facing away from them. He was still shivering and goose bumps had broken all up and down his skin.

Alex cleared his throat. "Do you think you should take his temperature again?"

"Maybe in a few minutes. Not right after he eats. Michael, why don't you drink some more?"

Michael sat up. Took the Gatorade from Alex and finished it off. "Has he heard from LJ?"

"Um, yeah. He talked to him the other night. They're discussing whether or not LJ should come down with the woman who's looking out for him."

"And the Company?" Alex asked.

She shrugged. "We haven't heard from them. Not since…" The rest of the sentence died on her lips, but the words, "the day Bill Kim died" hung in the air.

"Not like there's much we can do anymore," Michael said. "Rotting in this hellhole."

"True. Although Lincoln did talk to that Sullins guy Caldwell was talking about. They're trying to mount a case against the Company and asked for whatever information Lincoln had on them. They'll probably want to talk to the two of you."

Alex shook his head. "That's just… great," he said.

Michael shifted in the tub. Moved a few inches until he could lower his head and rest against Alex's knee.

He reached out and stroked Michael's head. Felt the wet locks and reminded himself for the millionth time that they needed to cut it. Ran his hand down Michael's neck. For the first time in two days, he felt… well. Not cool, but he wasn't burning up anymore.

"Keep doing what you're doing in your free time," Sara said. She set the empty soup tub aside. Got the blood pressure cuff from the cot and wrapped it around Michael's arm. "I think that, ultimately, it's better for you to do something that feels productive. That gives you hope." She said you, but Alex heard the implied him. Michael was the one who needed to feel they were making some progress. Feel that there might be an end to this nightmare.

He traced the shell of Michael's ear. "Could this be mainly psychological? I mean, he's sick. He caught whatever this is from someone we were sharing a cell with. But the severity of it…"

"It's possible," Sara answered. "Blood pressure's gone down a bit. Pulse is normal." She draped the stethoscope around her neck and set the cuff aside. "I need to check you over, too. Michael, open your mouth."

He did, and Sara slipped the thermometer into his mouth.

"I'm going to take some blood from all three of you. The embassy put me in contact with a doctor who's working out of one of the hospitals. He said he'd be willing to run whatever tests I needed."

"For how much?"

She smiled wryly. "Doesn't matter. All my father's estates and money have been turned over to me. I'm officially rolling in it."
Alex nodded. Ran his fingernails through Michael's hair. "Congratulations. And, my condolences."

"Thanks." She stretched and rose from her chair. "I brought a change of clothes for all three of you. Underwear, socks, shoes. Michael really needs to stop wearing long sleeved shirts. It's too hot, and he's not doing well."

"People will look at the tattoos," Michael mumbled around the thermometer. "They cause too much attention."

Sara crossed her arms over her chest and looked down at him. "I'm sorry, but you need to keep yourself cool. I have no doubt that the shirt contributed to your fever. That, stress, lack of food. This is a perfect storm of everything bad. I'm sure Alex is trying to keep you distracted from everything going on around you, and I know you have some kind of food, but you notice everything and whatever they're giving you is nutritionally deficient. We can control your comfort somewhat by dressing you cooler."

"I'll sunburn."

"I brought sun block." She checked her watch and took the thermometer out. "Much better. We'll keep you in another fifteen minutes, then you can get out. How are you feeling?"

Michael closed his eyes. Took a deep breath. Lifted his head from Alex's knees and rolled it back and forth a few times. "Better. Still tired, but my mind's clearer."

She smiled. "Good. How about you have some more water and something else to eat?"

"Okay." He hesitated, then smiled shyly. "Thanks."

Her smile turned bittersweet. Sara put her hand on Michael's shoulder. Squeezed. Before she let go, something passed over her face and she looked at Alex.

He'd been trying very hard not to feel guilty over what had happened between Michael and himself. It hadn't been something he could help. He and Michael needed each other in here, needed the other on a deep, primal level Alex had never experienced.

He'd never meant for it to be emotional. He'd never meant to fall in love with Michael. But, right now, stuck in this tiny room with the woman who'd given up everything for Michael, he had to admit the truth: he was falling in love with this man. And he didn't want to give him up.

* * *

"Ah, no, bastard!" someone said, laughing at the same time.

There was some shifting. The sound of something being placed down.

"Changed color on me. Too bad for you, Sara."

"You have got to be kidding me!"

"Draw another two." Alex. He sounded smug.

"I swear, you're cheating. I just can't figure out how."

Michael shifted on the cot, letting the sound of conversation fade away. He kept his eyes closed, taking stock. Feeling his body, poking around in his mind right now when he couldn't see anything that would distract him.
He felt better. A lot better. Less stuffy and overwhelmed by that frozen-fevered blood sensation. For the first time in forever, he wasn't shivering. The pain in his head had receded and he could think again. His arms weren't quite as sore. Nor his legs. Maybe he wasn't dying after all.

"Uno," Tony said, breaking into Michael's self-assessment.

He rolled onto his side and opened his eyes.

Sara, Alex, and Tony were sitting on the floor. Sara had a ton of cards in her hand, while Alex had considerably less. Tony had one. On the floor between them were two sloppy stacks of cards.

Michael hated sloppy stacks of cards. He always put them in neat stacks, constantly neatening as he played. People hated playing cards with him for that reason.

Alex shook his head. "Damn. Well. Red." He set a card down.

"Oh my God!" Sara wailed, head falling back. "How the hell did you get all the Wild Draw Four cards? Dammit!" She punched him on the shoulder, then drew her cards.

"Luck of the draw, dear doctor. Luck of the draw."

"Yeah, right." She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Tony?"

Tony beamed. "I have red!" He set his card down. "I woned, yes?"

"You won, yes. Because he cheated."

"I did not cheat," Alex protested. "You're just a sore loser."

"You lost, too."

"Want to keep going? I'll beat you honestly."

Michael's stomach rumbled suddenly. And very loudly.

Sara looked up. Her eyes crinkled and her smile softened. "Look who's finally up. How you feeling?" She rose and came over to the cot.

"Better," Michael said, voice creaky with disuse. He pushed himself to a sitting position and leaned against the wall for support. "How long was I sleeping?"

"A couple hours. Open."

He complied, allowing her to stick the thermometer back into his mouth.

"Alex, you want to get Michael something to eat?" she asked while she slid the blood pressure cuff around Michael's shoulder.

"Sure thing." He placed his hand on Michael's shoulder as he passed the cot and smiled.

Michael smiled back, around the thermometer. Alex hasn't looked so relaxed in days. Not since before Michael got sick. Maybe not ever in prison. There was an ease to him right now. His shoulders were lose, arms swung at his sides. There were even smile lines around his eyes and the corners of his mouth.

Something inside Michael unknotted. Seeing Alex like this made it easier to breathe somehow.
"You know how to play Uno, Michael?" Tony asked. He had the stack of cards in his hands and he shuffled them slowly.

He nodded.

Tony grinned. "I like it. Is fun game."

"He's good at it, too," Sara said, ruffling Tony's hair. "He's won three games."

Michael lightly cuffed Tony, who blushed.

Sara took the thermometer. "And you are officially under a hundred degrees. I think you're on the mend." She ran her hand over Michael's head. "Your blood pressure is down, too. I'm still going to need a blood sample, just to make sure that there's not anything serious."

Alex handed him a bottle of water and a tortilla wrapped around something. He sat on the cot next to Michael. Kissed his cheek. "You feeling better?"

"Yeah," Michael said. He leaned back against Alex and closed his eyes. "Sorry I've been so much trouble."

Alex didn't answer. He just put his arms around Michael and held him.

"I should probably take those blood samples and get going. I don't want to wear out my hospitality with the General."

"Are you going to come back?" Michael asked, opening his eyes again.

She nodded as she pulled a kit and some gloves out of the sports bag. "The General said I'll be able to continue coming until you're better. Probably not for as long as today, but I don't think you'll need me." She opened the leather kit. Inside were some vials, needles, and latex ties.

His stomach turned. It wasn't needles he disliked. Obviously. He'd sat through the tattoo without flinching, not to mention every injection of unneeded insulin back at Fox River.

He just wasn't thrilled with the thought of Sara taking blood. Here. In disease-ville.

But he didn't say anything. Allowed her to wipe down the crook of his arm, tie the latex on his biceps, and drew the blood.

"So. I believe the General said the three of you would stay here tonight. He didn't say whether whatever this is has spread, but I know he wants to keep it contained."

"At least one other person has it," Alex said, watching over Michael's shoulder. "Raoul, a man we were staying with, is sick. I think he gave it to Michael."

Sara nodded. Untied the latex strapped. "I think it's just a strain of the flu or something. Maybe food borne, maybe something else. I don't think it's serious, but..."

The door opened. General Zavala came in, carrying a clipboard and pen.

"Boy. Sign bottom." He shoved the clipboard at Tony.

Tony dropped the Uno cards. Frowned down at the clipboard, eyes scanning.
"Sign it," Zavala snapped.

Eyes wide, Tony did.

He took it back from Tony. Signed a line, then pulled off the top form. "Okay, doctor. You take this boy with you when you leave. You have ten minutes to pack up."

"What?" Sara rose, a vial of blood in her hand.

Zavala looked at her. "This boy is free. He has no family, but you can take him. This his discharge paper."

Sara narrowed her eyes. She took the paper from Tony. Scanned it. "It says that the government is not responsible for unlawful imprisonment and doesn't owe him any money."

"It's the only form we have."

"I no understand," Tony said, rising from the bed.

"As far as our paperwork is concerned, you have never been in this prison. Considering your age, I have no problem releasing you. The less bodies in here, the easier it is to run."

Michael looked at Alex. Alex had a grim expression on his face. He met Michael's eyes and held them. Then, he turned to Tony.

"This is good for you, kid," he said. "You go with Sara. Get out of here. Don't worry about me and Michael. We'll be out soon enough."

Zavala snorted, but said nothing.

Tony's eyes filled with tears. "I no want to leave you."

"Don't be stupid. You don't want to stay. This is hell. You've been here too long as it is." He drew Tony in for a quick hug. Pressed a kiss to his forehead, then pushed him away. "Time to go."

He shook his head. Threw himself on Michael, somehow folding his bony frame into a small ball on Michael's lap. "You need me," he sobbed against Michael's neck.

Michael closed his eyes. Held Tony close. "We'll manage," Michael said. "Alex and I will manage. But I will sleep a whole lot easier knowing that you're out of here. Safe. Please." Michael kissed Tony's cheek. Stroked his hair. Whispered, "Please, do this for me."

Tony sobbed. Tightened his arms around Michael. His thin body trembled and his breath came in panicked gasps.

"What's wrong?" Michael asked.

"I don't know how to be out there anymore. Too much happened here," he said in Spanish.

Michael sighed. "I know. I know how it feels. But everything that happened in here happened so you could get out there again. Everything you did to survive. It was worth it because now you're going." He tightened his fingers in Tony's hair. "My brother, Lincoln, he's been through this. Had to transition from being inside to normal life again. You'll be with him. And he's a good guy. A good father. You can tell him anything. And Sara..."

"I want you."
He tightened his arms around Tony. "I'll come as soon as I can. Alex too. But you need to go now. Or maybe they won't let you out next time."

Tony nodded. Kept his face pressed against Michael's neck. Took a few deep breaths.

"Um. Tony? I think maybe we should go."

He nodded again. Pulled his face away and looked into Michael's eyes. "I love you, Michael." He leaned in and pressed his lips chastely against Michael's. Then, he climbed off him. Went to Alex and threw his arms around him. "Thank you, Senor. For everything."

Alex smiled. Squeezed Tony tightly. "Take care of yourself, kid." He kissed Tony's forehead, then pulled away. "Take care of him," he said to Sara.

She nodded as she reached out and took Tony's hand. "I promise. And you two take care of each other."

"We will."

Sara put the sports bag over her shoulder and passed the suitcase to Tony. Then, holding his hand, she allowed Zavala to lead them out.

Before he closed the door, Zavala said, "You will stay here for the night. Another cot will be brought in, along with dinner."

"Thanks, General," Michael said. He felt drained again. Just wanted to lay down and go to sleep. Maybe this time when he woke up, it'd be somewhere nice.

He nodded. Closed the door.

Michael let out a sigh and slid down on the cot. "It's better this way," he said.

"Yeah." Alex stretched out next to him, molding his body to Michael's. "Tony is too young and too pretty to be here. And he's been through so much."

"Yeah."

Alex kissed Michael's neck. Ran a hand up and down his arm, tracing the tattoo design. "I'll miss him. He's a good kid."

"Yeah." His throat closed up and Michael closed his eyes. "I'll miss him, too."
Chapter 16

Lincoln tapped his fingers against the sticky tabletop pushed against the window of the hotel room. No matter how many times he wiped it down with a paper towel, the damn thing was still sticky. It'd drive Michael insane, but, then, Michael would have gone out, bought a gallon of bleach, and scrubbed the damn thing. That and the whole room.

Instead, he was rotting in the prison from hell and Lincoln…

Lincoln was eating at expensive restaurants, giving interviews to the swarms of reporters who'd flocked down to Panama in the past few days. He talked a little about the whole ordeal of being falsely accused and on death row, but mostly, he tried to talk about Michael. Which was actually fairly easy. Lincoln being falsely accused was nothing next to Michael getting himself thrown in prison and breaking him out.

He didn't know what his goal in the interviews were. Wasn't sure if he was trying to gain public sympathy for Michael, get the government to pardon him, free him from Sona, get him extradited or what. He knew the Company was still out there, that they were still a danger, and they might read the interviews and decide to try and take him and Michael out. Because of that, Lincoln did his best to avoid mentioning the Company and, instead, focus on Michael and his innocence. He stressed constantly how he didn't deserve to be in prison. Especially not one like Sona.

Especially not sick in Sona. Which he was. Badly enough for Sara to get quiet and pale before whipping into a whirlwind of activity. Making calls and contacting people as she paced back and forth in the hotel. Sending Lincoln out for clothes and food and supplies while she worked and got things done that Lincoln had never expected. Like permission to treat Michael. Equipment with which to treat him. Even a way to get some bloodwork.

She was kind of amazing.

Unfortunately, she wouldn't let Lincoln help her.

"The best thing you can do," she'd said, "is talk to the press and to the lawyers and try to convince people that Michael should be released."

"I want to go with you."

She'd smiled. Touched his cheek, then rubbed his arm. "It'll upset Michael. You'll say something, you'll fight. And he doesn't need that stress right now. Bad enough I'm going."

"But…"

"No." And that had ended the conversation.

Eight hours ago. Eight painful hours ago during which Lincoln was stuck doing interviews and counting the seconds until she came back and gave him news about Michael.

The door opened. He immediately snapped around, heart pounding. "Is Michael all…" He stopped talking. Frowned at Sara and the boy clinging to her hand. "What's the kid doing here?"

Sara smiled wanly. "Lincoln, you remember Tony."

"Yeah. What's he doing here?"
She didn't answer. Instead, she released Tony's hand and handed him the suitcase she was holding. "Tony, honey, go ahead and put that bags over by the table, okay?"

The boy looked at Sara through wide eyes and nodded in quick jerks. Suitcase in one hand, bag in the other, Tony crossed the room to Lincoln. His eyes never left Lincoln's face. He maneuvered himself so he never had to turn his back to Lincoln.

He was young. Looked younger, what with being skinny and short. And those big eyes, pale face. He looked scared in a way he hadn't been at the prison when he'd told Lincoln what had happened to Michael.

Lincoln smiled, trying to be comforting. The smile felt fake and stiff. "Hey, Tony." He turned back to Sara. "So?"

Sara sank to the bed, rubbing her forehead. "General Zavala realized they didn't have any record of him being in their prison. And I guess he's something of a decent guy, because he set Tony free right away. He's only sixteen, after all." She dropped her hand and looked at Lincoln. "I'm guess I'm looking after him. He said he doesn't have any family."

"No," Tony whispered. "But I don't have to stay. I can go. Be no problem to you."

"Bullshit, kid. You're the same age as my son. We're not turning you out. You can stay here as long as you need."

"And we'll figure something out," Sara said. She was lying flat on the bed now, arm over her eyes. "There must be paperwork on you somewhere. Family that you haven't met or something. Or something. I don't know." She yawned and pushed herself up. "I'm really wiped. Linc, can he stay in here with you? I was thinking that might be better."

He nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I'll, uh, see if they have a cot or something. You need anything, kid? Food, shower?"

Tony ran his hand through his hair, looking very self-conscious. "Um… I take a shower. But, um, clothes?"

Damn. "You can wear something of mine until we get you your own."

"Okay." Tony gave him a tentative smile, then disappeared into the bathroom.

Once he was gone, Lincoln turned his attention to Sara. "You all right?"

She nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just tired. Michael's okay. His fever came down and he got some color back before I left. Seemed to be feeling better. I'm not sure if he has the flu or if it's stress or what. I took some blood and also got a swab from his throat, since he was coughing. My contact at the hospital said he should have the results in two days."

"Two days?" He shook his head.

"That's better than I thought we were going to get," Sara said gently. "Lincoln, he's fine. He'll be fine. He's strong."

Lincoln sighed and rubbed his eyes. They felt scratchy and tired. "I know he's strong. But he's my little brother. I worry. And that place…"
"I know. It's awful there. But he has Alex, so…"

"Oh, yeah," he snorted. "Very comforting knowing that he's in there with that killer. That… that sonofabitch that put my son in prison, murdered my father, and tried to blackmail me and Michael."

"At least it was just blackmail. He didn't try to kill you."

He snorted again.

"He's looking out for Michael. Trying to keep him sane." She ran her hands through her hair. "Lincoln, have you ever… have you ever known someone, cared for someone, and thought… thought that you got them. Understood them. And then, one day, you see them with someone else, someone who fits them so perfectly and you realize that everything you thought you knew was just… superficial?"

Lincoln frowned. Looked at her.

Sara was gazing steadily at the carpet. Her expression was blank, eyes far away. She gripped the edge of the bed, comforter wrinkling under her fingers.

"I'm not sure what you mean," he finally said.

"Alex Mahone and Michael. There's just something about them that fits. They're… I don't know. Alex just touched Michael, and Michael calmed down. With just a touch. And Michael trusts him. I don't…" She looked up at Lincoln. "I know I don't know Michael well, but trusting isn't a work that I'd ever associate with him. But he does Alex. Totally. Completely."

Lincoln shook his head. He went to the bed and sat next to her. "No. No, Michael wouldn't trust that man. Alex hunted us. He's a Company stooge, and Michael….


Lincoln leaned forward, resting his arms against his thighs. "When we were on the run, he said that Alex was in his head. If Alex hadn't been assigned to catch us, it would have been a lot easier."


"What do you mean by that? Is he beating him or something?"

Sara rolled her eyes. "No. Maybe at first, but no." She gasped suddenly. Her hand went to her mouth.

"Sara?" Lincoln turned to her. Awkwardly put his hand on her shoulder. "Sara, what's wrong? Is Michael really sick? Are you not telling me something? Is he…"

"Michael's fine," she said, voice quavering. "He'll be fine. He just… He and Alex are completely in love with each other. And looking at them, seeing how perfectly they fit together, I feel… really stupid."

The words didn't process. He heard them, but they didn't make any sense. Michael and… and Alex. Mahone. Alex Mahone. Michael. His Michael. His baby brother…

"What?"
She wiped underneath her eyes. "I care for him so much. Love him. But I don't understand him. Not completely. I thought… I thought that, if we ever got a life, that's what my life would be. Learning Michael. Loving him. But then Alex showed up and in, what? Five days or something manages to unlock the mystery of Michael. He's got Michael completely under his spell."

"So, Alex is taking advantage of him," Lincoln said, the world settling as something made sense. And then Sara shook her head. "Alex is just as bad. Michael's got him wrapped around his little finger. I knew, you know. Suspected. When Michael told me that Alex stopped sleeping with him because he was afraid Michael was falling in love, I suspected that it was Alex falling in love, but…"

"What?" It came out way louder than Lincoln had intended. He was off the bed, fists clenched, ready to rush that prison and rip Alex's heart out. And his dick. "They're sleeping together?"

Sara flushed. Closed her eyes, sending a tear cascading down her cheek. "I thought you knew."

"No, I didn't know. Fuck, what… How…. Why…."

"Because, obviously, Michael needed it. Needed something and Alex provided it."

"Michael doesn't need sex. He doesn't… Sara, that kid is fucked up. Completely, all right? If he's having sex with Alex, it's 'cause…" Lincoln squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to finish the sentence. Not wanting to admit what a mess his baby brother was when it came to intimacy. Not to Sara.

"It's because why?"

"Never mind. It's not important."

"Lincoln."

He pressed his fist against his eyes, feeling the pound of a headache behind them. "Michael's got… issues. He doesn't think he's worth anything. So, he manipulates. Everyone. I've gotten better at recognizing it, but… but one of the ways he manipulates people is with his body." He opened his eyes.

If possible, Sara looked even more lost than she had since she'd come back. Lost… and embarrassed. Dammit.

"He loves you, Sara. He wasn't manipulating you."

"Of course he was," she snapped. "It was never about me. He needed to soften me up so I'd leave the door open if he needed it." Face red, she stormed across to the door that adjoined their rooms and yanked it open.

Lincoln caught her by the arms. Held her. "Sara. He loves you. It was real. I know Michael better than anyone, and I know that what he feels for you is real."

She looked up at him, eyes filmed over with tears. "Maybe. But whatever he felt before, it doesn't matter now. Because what I saw in that room wasn't Michael manipulating Alex. What I saw in his face the other day…. Maybe it started that way, but they're both past it now. And there's nothing anyone can do about it. Not even them."

"Sara…"

She shook her head. Pulled away. "I need a shower."
"Sara, wait…"

But she was through the door and closing it in his face, leaving him staring, helpless.

"Shit."

* * *

Night. In their tiny cell, it was dead quiet. No windows, no outside light. Just a small lamp that Zavala had sent in along with the promised fan. The fan kept the air moving, kept the room from feeling oppressive. It was almost comfortable.

Alex and Michael lay on their cots, which they'd pushed together to form a tolerable sized bed. Michael was half asleep. He'd soaked in the bath again an hour or so ago when his fever crept up a bit. Alex had bathed after Michael, reveling in the coolness. The room was a bit warm, despite the fan.

He'd been reading earlier, some pulpy paperback Sara had no doubt bought at the airport or something. But that had been some time ago. Now, he was drifting, completely relaxed, with Michael heavy, warm weight in his arms.

Lazily, Alex trailed his fingers up Michael's bare arm. Traced the tattoo design over his left shoulder. Moved up and ran his finger around the shell of Michael's ear before drawing them back down to play along Michael's collarbone.

Michael stirred. "I thought you were asleep," he said, voice thick and drowsy.

"Back at you." He pressed a kiss to the top of Michael's head. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine. Not too hot, not too cold. Still a little tired, but not like before." He rolled over. Draped one leg over Alex's, arm across Alex's stomach. "Don't want to go back to the prison, though."

"I know." He touched Michael's bottom lip with his thumb. "It'll be okay, though. We don't have to worry about Tony anymore, so that'll cut down some stress."

"Tony wasn't the problem."

"Tony was part of the problem." He ran his thumb across Michael's forehead. "You worried about him. Watched out for him. Felt guilty. So did I, but it's different for you and you know it."

"I'm trying to block everything out. Even Tony."

"I know. But now you don't have to worry about him anymore. He's safe."

"I know." Michael closed his eyes. His fingers drummed lightly on Alex's chest before stroking over and over.

"And, think of it this way. Now I have you all to myself. We don't have to worry about the kid watching or getting jealous or trying to join in." He let his hand slide down to Michael's bottom, which he pinched.

Michael squirmed, smiling. "You have a one track mind."

"You have a tight little ass and a delicious body. Both belong to me. It's hard to think of anything else."

"And yet, you're the one who called a halt to us screwing around." Michael propped his chin on
Alex's chest. He raised an eyebrow.

He sighed and traced Michael's arched brows. "Let's not talk about that anymore, okay? Just put it off to me… getting a little overwhelmed by everything and overreacting. I'm back in my right mind and it won't happen again."

"Don't know about right mind, but okay."

"Brat." He sighed and closed his eyes. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure," Michael yawned.

"When we get out of here, what do you expect us to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know you have a plan. Are we going to Peru or Chili or some island? What?"

Michael sighed. His hands tightened on Alex's shirt. "Well. I was thinking about going back to the States and, um, you know. Turning myself in."

"Yeah, I figured." He rested his hand on the nape of Michael's neck. "I hate to burst your bubble, babe, but you do know we can't go back. As long as the Company is active, we're not safe. They seem to be fine with us here, but if we go back, we're dead."

"Maybe not."

Alex snorted.

"Well. Maybe if we help the government get rid of them. Like maybe the FBI. Do you think that agent they said was calling about you would be interested in taking the Company down?"

"Who, Sullins? Yeah, he'd jump at the chance. Of course, it'd get him killed which, you know, might be reason enough to do it."

Michael pushed himself up. Looked at Alex.

"Sullins and I have a history."

"No kidding. The Company isn't all powerful."

"They got Caroline Reynolds into the presidency. " He interlaced his fingers behind his head and rested against them. "They managed to manipulate us into a prison down here. Everyone involved with Fox River is either in Sona or dead."

Michael frowned. "Sucre's not dead."

"Do you know that for sure? And what about Franklin? Sullins got his hands on him, but who knows what happened after. The Company has reach, and I, for one, don't care to go up against them again. " He sat up. Leaned close to Michael, meeting his eyes. I'll follow you, Michael, wherever you lead. But I won't be a sitting duck for the Company. So you better start thinking of a new plan."

"Maybe after we get out, we part ways."

Alex's jaw clenched. He reached out and grabbed Michael by the arms, fingers digging into soft skin hard enough to make Michael wince. "No."
Michael lifted his chin, defiance in his eyes. "I don't want to spend my life on the run. I don't want to leave my family."

"I'm not leaving you." He winced, and added, "I'm smart, but you're better at this."

He got a knowing smile in return. "Right." Michael pried Alex's fingers from his arm. Held his hand. "We make a pretty good team. Why don't we go up against the Company together?"

"Two men against a multinational corporation with political ties? Even we're not that good."

Michael gave him a small smile and rubbed his thumb over Alex's knuckles. "You have contacts. I have ways of persuading people to listen to me. To believe me. We can work something out. And, if we do it right, maybe we can stay ahead of the Company." He leaned towards Alex, one hand resting on Alex's thigh, ass in the air, eyes half-lidded. "But we don't need to worry about that right now. We've got other things to focus on." He pressed his mouth against Alex's. Parted his lips, licking lightly, seeking entrance.

Alex opened his mouth, allowing the kiss to deepen. Twined his tongue around Michael's, drawing it in further. Sucking on it lightly.

"Alex," Michael whispered shakily.

He laughed, a deep rumble in his chest. "We're not having sex right now."

"Please?"

"You'll fall asleep before you're done."

Michael moaned. "That's okay," he assured Alex, kissing down his neck.

He laughed again. Wrapped his arms around Michael and tackled him to the bed. "Yesterday, you were convinced you were going to die."

"I think I was wrong." Michael wrapped his legs around Alex. "Wanna celebrate?"

"You are an impossible man," Alex said fondly, gazing down at the lit-up eyes and the smile stretching across his face.

"Yeah, but…." Michael cut off abruptly, biting his lips. A blush spread across his cheeks.

Alex sighed and closed his eyes. "Yeah," he whispered, answering the words Michael knew he didn't want to hear. Didn't want to admit. He cleared his throat. Kissed Michael, then climbed off him, settling at his side. "Tomorrow morning, if you're still feeling well. I don't want to exhaust you too badly and cause you to relapse."

"Fine." Michael sighed. His lower lip protruded, but he settled back against the uncomfortable pillow and closed his eyes.

Alex copied him. Scooted closer, until their foreheads touched and he could feel the heat radiating from Michael's body. For the first time in too many days, Michael didn't feel as if he were competing with the sun for a job.

"Michael?" he whispered.

"Yeah?"
"You remember why I said we had to stop sleeping with one another?"

Long silence. Then a wary, "Yes."

"Well. It doesn't matter anymore. You know that, right?"

Another silence. Then, "Yes, Alex. I know."

* * *

Michael opened his eyes to find Alex's face inches from him. The good kind of inches, where you could still see clearly. Not the disorienting kind where they looked like a monster. Michael hated that kind of inches away. Lincoln tended to be that kind of sleeper. There were many, many mornings where Michael had woken up to find Lincoln breathing morning breath into his mouth, face distorted by the distance.

Not just Lincoln, of course. Every bad lover Michael had ever had did the too close sleeping, too. The clingy ones, the ones who wouldn't let him go. The ones who wouldn't be put off by a few rolls in the sack. Those who wanted too close.

Alex had it perfect. Even before they'd begun getting along, Alex had the distance thing down. Close enough that Michael was kept calm by the contact, but not so close he felt trapped.

Michael pulled his hand from underneath the sheet. Drew his fingers down Alex's stubbly jaw. Up his chin to his mouth.

Alex's breath hitched. His eyes tightened and he jerked. After a moment, though, he released a long, slow breath through his nose and relaxed into the hard cot, not opening his eyes.

He pressed his fingers to Alex's lips. "We'll need money," he whispered, voice scratchy and broken with sleep.

"Money?" He opened his eyes.

"Once we escape. We'll need money. Lots of it."

"Westmorland's…"

"It's gone."

"Are you sure there's…"

"It was dropped in the water. Even if Lincoln went back and searched, it's gone. That much money, gone."

Alex sighed and closed his eyes again. "Sara has money. Lincoln's getting money from the government."

"That won't do for long term. But I guess it's a start." With the tip of his finger, he traced Alex's eyes. Over his eyelashes, then up to his temple. "Clothes, too. We'll need to change pretty much right away. Get transportation out of here."

"You must be feeling better." He took Michael's hand and lightly kissed the tips of his fingers. "Back to making plans instead of talking about dying." He opened his eyes. "How do you feel?"

He pulled back into himself, assessing. For the first time in days, he wasn't a mass of pain. The stabbing in his throat was gone, the pounding in his temples faded to a muted ache, and his
temperature was normal. No more fire marching over his skin. No more chill in his veins. Normal.

But still tired. The pain was gone, but there was an exhausted ache in his limbs. He just wanted to snuggle up to Alex and sleep. And maybe, this time, sleeping would do something.

"Better." He moved closer to Alex and threw a leg over his. "Tired."

"Then go back to sleep." Alex kissed him on the forehead.

"Too hungry. What do you think the chances of getting something edible and plentiful are?"

"Sara should bring more food today. When we get out, though, it'll be back to what's out there. Until we get out."

Michael nodded and closed his eyes. Sighing softly, he rested his head in the crook of Alex's neck. "Need to find out how close we are to the beach. The fastest way to get there."

"Why? Want to go for a swim?" Alex's hand stroked down Michael's spine, sending shivers through him. "Get a tan?"

"I'm thinking a water escape route is the best way to go."

"So... we'll swim... where?"

Michael slid his hand underneath Alex's shirt. Traced along his ribcage. "We swim under the water a distance out. Get picked up by a boat, have it take us back to town. We get a car and flee the country."

Alex kissed the top of Michael's head, hips shifting closer, pressing. "You'll have to teach me to breathe underwater, babe." He rolled his hips again.

Michael made a sound deep in his throat. Rolled onto his back, pulling Alex with him. Fingers threaded into Alex's hair, pulled him down. Pushed their mouths together and kissed him fiercely. Tongue invading, mouth working furiously, holding him. Needing to feel him, needing Alex's mouth and body and to feel his blood rushing to limbs that had done their best to convince him to let go of life over the last few days.

He was alive. He felt good. And he wanted Alex.

Alex seemed to feel the same. His hands stroked Michael's face. His neck and down his sides to tug at his shirt.

Michael released his death grip on Alex long enough to yank his shirt over his head. Then his fingers were scrabbling at Alex's, pulling it up, nails scratching Alex's back, ragged edges catching the skin.

"Ah," Alex gasped, tearing his mouth away. "Careful." He shucked his shirt and tossed it to the ground. His hands gripped Michael's neck. Tongue twisting around Michael's, wet and hot. Hips rolling against Michael's. Bright, stomach twisting bursts of pleasure radiating from his groin.

Sweat beaded on Michael's forehead. Slicked his chest, his arms. Alex was flicking Michael's jeans open, yanking down the zipper. He pushed them down until they were caught around Michael's knees, then undid his own.

Michael was gasping. Making soft little noises in the back of his throat as Alex's cock dragged against his own. Slid in the slick sweat of their stomachs, Alex humping against him. Michael's nails
dug into Alex's ass, holding him tight, pressing. He twisted his hips, wrapped his legs around Alex's waist. His eyes screwed shut and he sought out Alex's mouth again.

"That's right, Michael," Alex whispered. "Come for me. Come on, babe, let go."

"Alex," Michael gritted out through his teeth. He could feel his climax approaching, feel his body tensing. Peaking, and yet…

It was almost painful, the pressure in his groin. All the heat, the pleasure rushed together, tightened his stomach and then… stayed. No release, just stagnation and a pulse deep in his veins.

His hips moved frantically. "Alex," he whimpered, chasing that elusive moment of perfection.

"What's wrong?" Alex moved his hips with Michael's, rolling them.

Michael closed his eyes. Kicked his pants from one leg and wrapped it around Alex's. "It hurts. I can't and… I just…"


He did, breathing in deeply, feeling his lungs fill, belly rise. Alex's hand stroked his stomach, soothing him. Bit by bit, his arousal eased off. The painful twisting unknotted and his muscles relaxed against the thin mattress of the cot.

"This ever happen before?" Alex asked, still stroking him.

"I'm not in the mood to have a heart to heart, Alex."

"I am." He kissed the corner of Michael's mouth. Nuzzled under his jaw.

Michael sighed. Stared at the ceiling. He was still aroused, still hard, but it was less than before. Less frantic, less painful. More comfortable. Alex's hand stroked his stomach. His mouth traced patterns on Michael's neck, slow. Easy.

He sighed again. Closed his eyes. "Yeah. It's happened before. Kind of a lot. Another reason why sex has never been a big deal for me. Something I do for fun."

Alex didn't say anything. Just kept stroking his stomach, lower and lower. His fingers combed at Michael's pubic hair and back up, lightly trailing over his skin.

"I understand if this isn't worth it to you anymore. I mean. I'm not talking about the thing we're not talking about. Just. I get that I'm too much trouble. I'll still get you out."

"Of course you'll still get me out. You can't do it alone. Never could have." Alex kissed his forehead. "You ever think this problem of yours might have something to do with the way you approach sex? You use it to keep people away. They start getting frustrated by not being able to please you. They leave you that much faster."

Michael closed his eyes. Tried to block out everything.

"I'm not letting you go. You belong to me, and I don't throw things out just because there's a slight flaw in its perfection." He kissed underneath Michael's jaw. "I can make you come. I can make sex something you not only enjoy, but you crave. I know what turns you on, how to turn you on, how to make you melt in my hands." He kissed Michael again. "You've been seriously ill the past few days.
You're tired and sore and achy. Don't stress out about this. Don't strain yourself."

"Don't strain myself?" Michael opened his eyes and looked at Alex incredulously. "I can't come."

"Yeah, babe. You can." Alex straddled Michael. Kissed down the column of his throat. "You just need to relax." He licked over Michael's chest. Sucked on a nipple while his fingertips stroked over the inked wing of the kneeling angel. Up the sword poised over the angel's bowed head, then down its arm that was draped elegantly, reaching for Michael's groin.

Michael tried to do as Alex suggested and relax. He closed his eyes, focusing on the feel of Alex's fingers. His hot, wet tongue, licking over him. Teeth nipping, mouth sucking. Blood rising to the surface of his skin as heat began to build in Michael's body again.

Alex straddled Michael's body and worked his way down with his mouth. When he reached Michael's crotch, Alex skirted the erect cock. Moved to the juncture of Michael's thigh and slid his tongue down it, causing Michael to shudder.

"Let go, Michael. Let yourself go," Alex murmured.

"Alex, this…"

"Shh." He wrapped his hand around Michael's cock. Slid his lips over the head.

Michael groaned, arching his back off the cot. Alex was sucking relentlessly, hard, lots of tongue. His cheeks caressed the sensitive head. His hand wrapped around the base of Michael's cock, caressing, twisting. With his other hand, he massaged Michael's perineum. Pressed against it, sending shocks of pleasure through Michael. Causing him to shake, his stomach clench.

Alex pulled his mouth off Michael. Licked over the head. Around the rim, then back over with just the tip. Slid down with the flat of his tongue. Down to Michael's balls, which he sucked into his mouth.

"Shit," Michael swore. His hands clenched in the cover. Tugged. Twisted his hips as Alex sucked and licked at him, fingers massaging him. Making him burn, his body flame. Pleasure rushed through his body, making him dizzy. He panted, gasped for air. His feet rubbed over the cot, body twisted, writhed.

And Alex sucked and licked at his cock. Stroked him, played him expertly, bringing him closer and closer until finally…

He gasped as he spilled into Alex's mouth. Gasped harder when sticky lips pressed kisses against his stomach, as a come cover hand stroked up Michael's ribcage as Alex climbed his body. Pressed his mouth to Michael, kissing him, exploring Michael's mouth with his tongue.

Michael shuddered as Alex kissed him. Wrapped his arms around him and held him. Kissed Alex back with all the force he could muster, feeling sleepy and heavy, his head spinning slowly.

"Told you I could make you come," Alex said smugly, resting his chin over Michael's pounding heart.

He rolled his eyes. Stroked Alex's hair and didn't say anything, just basking in the glow of satisfaction and relief.

* * *
Sara arrived a few hours later. She brought food and more clean clothes. More entertainment in the form of novels and puzzle books.

And she wouldn't look Michael in the eye.

"Your fever is down," she said with a bright smile. "I mean, it's gone. And, um, your heart sounds good. I haven't got the bloodwork back yet, but from what I'm seeing, I think the worst is over."

Michael gave a thin smile. He was tugging at his fingers, obviously uncomfortable at how bright and false Sara was being. "Except that means getting thrown back into hell. But I guess you can't have anything."

"Yeah." Sara reached over and took Michael's hand. She squeezed it, her thumb rubbing over the back. Still without meeting his eyes.

Alex cocked his head to his side, staring at Sara's neck. It almost looked like there was something there, but he couldn't be sure. She was wearing her hair down, brushing over her face. Yesterday, she'd had it pulled back from her face. It wasn't noteworthy, not exactly. Alex didn't know Sara well enough to make inferences based on her hair style. And yet, something was off with her. And he didn't think it was her reacting to him and Michael's relationship.

"So, Alex. That man from the FBI, Sullins? He flew into the country yesterday," Sara said. She released Michael's hand and turned on the cot to look at Alex.

There, again. Something that looked like a faint, red smudge.

"Oh?"

"He's talking with authorities now to try and get in to see you. He's persuasive. He'll probably get in here later today or tomorrow."

Alex shrugged. "It's easy to get in here."

Sara rolled her eyes and gave him a smile. "True. But he's coming in on official business. To talk to you. He wants to talk to Lincoln and me tonight. About anything we know about the Company. Sounds like he's serious about this case against them."

"He probably is. He hates dishonesty. Hates when people use the system to benefit themselves. He's exactly the kind of man you want in IA: honest, smart, and incorruptible. But he's not who you want at your back against something like the Company. He's smart. They've got too many fingers in too many pies for even him to cut them all off."

"So you're not going to cooperate?"

He looked at Michael.

Michael had drawn his knees to his chest, chin resting on them. As if feeling the weight of Alex's gaze, he raised his eyes. Tapped his fingers on his shin. Raised an eyebrow and lifted a shoulder. "If we go with our plan, it won't hurt us to tell him what we know."

"He might try to do something. Get us out. Get us transferred."

"I'd rather do what we wanted on American soil. It's easier in transit."

"I almost killed you while we were in transit."
Michael rolled his eyes. "We can accelerate our plan now that it's just the two of us. Tell him what we know, then disappear before he can do anything."

"The thing is, Michael, the only way he can build his case is if he has us as witnesses. He'll need us to testify in order to really do anything."

Michael sighed. Pressed his forehead against his knees. "He can't investigate on his own? Just take our information and find the proof?"

Alex shrugged. "Maybe. It's still a stronger case with us."

"But you won't go back to the States."

"Don't you have a wife and child back home?" Sara asked.

He glared at her, but resisted the urge to invade her personal space to intimidate her. Instead, he forced himself to unclench his fists and said, "I'm no longer married. And it's probably safer for both of them if I'm not in the country, screwing with the Company. Besides," he added in a softer voice, "I can't justify screwing around with them anymore. It's cruel."

She nodded, face reflecting sympathetic understanding.

He wanted to punch her.

"Don't worry about it," Alex told Michael. "We'll figure out to do when we have to. If Sullins come, we'll deal with him."

The door opened and one of the guards came in. "Senorita. General say he talk to you now, then you go."

Sara nodded. "Okay." She rose. "There's more food in the basket. The general said that he'd let you take anything non lethal with you into the prison. If you're still here tomorrow, I'll bring you more supplies." She leaned over Michael and kissed him on the top of his head. "Take care of yourself."

Michael looked up. Kissed her cheek. "You, too. Tell Lincoln I said hi."

Alex watched as Sara's face turned bright red. She gathered her belongings and crossed the room to Alex. "Take care of yourself, too, Alex." She kissed him on the cheek. "Make sure you're getting rest."

"I'm fine. Thanks."

She nodded, then followed the guard out.

The door shut, leaving them alone.

Michael looked up and met Alex's eyes. Alex looked back, not sure what to say.

Finally, Michael sighed. "She slept with Lincoln."

"I wasn't sure until she came over. I knew she was acting strangely, but…"

"I don't blame her. I can't bring myself to care."

He pushed away from the wall and went to the cot. "You sure?"
"It's not the first time Lincoln slept with someone I was with. Or had been with." Michael shrugged. "Lincoln was really devoted to Veronica, but he still sometimes cleaned up my messes. Or, you know. Whatever. Picked up the slack when I failed to perform." His cheeks burned dully. "A few times, when I was in high school and these girls just wouldn't leave me alone. So, I let them sleep with me a few times, but then they kind of latched onto Lincoln. He was older and cool and really didn't care if anyone drank beer or whatever. And he had no qualms about sleeping with underage girls, as long as they weren't too underage, you know?" He shrugged.

"That's not what happened here."

Michael shook his head. Leaned his head against Alex's shoulder. "No. Lincoln's still grieving Veronica. Sara must have been freaked out or mad or just... hurt. I hurt her. So. Bang. There they are." He sighed. "She wouldn't have been happy with me. I'm cold in bed. Distant. She'd want more."

Alex slipped his arm around Michael. "She'd probably want what I have in my bed."

"What's that?"

"An absolute firecracker. The warmest, most responsive lover I've ever had." Alex kissed Michael on the head. Squeezed him. "The best lover I've had."

Michael snorted. "Liar."

He ran his finger down Michael's neck.

Michael shuddered. "Alex," he started, but Alex stopped him by slipping his thumb into Michael's mouth.

"Jerk," Michael mumbled, then closed his mouth around Alex's thumb. Flicked his tongue against the tip. Swirled around it, then sucked.

The lock on the door rattled.

Alex pulled his thumb from Michael's mouth and scooted away just as the door swung open and General Zavala entered.

"Gentlemen. The doctor say you recovered. Only three inmates displayed the same sickness as you, and it's been taken care of. I received call from the governor telling me to keep you here a few hours longer. Someone from your government is here wanting to talk to you. There is talk of extradition."

"Even though we've both committed crimes here, we might be sent back to the States?" Alex asked.

Zavala shrugged. "I must be honest and say I would not be sorry to see you go."

"We've enjoyed your hospitality, though. It'll be hard to leave."

Michael poked Alex in the ribs.

"Then enjoy more of our hospitality while we wait on the government to decide what to do." With that, the general left.

Michael fell back against the cot. Draped his arm over his eyes. "Any way to tunnel out of here?"

Alex didn't answer. Instead, slid off the cot and began to pace. "So. If we're taken out by Sullins, what's our plan of action?"
"Escape. Find a hole and bury ourselves in it. When no one's talking about us anymore, take off for, I don't know. Australia or something."

"Australia?"

"Or something," he said, voice defensive. He sat up, looking wild-eyed and desperate. "I don't know! Okay, is that what you want to hear me say? I. Don't. Know." His jaw clenched. He looked away. "Look. Just… I'll get you out. And you run. It's me they want anyway. Don't worry about me. Just go."

Alex sighed. "Are you done, Saint Michael?"

Michael looked at him.

"We've discussed this. I'm sticking with you."

"We're too conspicuous together. Too well known."

"You already said we'd find a hole. It's doable. Believe me, I know. I'm the best man they've got in finding people like us. And there's two of us. We'll find that hole and stay there."

"You're insane."

"So are you. That's why we're so good together."

Michael let out a long sigh and slumped against the wall. Closing his eyes, he nodded. "Yeah. I guess you're right."
Chapter 17

After the grime and dirt and sweat of Sona, where even the guards and the warden had a sheen of grime clinging to them, the sight of Sullins and Lang, both looking fresh in clean pressed suits, was unexpected.

Michael and Alex had been escorted from their holding cell to an office about ten minutes ago. Unlike the room they'd been in the past few days, this one had lots of space, furniture, and windows open so what little breeze there was could blow in.

The sun streaming through the windows was a relief to Alex after being in artificial light for so many days, but it was obviously hurting Michael's too-sensitive eyes. He had them squinted, head turned away from the source, hand cupped against his forehead. When they'd come in, Alex had seen Michael study the two FBI agents before the light got too much.

Alex wondered what he thought when Alex himself wasn't sure what to think. Sullins had been his adversary for a long time. At first, it'd been unwarranted. For whatever reason, Sullins had gotten it into his head that Alex was being unscrupulous somehow. Using force to elicit confessions. Shooting before identifying himself, getting too close to suspects. Being too trigger happy. He had a thousand accusations, none of which were true. In the early days, Alex had been completely straight in everything he did. Being an FBI agent had been something he'd loved. Something he'd excelled at easily. Fugitive retrieval was a giant chess game, and Alex loved chess.

Sullins hadn't been able to accept that. Even when he never found any wrongdoing on Alex's part, he hadn't let it go. And when Oscar Shales had disappeared, well. It was like Christmas for Sullins. Even though he couldn't prove anything, couldn't find the evidence, he knew he was right.

And then it became a chess game between the two of them. Only this one, Alex didn't enjoy as much. Sullins was a skilled opponent, but Alex didn't like being the one in the wrong.

A breeze strengthened by a fan brushed against the side of Alex's face. It dislodged a bead of sweat from Alex's hair. It rolled down the side of his face, catching in the scruff of a beard that'd sprung up over the past weeks. He ran his hand over it, his fingers dampening from the sweat.

And Michael had tried to insist on wearing sleeves. Had fought Alex, punching and pushing, as if he were Cameron's age. Alex had finally won, but, Goddamn the man was stubborn.

Sullins sat up straighter. Cocked his head and gave Alex an oily little smile. "So, Alex. Enjoying your vacation?"

He rolled his eyes and sat back, stretching his arm across the back of Michael's chair. "Oh, it's been great. Wonderful. Tropical location, plenty of sun with the occasional rain. Painfully scorching days. What's not to love?"

"Cute. And Mr. Scofield." Sullins turned his gaze to Michael. "The great white whale, I presume. The man Alex gave everything up for in the end. Chased you down here as his career came apart, risked his life to capture you."

"You've got your facts wrong," Michael said. "He came down not to capture me. He came down to get the money I recovered. Not for me. I'm not the white whale."

"I locked myself in a room for two weeks trying to figure out where you were, Michael. Don't be modest."
Michael looked at him, eyes widening. His cheeks began to burn. "What about Shales?"

"I caught Shales, remember?"

"Oh, so you admit that," Sullins said.

Alex rolled his eyes. "Didn't you dig up the body already?"

Sullins inclined his head in acknowledgement. "So. I've been authorized to offer both of you a deal. The government is very interested in the information the two of you have about the involvement of the Reynolds Presidency with Lincoln Burrows. We're talking names, dates, locations. Anything you have."

"And in return?" Alex prompted.

"For you, Alex, eight years in a medium security prison."

"Eight years?" That was a long time. Not as long as ten. Not as long as death. But it wasn't as short as he'd like. Not that he was really planning on going to prison, but…

"You're facing multiple counts of murder, Alex," Sullins said sharply. "I had to talk them down to eight. That's the best you're going to get."

"It's a prison in the States, Alex," Lang said, the first she'd spoken since she'd come in. "You're in hell right now."

He couldn't help the bitter smile. "You haven't even seen the inside, Felicia. What do you know?"

"Enough. I've done my research on this place. You're not going to survive it. Very few do. With this offer, you'll be back on home soil by tomorrow. Be clean. In air conditioning. Have a real bed to sleep in. Eight years is nothing to staying here."

She held his eyes with earnestness. With compassion.

His stomach clenched gazing at her. They barely knew each other, but here she was. Alex knew her well enough to know that she'd been the one to twist Sullins' arm about getting him onboard with his investigation. In the few weeks after she'd joined his team, Alex had gotten a good idea of her character. And beside that…

Well. Suffice to say, had Michael not been sitting next to him, there'd be more sparks between him and Felicia right now.

He swallowed. "What about Michael?"

Sullins shrugged. "Well, Mr. Scofield is a bit different. Poses something of a problem. I'm not really in a position to offer you anything other than to assure you a deal will be reached. It will be comparable to Alex's, at the very least."

"At the least?" Michael repeated.

He shrugged again. "There is talk among my superiors of something sweeter. Something more. Because of what your family has been through. But I really don't have information other than that."

Michael nodded. Looked down at his arm and scratched at it. Drew red lines over the blue ink before bringing his hands together and twisting. Rubbing them together nervously and tugging his fingers.
"Michael?" Alex asked.

He didn't answer.

"Can we have a few minutes alone to discuss this?"

Sullins and Lang exchanged glances. Sullins nodded. "Fine. But only five. We need to move on this and quickly."

Alex waited until the door had closed behind them before he turned to Michael. "So. Thoughts."

"What does it matter? You don't want to go to prison anyway."

"You actually want to take the deal. Of course you do, what am I thinking.? Your Saint Michael the Pure. You probably want to tell Sullins that first you want to finish your sentence here, then you'll go back to the States and do that time."

Michael rolled his eyes. "It's a good deal for you. And, I bet you can probably negotiate yourself into minimum security or something." He looked at Alex through his lashes. "Look, life on the run isn't all that's cracked up to be. We probably couldn't really find a hole. And the Company… I mean, they won't really be interested in us. Not anymore. Besides, they couldn't get to you while you're in prison. Right?"

Alex raised an eyebrow.

"Okay, maybe they could. But, well. They're not as smart as us. I don't think. I mean, they had to hire you to catch me. And, um. Maybe we could convince them exactly how dangerous the Company is. We could… insist they put us in prison under assumed names, but really not put us in. Just have it on the records. Then they can put us in a safe house. With ankle monitors or something."

"For eight years?"

"Alex," Michael whispered. "I want to go home."

Shit. Well, there it was. Only one thing to do.

Alex got up and walked to the door. It was unlocked, and Sullins and Lang were standing just on the other side. "Richard," Alex said.

Sullins turned around, eyebrow raised.

He tried not to let his face betray the bad taste in his mouth that came from cooperating with Richard Sullins. Instead, he kept his mind focused on Michael as he said, "We'll take the deal."

* * *

Despite Sullins' wish to have this done as soon as possible, it'd been too late for Michael and Alex to give their stories to anyone. Before being shipped back to the US, they had to convince the prosecutor that they had valuable information about the Company. Michael didn't think that'd be a problem, but Alex was a little jittery. Now that they were out, neither one of them wanted to go back.

They were at a hotel. The same as Lincoln and Sara, although not on the same room or floor. Sullins and Lang had secured a suite in the hotel and had Alex and Michael locked in the same room. They'd both been told they'd be shot on sight if they tried to escape. Alex had said something snarky about that, but Michael hadn't been listening. He also hadn't quite caught what snide remark Sullins
had made about there only being one bed, but he'd gotten the implication. Alex had dealt with that remark, too.

And now they were alone. Nice room. Soft, comfortable bed. Lots of hot water and a shower that was actually clean. They'd both spent nearly forty five minutes in the shower, washing each other, enjoying the feel of being clean. Of clean, soapy hands sliding over flesh and all the time they wanted to explore.

Now, Alex was standing next to the window, looking out. His back was in a straight, tense line and his fingers tapped restlessly at his side.

Michael reclined on the bed, a book in hand. He wasn't reading it, though. Couldn't concentrate. His head was spinning too quickly, trying to take stock of what happened. What he was going to do. How they were going to get out of this. If they even could.

He felt guilty. Horribly guilty. He knew that Alex didn't want to do this. Didn't want to testify, didn't want to go back to the US. He was doing this for Michael, because Michael couldn't bear to stay inside Sona for one second longer. Not even with the chance at escape so close. He couldn't do it.

"T-Bag had contact with the Company," Michael said suddenly. Out of the blue, even to himself. "They hired him or something. They got him here."

Alex turned from the window. "We are not going to let Sullins know that."

"But…"

"No. T-Bag is staying in that hell-hole. He is going to rot and you are never going to think about him again."

Michael narrowed his eyes. "You know me so well, Alex, that sometimes it takes my breath away," he deadpanned. Alex at least acknowledged him with a half-smile. "Okay, so, possessiveness aside, what do you want them to do? Offer T-Bag a deal?"

"Fox River verses Sona is a good enough deal for him."

"He's a murderer. I wouldn't trust him. Look at us. We're locked in a room with a window, Michael. At a hotel. T-Bag would have weaseled his way out by now and killed twenty people. Besides, what purpose would it serve, in the long run?"

"More people who have information on the company? A stronger case?"

"And how much do you trust T-Bag?"

Michael let out a long breath. "Less than anyone on earth. And then some."

"Well, there we go." He walked away from the window and sat on the bed. "What's going on? Are you actually feeling guilty over leaving him there?"

"No. Just… this feels too easy."

Alex raised an eyebrow.

"Getting out. This deal thing. I mean, eight years in medium security? That's nothing. That's a gift. Why?"
"Let's see, your brother was framed and put on death row, you were thrown in prison where you had your toe cut off and were burned badly, you escaped only to be chased across the country by a drugged addicted psycho who shot your father, confessed to a murder you didn't commit, thrown in a shit-in-the-hole prison in Panama with said drugged addicted psycho, became a giant child's favorite doll, were broken, sold for a nickel bag, and then got the killer death plague from hell that you just barely survived. Maybe you were due."

It was Michael's turn to raise his eyebrow and give Alex a look. "And... what universe do you live on?"

"I don't know." Alex sighed and flopped onto his back. "One in which things are occasionally fair?"

"Optimist." Michael reached out and combed his fingers through Alex's hair. "Still. Doesn't it seem too good to be true to you?"

"I really don't want serve eight years, but I guess avoiding it is out of the question. Unless we do make a break for it." He arched his neck so he could glance at Michael, then let it back down.

"I'm thinking about it. They had us chained up really well in the van. It'll be the same in a plane. I don't know... I don't know if I'll be able to do it."

"That's what you said about Sona."

"Yeah, but this time I mean it. Unless we plead the need for a bathroom break at the same time, and then somehow break out from the bathroom and run... and that's a big if." He sighed and shook his head. "It'd probably be better for us to get thrown back into Sona, set fire to the place, and run."

"We can tell them we changed our minds. But they're not going to like it. And, if you change your mind again, they won't offer another deal. So. I'm putting my foot down and saying no. We stay here. We give them our information. We say we're going to cooperate and go back. And then..."

"I fake a massive anxiety attack about getting onto a plane and insist on going by bus."

"When Sullins tells you to shut up..."

"I'll get more hysterical."

"And when he says he's going to drug you?"

"I got into a catatonic state and Sara says that I can't be given drugs and it's not safe for me to fly."

Alex rolled onto his stomach. He propped himself onto his elbows and looked at Michael. "Do you really think that would work?"

He nodded. "Definitely. I've got a bit more information than you. Or at least some just as valuable, such as a senator who worked with me and Sara to get information on the Company and Reynolds. They can't risk damaging me, not if they want to build their case."

"You can make yourself believably catatonic?"

Michael smiled. "Baby, nothing is as believable as the real thing."

"You can put yourself into a catatonic state?" Alex asked.

"I did it at Fox River. Sara saw it."
"How are we going to let her know?" He pushed himself into a sitting position. Scooted closer to Michael.

"Well, I can try and get one of them to let me see either her or Lincoln. But, if we can't get any visitors, I'm pretty sure she'll catch on to what I'm trying to do. She's quick like that."

Alex nodded thoughtfully. "She is. But will she do it?"

"Alex, she slept with my brother. Right now, she'll do anything."

"True." He tapped his fingers on Michael's knee. "But are you willing to play the guilt card if you really don't care?"

"It's not that I don't care, it's... I don't know. And I won't have to do or say anything. She's already feeling guilty."

He nodded. Looked down. "You know, I have been thinking about it. There are logistical problems about running away and going into hiding. Mainly..." He trailed off. Ran his fingers up Michael's arm, tracing the tattoo.

"I know. I've always known that was going to be a problem. I'll wear sleeves."

"In Australia?"

"Maybe if we won't go someplace warm. Or tropical. There are places on earth where I can get away with wearing long sleeves year round."

"Like where? Russia?"

Michael shrugged.

"I don't want to think about this anymore." Alex go to his knees and leaned over Michael, pushing him onto his back. "Not when there are more interesting things to do." He kissed Michael, a scorching, slow kiss that had Michael's toes curling and his skin growing warm.

"They could walk in at any second," Michael whispered as Alex kissed down his jaw and neck. Still, he couldn't help stroking Alex's back, mouthing at his ear and face. "We haven't had dinner."

"Who cares?"

"I do."

"Jesus, after weeks of screwing in front of an audience, I'd think you'd grown past this modesty, Michael." Alex licked Michael's Adam's apple, then bit his lower lip.

"It's different and you know it. Besides, don't FBI agents tend to be conservatives and therefore would be disapproving of this? Less likely to try and make sure we got a good deal?"

"You worry too much. Sullins won't care. Lang might, but more out of jealousy." He pressed his lips against Michael's.

Michael cocked and eyebrow. "Jealousy?"

"We had some tension between us. You're not the only one who swoons when I crowd into your personal space." This time, he laid a trail of kisses along Michael's neck.
He squirmed, hands tightening on Alex. "I do not swoon." He turned his head to brush his lips against Alex.

"Sure you don't." He kissed Michael's forehead, then propped himself on his elbows. "So. Here we are."

"Yeah."

"Do you think they'd let us do our sentences at the same prison?" Alex asked as he drew his thumb over Michael's forehead, down his temple, and over the edge of his ear. "Be cellmates together?" Michael smiled sadly. "I doubt it." His fingers threaded through Alex's hair. "We could ask."

"The thing is, now that I've had you. Enjoyed you." Alex gave him a wry smile. Traced Michael's lips with his thumb. "Now that I..." He shrugged. Tugged at Michael's lip. "I'm not sure if I'm willing to be apart from you."

"We could try to make it part of our terms. To be incarcerated in the same prison. I mean, we committed our crimes in Illinois, right? So we should be incarcerated there."

"Not at Fox River."

"Fox River isn't medium security."

"God, I don't even know how well you'd do in medium security," Alex groaned. He rolled off Michael and stared at the ceiling. "I need a cigarette."

"What do you mean?" Michael asked. He flopped onto his stomach, crawling to the edge of the bed. Hanging half off, he rummaged around for his jeans that he'd shucked under the bed. "About not doing well in medium security?" He found the jeans. Dug into the pocket for the cigarettes he'd stashed before they left Sona.


"Because Sona was so distraction free." Michael pulled himself back onto the bed and handed Alex a cigarette.

"Where did this come from?" Alex asked in surprise. He didn't wait for an answer as he grabbed the matchbook from the nightstand and lit up.

"Sona. I've been keeping them in my pocket since you started smoking. When we were moved, I had about five. Sullins didn't seem to care when he searched my pockets. You could probably ask him for more."

"I'm not asking him for anything." Alex had his head resting against the wall, eyes closed. The expression on his face was positively orgasmic.

Michael felt jealous. Of a cigarette for Christ's sake. "Well. You only have four left."

"Maybe I'll ask Lang." Alex inhaled on the cigarette and held his breath.

"I'll be fine," Michael started, but he was interrupted by the door opening.

"Mr. Scofield," Sullins said. "Your brother's here to see you. I'll give you ten minutes in the front room."
His heart began pounding in his chest so hard his head spun from the suddenness of it. Lincoln. Linc. He was here and Michael was getting to see him without guards surrounding them or a fence between them. Michael could actually touch him. Hug him.

Of course, Lincoln had to know about Alex and him by now. And Michael really didn't really want to hear what he was going to say. Didn't want to hear the accusatory words Lincoln would spew. About how Alex had taken advantage of him. That he'd killed their father. That Michael had let himself be used, be abused. That this was part of a cycle, and hadn't he been in therapy to break it? Hadn't he…

"Michael." Alex squeezed his hand. "Go see Lincoln."

"Right. Right." Michael took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Once he was feeling more calm, he slid off the bed and went to the door.

Sullins led him into the main room. There was one couch in the middle, facing a television set. The far side of the room was obviously the dining area, a table with a newspaper spread across it and a coffee pot brewing coffee.

Lincoln was pacing in front of the couch.

"Ten minutes, Mr. Burrows," Sullins said. He went to the dining area, poured himself a cup of coffee, and sat, reading the newspaper.

Michael looked at his brother. He didn't know what to say. He just stood there, twisting his fingers, waiting for Lincoln to make the first move.

He finally did. "Michael," he breathed. He closed the difference between the two of them and drew Michael into a fierce embrace. "I've been so worried about you."

"I'm fine, Linc."

"I know. But you were sick. Sara said… When Sara said you were sick, I got so worried. You never sick, you know? And when you do…"

"Yeah." Michael untangled himself from Lincoln's embrace. "I'm feeling better now. I think I was just overheated and stressed. You know me."

Lincoln cuffed him lightly on the head. "I know you. Let's sit down."

"How's Tony?"

"Tony? He's doing great. Eating everything he looks at. I swear, in one day, he's gained something like five pounds. It's going great." He threw a glance over his shoulder at Sullins, who looked like he was ignoring them. Lincoln leaned in close to Michael and whispered, "Adoption isn't going to be possible, and it doesn't look good for keeping him."

Michael met Lincoln's eyes. "Legally, you mean."

Lincoln gave him a crooked smile. "Right. I'm working on it." He cleared his throat. "So. You're going to testify against the Company."

"I guess so." He hitched a shoulder. "Better than staying in there, right? I'd go crazy."

"You are crazy." But Lincoln lightly punched his shoulder to take the sting from his words. "Too
bad that maniac is being given a deal too, huh?"

He rolled his eyes at Lincoln's forced tone. "Stop it. I know you know."

"What happened in there? I don't get it. That man killed our father."

"He also kept me alive in there. We have a lot in common. We get along. Besides. You're one to talk."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Michael just rolled his eyes again. "Nothing. But… I'm fine with Alex getting a deal. I hope we somehow end up in the same prison." Or we can escape together, he added mentally. Not that he knew if it were feasible. If anything was feasible. Escape held one set of problems; allowing themselves to be jailed held another. And the Company was a threat in either option.

"I hate to think of you in prison, man. You don't belong there."

"I committed a crime. Multiple ones. I deserve to be in jail."

"Yeah, but if I hadn't been framed and given the death penalty, you wouldn't have done what you did. All those crimes wouldn't have been done, right? So, you deserve a free pass."

"Free passes don't exist, Linc."

He shrugged. "I got one. I went to kill Steadman. I had the gun in my hand. They could have hauled me back to the US and brought me up on charges for intent to kill. Instead, they pardoned me. They're making up for the wages I lost during the time I was on trial and in prison. Close enough to a free pass for me. Maybe you can get something, too."

"What about Alex?"

Lincoln sighed. "For Christ's sake, Michael. It's just sex. And it's you and sex. You don't even like it."

"I like it with him. It's different with him. Everything is."

"He's a psychopath."

"He is not. T-Bag is a psychopath. Alex is… Alex is like me. Without all my issues."

"He's got issues of his own."

"Didn't say he was perfect."

Lincoln snorted. "What about Sara?"

"What about her, Linc?" Michael sighed.

"I thought you were in love with her. What about her? You're, what? Going to break up with her because you're enjoying sex for the first time in your life? How do you know you and Sara wouldn't have great sex? Better sex than with Alex?"

"Well, I guess you'd be the one to know, huh?" Michael snapped.

Lincoln looked like Michael had slapped him. He opened his mouth to say something, but Michael beat him to the punch.
"Look, Linc. You might be fine fucking my sloppy seconds, but I don't particularly want yours. You screwed her, you keep her." He got off the couch. "I think we're done."

"Michael…"

"Go away, Lincoln. I'll see you tomorrow." Michael stopped at the door to the bedroom and looked back.

Lincoln was standing next to the couch, looking lost and guilty all at once. Behind him, Sullins sat with his coffee mug halfway to his mouth, staring at Michael through surprised eyes.

Michael looked away from Sullins and back at Lincoln. "I'm not angry. I'm not upset. I just… I can't explain what's going on with Alex. But it's real. And it's important to me. I just… what happened with Sara was real, too. But it's over now. You want her, great. But don't try to dangle her at me like she's something I want. I don't. Not anymore. I have what I want. At least, right now I do. Just let me worry about what I'm going to do to keep it and… lay off." With that, Michael opened the door to the bedroom and stepped inside.

Alex was stretched across the bed, asleep. His mouth was open and he snored slightly. But he looked relaxed and comfortable. More deeply asleep than he had at any time in Sona.

The guilt that had been clutching Michael's heart eased its grip. Alex might not be ready to face time for what he did. But he was better off for being out of that hell.

Things were going to be better now that they were out. Michael knew they were.

* * *

"Can you tell us, Mr. Mahone, when the group known as the Company first contacted you?" asked one of the suits sitting behind the panel at the head of the courtroom.

Alex cleared his throat and shifted in the hard chair. He felt like crap, having finally come down with whatever it'd been that Michael had had. Headache, throat ache, aching skin, aching limbs, fever, and a general feeling of death stamping over his head. Yeah. Little bastard had given him whatever that disease was.

Fucker.

He cleared his throat again. "The, uh. The company contacted me about May 31 or June 1. I don't remember which, exactly. There was a lot going on."

"What was the name of the man who contacted you?"

"Paul Kellerman." He coughed into his shoulder, wincing as pain lanced through his sinuses. "He, uh, he, uh called me at the office sometime late into the night. Said he wanted to meet with me. That it was in my best interest. I tried to put him off, but he mentioned something about Oscar Shales. Said again it'd be in my best interest to see him. So. I did."

Michael pressed a glass of water into Alex's hand. Alex took it with a grateful smile and drank it down. His throat felt swollen five times its normal size and on fire besides.

"What information did he have on Oscar Shales?"

Alex glanced at Sullins.
Sullins nodded and leaned forward. "The Oscar Shales case isn't really pertinent to this. Sufficed to say, they had uncovered what had transpired between Alex Mahone and the fugitive Oscar Shales and the information would destroy his career in the Bureau. He's been given immunity in these proceedings and I say we move on."

The men glanced at each other before nodding.

"Mr. Mahone, what did the Company ask of you?"

"They wanted me to kill ever member of the Fox River Eight. They knew Lincoln Burrows had some knowledge of the Company, as did Michael Scofield. They just didn't know how much. They also didn't know what Michael had shared and with who, so they just said to kill them all." Alex cleared his throat. "That, uh… at the time, I was just told to kill them. I figured out the rest later. In the beginning, all I knew what who I had to kill. My contact was Paul Kellerman. Later, I came into contact with a man named Bill Kim."

"Did they ever give you the name of their organization? Anything beside the Company?"

"No. They didn't."

"Did you, at any time, try to turn down the Company? Go straight?"

Alex nodded. "I did. After I was shot, I told Bill Kim I was out. That I was going to turn myself in, tell Agent Sullins everything. Accept my punishment."

"And what happened?" he prodded when Alex fell silent.

He looked down at the table. Cleared his throat.

Under the table, Michael reached for his hand and squeezed it.

Alex smiled at him faintly before looking back up. "Um, they, uh. They sent an agent of theirs to my ex-wife's house in Colorado. Hit my son with a car. Broke his leg pretty badly. I was on my way to be with her when the agent found me. Told me that next time, it wouldn't be just a broken leg and I better get back to work."

"What was this agent's name?"

"To be honest, sir, I didn't get it."

"Do you know where he might be now?"

"Middle of desert in a shallow grave."

Pens scratched on paper. Glances were exchanged.

The questioning went on for another twenty minutes. Alex talked himself hoarse. And then, after he spoke, it was Michael's turn. And he had to sit there and listen to Michael go on and on about the Company and the conspiracy. About the information he'd uncovered and the flash drive with an incriminating conversation between Caroline Reynolds and her supposedly dead brother. About people who helped and people who hindered and Bill Kim's death and…

All in all, the inquest took over an hour. By the end of it, Alex was completely wrung out and so tired, he didn't care if they were sent back to Sona so long as he could sleep.

"Okay, now they'll deliberate," Sullins said after they were dismissed, ushering Michael and Alex
into the hall of the courtroom. "In about an hour they should have their decision. Sit, sit. You two did well."

Alex fell onto the wooden bench with a hard thump. It reverberated up his spine, but he didn't care. He just wanted to sleep. "Any idea of their decision?"

"Between the two of you, I think we have enough information to at least get a good start. As far as I'm concerned, we'll be catching a flight back to the US in a few hours."

Alex and Michael exchanged a look, before Alex slumped onto Michael's shoulder.

"You're burning up," Michael said.

"I know." He coughed. "I hate you."

Michael's shoulder shook. He lay his cheek against the top of Alex's head. "No, you don't."

For the first time that day, practically, Sullins stopped being wrapped up in his mind and plans and actually looked at Alex. "Wow. You look awful."

Alex snorted, which sent into a round of small coughs. "I feel awful. Why do you think Lang's missing?"

"I don't know. I asked about her, but never heard anything."

"That's because you never stopped talking long enough to get an answer," Alex said with another small cough. "She went to Sara to see if the test results from Michael were back yet. To see what this sickness is." He coughed again. "Then she said she was going to come back with something for the fever."

"This, like, some, uh... well." He cleared his throat. "You know."

Alex honestly doesn't know, but it might just be the fever and weeks of stress coming over him.

Michael, thought, gets it. "No, it's not an STD or anything. Just some kind of virus that was going around Sona."

Sullins had the decency to blush at least. He looked down and rubbed his hands on his pants. "Well. Good. Um, bad that you're sick, but you know. Good." He cleared his throat and rubbed his hands together. "So. Once they clear you, we'll go to the embassy to run some paperwork. You'll have time to say goodbye to your brother there, Michael. Then we'll get on a plane, go back to Chicago, where you'll be put into protective custody."

"Do you know where?" Alex asked.

"Medium security prison about ten miles outside of Chicago. I don't think it'll be a permanent placing. If you're right, and the Company has the reach you say it does, we'll need to protect you. Keep you alive until you're able to testify."

"And after?" Michael asked.

"Of course, that would be ideal," Sullins said with a faint smile.

Michael nodded. He clenched his fists, then flexed his hands. Began to pull on his fingers and shift in his seat.
Great.

Alex tried to muster up the energy to stop him, but Michael was too fast. Luckily, what came out of his mouth wasn't either of the top two things that Alex thought would come out.

"There's a man back in Sona. Brad Bellick. He was a guard at Fox River and came down here looking for us. You know. To collect on the bounty, get justice. He, uh. I think he might have some information about the Company." Michael glanced at Alex from under his lashes.

Well. Damn.

"This true, Alex?" Sullins asked.

"I don't know how much he knows. I hired him to help me track down some of the escapees. He came down to Panama looking for Fernando Sucre. I don't know how he wound up in prison. But." He exhaled hard. "I wouldn't wish Sona on my worst enemy. Well," he corrected himself, thinking of T-Bag. "Bellick's an ignorant asshole, but Sona will kill him."

"I can't get a guy released because the prison down here is too rough," Sullins said. "It was hard enough to get you two out, and I need you."

"But Bellick didn't do anything to deserve to wind up there," Michael protested.

"How do you know?" countered Sullins, sounding reasonable. "You just said that you didn't know what he was in for. For all you know, he was caught torturing someone."

Michael nodded, but he looked crestfallen. Damn kid probably wouldn't be happy until he released every person in Sona he had the slightest bit of contact with.

"Agent Sullins," someone called.

"Stay here." Sullins turned and went to talk to someone who'd just stepped out.

"Michael, give it up, okay? You can't save everyone. We got Tony out." He slipped his hand into Michael's, interlacing their fingers. "We saved the one who mattered."

Michael turned his head and rested it in the crook of Alex's neck, pressing his forehead against his skin. "You mattered," he whispered. "To me, you matter."

"Back at you," Alex said through a tight throat. He kissed the top of Michael's head.

"It's just, without me, Bellick wouldn't have been down here. He wouldn't… I feel bad."

"I know. But Bellick isn't an angel. He's done things he deserves to be punished for."

"So have I."

"Michael," Alex started, but he stopped when Lang and Sara entered through nearby doors.

"Sorry," Sara said as she rushed down the hall in a light run. She was again carrying her bag and managed to look official even in a pair of jeans and a tee shirt. "I got the tests back. You have strep throat, so did he. I thought he might, but there were symptoms that aren't normally associated with strep, so I wasn't positive. How's your throat?"

"Hurts," Alex said.

She nodded and lightly touched under his chin. "Head back and open your mouth?" With one hand,
she dug through her bag and pulled out a flashlight.

Alex complied with her directions.

"Oh, yeah. You have strep." She clicked off the flashlight. "I don't have an antibiotic to give you, so we'll just treat you with acetaminophen, liquids, and rest if possible." She bent down and dug through her bag again. "Temperature."

Alex opened his mouth and accepted the thermometer.

"I'm going to see what I can do to convince Sullins to let us stay another day to let you rest," Lang said. She put her hand on Alex's shoulder. "How'd it go in there?"

Alex shrugged. Then he lifted one shoulder, tilting his head to it.

"He thinks it went okay," Michael interpreted. "Sullins seemed positive. But he's really pushing to get out of here."

Lang smiled and winked at Michael. "Leave him to me. Excuse me." She turned and walked off towards Sullins.

Sara pulled the thermometer from Alex's mouth. "One hundred. Not too bad. Here." She pulled a bottle of Gatorade from the bag for him. As he guzzled the liquid down, she dug in the bag before coming out with a bottle of Tylenol.

"Thanks, Sara," he said, voice hoarse. "I really appreciate it."

"Don't worry about it." She smiled kindly and ran her hand over his head, smoothing flyaway hair down. Then she squeezed onto the bench next to Michael. "We okay?" she asked, taking his hand.

Michael closed his eyes. Let out a long, slow breath, his fingers tightening in hers. "Are we?" he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Michael, I'm disappointed things didn't work out between us. I love you, I do. But I'm also happy that you're so… happy with Alex, because you are. Even under these circumstances, you're happy." She stroked her thumb over Michael's finger. "I'm sorry I slept with Lincoln."

"I don't care that you slept with him. It's fine."

"See, that scares me. Because you should care. One way or another, you should care." She looked at Alex, meeting his eyes over Michael's head.

He shook his head helplessly. Michael was a twisted mess when it came to personal relationships. To sex. Sara was right; Michael should care. But, if Michael said he didn't, and he probably didn't. He'd trained himself not to.

"Sara," Michael said, voice cracking. "What I feel or don't or… or can't… it's too much to get into right now. I can't…"

"Okay, Michael." She kissed him on the head and squeezed his hand again. "Okay. We'll talk about it some other time."

He snorted, but didn't say anything. Just leaned against Alex and held onto Sara's hand so tightly, his knuckles turned white.

Sullins and Lang came back. Sullins had a self-satisfied smirk on his face. Lang was beaming.
"They said that you had enough information to warrant bringing you back to the US," Sullins said. "They're processing the paperwork right now. We'll go back to the hotel and I'll arrange for a flight out."

"Richard," Lang muttered.

He looked at her, then back at Alex. Rolled his eyes. "Felicia seems to think you need time to rest. Do you really want to stay in this country overnight so you can sleep?"

Alex didn't care. As long as he can lie down right now, he's fine with anything. "Whatever, Richard."

"It might be good to fly out today," Sara said. She released Michael's hand and rose. "They'll have to examine you wherever you're going. You'll get medication."

"How long will it take to get a flight?" he asked.

"When I checked yesterday, the next flight out wasn't until eight. That's a few hours sleep, at least."

Alex nodded. Tightened his hand in Michael's and stood. "That will be fine." He cleared his throat and glanced at Michael.

Michael looked happy. For Michael, of course, which meant his face was basically blank and expressionless. But his eyes glowed and the lines etched around them and his mouth had faded away.

He was happy. Stupid that a thing like that should make going to prison worth it to Alex, but it did.

Alex had chased Michael for a month. Spent about three weeks in prison with him. And somewhere in all that, in all the anger and admiration and frustration and lust, had fallen madly in love.

"All right," Sullins said, clapping his hands. "Let's go back to the hotel, then. This is almost over."

* * *

Michael awoke to a heavy body on top of his. A hot, wet mouth caressing his.

He moaned deep in his throat and returned the kiss. Without opening his eyes, he ran his hands up Alex's back. Threaded his fingers through silky hair.

Alex laughed. Nipped Michael's lower lip. "You're lucky we're not in Sona anymore," he said hoarsely. "What if someone had snuck into our cell?"

"I know you." Michael opened his eyes. Looked up at Alex, studying his face. He reached up and ran his fingers over Alex's forehead. His nose. Lips. "I know you. I'd know you blind. I'd know you deaf. I'd know you even if I couldn't feel."

"So romantic," Alex mocked teasingly. He pressed his lips to Michael's. Deepened it, mouth opening, tongue moving against Michael's.

"You're sick," Michael said, breathing heavily, when they parted. "Shouldn't you be resting?"

"In a few hours, we're flying out. Back to America. To prison. We probably won't get to be together for eight years."

"I don't expect you to wait," Michael said.
Alex rolled his eyes, a patient smile crossing his face. "There is no one else." He kissed Michael. Rested their foreheads together. "I had to let Pam go. I get that now. It's safer for her, and I... I'm ready to move on. To move to you." He kissed Michael again. Under the covers, he tugged at Michael's boxer.

Michael wiggled out of them. Pulled at Alex's until they were both naked.

All they had was a tiny bottle of complimentary lotion. It wasn't quite enough, but Michael didn't care. Didn't care, just wrapped his legs around Alex and arched his back as Alex slowly slid into him, heat racing over Michael's skin.

"I'll wait for you as long as if have to," Alex whispered against Michael's skin as he thrust. "Eight days or eight years or eight centuries. I'll wait."

Michael didn't answer. His nails bit into Alex's back. Sweat rolled down his face, brow furrowed and he concentrated. Focused on the sensation of Alex's body against his. The way his face looked as he thrust into Michael, each stroke harder than the one before. The musky smell of his sweat and the taste of his skin, his mouth. Pleasure coiled in Michael, tighter and tighter. He kissed and licked every part of Alex he could as Alex pushed him closer and closer to the brink until...

There were tears in Michael's eyes as he floated back to earth. Alex was still inside him, kissing him, stroking his face. Wiping away the tears that escaped to roll down Michael's face. Following the trail with his lips.

Michael closed his eyes. Pushed his face closer to Alex's. Kissed him. Clung to him.

"I love you," he whispered.

Alex kissed his forehead. His nose. "Yeah," he said, kissing Michael's upper lip, then his lower. "I love you, too."

* * *

"We're lost," Lang said, folding the map so she could manage it better.

"We are not lost. These are the directions they gave us at the embassy."

"A deserted road is supposed to take us to the airport? Really?" Lang's voice dripped with scorn.

"It's a shortcut."

This time, Lang's response was inaudible, but Michael could guess at its content. He'd had many such conversations with Lincoln over the years and knew the frustration at butting heads with someone who refused to admit they were lost.

Although, Michael wasn't entirely sure they were lost. Not exactly. Yeah, they were driving down what looked like a dirt path in the middle of a deserted area, but they were still in view of the city. Maybe it was a short cut. Of course, more likely, it was a plot to get them alone so they could all be killed, but Michael wasn't going to point that out. Alex had already tried. Sullins had just laughed and told him he was a bit paranoid.

Michael sighed as Lang and Sullins continued to bicker and turned his wrists around in the cuffs. They weren't tight, but psychologically, they were choking him. He hated being cuffed. Hated
feeling out of control. No. Scratch that. It wasn't that he felt out of control. It was that he hated being under the control of others.

Except Alex. But he was different. Alex was… Alex, and he could control Michael as much as he wanted.

He tugged at the cuffs.

"Stop," Alex said, opening his eyes. He lifted his head from the seat and blinked his eyes. "You'll just panic yourself."

"I'm not going to panic."

He moved his hands over the few inches they were allowed and took Michael's fingers in his. Squeezed. "Just stop pulling or twisting or even thinking about them. Just relax."

He snorted.

"Michael." Alex leaned closer and pressed a kiss on Michael's temple. "I… Shit!"

The word was barely out of Alex's mouth when the world went to hell. There was a loud crash Michael more felt than heard. There was noise and bright flashes of light. The world tumbled head over heel. Shards of glass sliced into his skin and all Michael could do was hold his breath and squeeze his hands around the goddamn chains until it was all over.

And then it was. The lights faded away and the noise muted. There was beeping. The car. And the engine idling. The sound of another car, the engine shutting off.

Michael opened his eyes. They were sticky, like he'd been asleep. He blinked a few times, trying to clear his vision. Something dripped into his eyes again.

"Alex?"

There was no answer.

Michael turned his head and wiped his eyes on his shirt.

He was upside down. Sullins was underneath him, on the ceiling, unconscious. A gash on his forehead. Bruises forming. And Felicia. Laying in her seat, crushed glass covering her body.

Michael had to wipe his eyes again. Squinted, looking through the windshield.

In the road, just ahead, was a Hummer. There was the sound of doors opening. Feet appeared. Doors slammed shut.

Adrenaline rushed through Michael. He struggled against the handcuffs and leg chains holding him into his seat. This time, panic did roll through him, but he ignored him. Stretched his hands as far as they could go, straining for Sullins's jacket.

He snagged it with the tip of his fingers. Shook. He knew the keys to the cuffs were in his jacket pocket. Not on the key ring, not in his pants, his jacket. Inside pocket.

He shook again.
The keys fell out and onto his chest.

Michael grunted. Reached. Got the keys.

Frantically, he palmed them and brought them up to the locks. He could hear the footsteps coming closer. His hand shook. He missed the lock three times before he got the key in. Turned.

The cuffs unlocked.

The men came closer.

Michael grabbed Sullins's gun just as the door to the van slid open. He fired blindly, shooting ahead of him.
The gun clicked. No more bullets.

Two attackers were on the ground, blood soaking through their shirts.

With a gasp, Michael dropped the gun. His shaking hands found the keys again and he unlocked his ankle cuffs before carefully lowering himself to the ceiling. The world spun as blood drained away from his head.

"Alex," he said, climbing over Sullins to his lover. "Alex."

Alex blinked, gaining consciousness slowly as Michael undid his cuffs.

"You okay?" Michael asked, assessing Alex's injuries. A few cuts, and a bruise from where he's banged his head into the side of the van.

"I think so. What happened?"

"Company, I think." Michael wiped what he now realized was blood from his eyes. "We got to get out of here."

"If we run, they'll think we did this."

"I know." He turned to Sullins. "What if we leave them a message? A way to contact us."

"Your website?"

Michael shrugged, looking back at him. "It's all we have. Unless we just call when we're safe."

"Whatever. Let's just do it quickly and get out of here."

"What about them? We can't just leave them."

Alex rolled his eyes but moved to help. Together, they got Sullins and Lang out of the van. There was a first aid kit in the back. As quickly as they could, they dressed the majority of their wounds and covered them the blankets to help with shock.

"How did you manage to miss every vital organ?" Alex asked as they cuffed their attackers.

"I was shooting with my eyes closed," Michael answered. He pat down his down, relieving him of his wallet and cell phone.

"We can't take that. They'll track us."
"I know." He opened the back and removed the battery, then the SIM card, which he snapped in half. "Okay, we've got a passport and… five hundred bucks."

"Two hundred over here. They guys are traveling heavy. Let's go."

"One second." Michael fished a paper from Sullins's pocket and tore it in half. On both, he wrote the URL for europeangoldfinch.net and his name, then tucked it into Sullins and Lang's pockets. Then he rose. "Which way do we go?" he asked. He felt kind of giddy. Adrenaline was still rushing through him and the possibility of escape loomed in his mind. No, he wasn't with Lincoln, but that would change. They'd fix that. Be reunited. With Lincoln and LJ and Tony. Maybe even Sara.

But right now… Right now, he and Alex were free. They were free and they were together.

Alex grinned as he twirled the keys around his fingers. "I say we head north. Find a hole in Costa Rica to hide out for a bit. Plan our next steps."

"Sounds good to me." He moved closer to Alex. Kissed him, running his fingers down Alex's jaw. "Thanks, by the way. For keeping me sane."

Alex kissed him back. Rested their foreheads together as his hands held Michael tightly by the shoulders. Keeping him stable. Keeping him safe. "Well, right back at you, Michael. Because I really don't think I would have survived that hell without you there." He kissed Michael again. "Now let's get a move-on. We have an escape to make."

Fin

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